



هيئة الأدب والنشر والترجمة
Literature, Publishing & Translation Commission



Philosophy and The Quality of Life

Riyadh International Philosophy Conference 2024

Selected Papers

برنامج جودة الحياة
QUALITY OF LIFE PROGRAM



رؤية
2030
المملكة العربية السعودية
KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

Philosophy and The Quality of Life

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Selected Papers from Riyadh International Philosophy Conference 2024

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ISBN: 978-603-92118-9-1

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Preface

As part of intellectual efforts aimed at deepening our understanding of quality of life and the role of philosophy in achieving it, this publication emerges as the outcome of the fourth session of the International Philosophy Conference, held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, from December 5 to 7, 2024, under the theme “Philosophy and Quality of Life: Existence, Truth, and Goodness.” The conference was organized by the Saudi Ministry of Culture, represented by the Literature, Publishing, and Translation Commission. It brought together a distinguished group of philosophers and researchers from around the world to explore how philosophy can contribute to enhancing human quality of life, on both individual and collective levels.

The research papers presented here address diverse and comprehensive topics, starting with discussions on measuring quality of life and developing indicators that reflect complex human experiences, moving through analyses of the mechanisms of philosophical thinking and its importance in enhancing quality of life, and exploring the role of aesthetic awareness in enriching our daily lives, along with many other papers related to concepts of quality of life and “flourishing life,” and the ways philosophy can help us achieve a life filled with meaning and satisfaction.

This work is not merely a compilation of theoretical ideas but a serious attempt to link thought with application. The papers presented seek to provide practical recommendations that can contribute to improving our quality of life. We hope this publication serves as a valuable addition to contemporary philosophical dialogue and opens new horizons for thinking about how philosophy can be used as an effective tool to achieve a better life. Through this work, we invite researchers and readers to engage in a deep intellectual dialogue on how to enhance our quality of life through critical and creative thinking, emphasizing that philosophy is not just abstract contemplation but a powerful tool for positive change and sustainable development.

The Editor

Quantifying the Quality of Life

How did we get to this point? How do we go beyond it?

Robert Bernasconi

The Pennsylvania State University, USA

Abstract

Beginning at least fifty years ago, a vast amount of effort has gone into trying to translate a person's subjective views about their happiness, well-being, or quality of life into mathematical quantities as a basis from which governments can make policy decisions and doctors can decide on treatments. How did we get to this point? Part of the answer lies in President Lyndon Johnson's vision of a Great Society, but a broader study highlights the role of both Aristotle's *Ethics* and utilitarianism. How do we go beyond it? The philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas offers one promising path.

Keywords: Aristotle, Happiness, Quality of Life, Well-being.

I

Debates about the quality of life, although not precisely under that name, have long been central to philosophy. During the last one hundred years this has most often taken place, at least so far as specifically academic philosophy is concerned, in the form of responses to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. But for the last sixty years debates about the quality of life have also and perhaps predominantly taken place in government circles or within international organizations, like the World Health Organization, or among various bodies associated with the United Nations. Once this happened, it did not take long for academic philosophers to be sidelined from these discussions. Already in 1993 when introducing papers from a philosophical conference on the quality of life that had taken place five years earlier, Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen mourned the fact that, as they put it, "the philosophical debates have not had much impact on the making of public policy in much of the world; nor have they been particularly noticed in the standard works on economics." (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993). The eminent philosophers who gathered for that occasion were largely concerned with the question of which philosophical theories offered the best resources for those trying to define adequate criteria

for assessing the quality of life, but the various agencies engaged in promoting their own understanding of the quality of life, happiness, and well-being do not seem to have been listening. For the most part, these agencies were not interested in definitions, even though the literature they continue to produce is to this day full of observations about the lack of certainty as to what is meant by these three terms. Their primary concern was producing numerical indicators that could measure changes either across time or across different societies. Governments could be assessed on whether they had improved the quality of life of their people. This gave rise to a flood of assessments of the quality of life and a new sport with winners and losers. League tables could be produced showing which nations gave their people the best quality of life. How did we get from Aristotle to this? To address this question, let me begin by exploring the current discussion of quality of life. I will subsequently turn to the approach to this issue within the history of moral philosophy to investigate what we have lost and what we might be able to introduce to make good that loss.

The first league tables of any standing were produced by the World Health Organization (WHO). Their initial interest in the quality of life arose in an effort to help doctors determine when, in the medical context, prolonging a life could not be justified because of the diminished quality of the life being prolonged. However, the WHO soon expanded their purview from physical and psychological issues to levels of independence, social relationships, and the environment, understood to include everything from freedom, safety, and transport to financial resources and opportunities for everything from acquiring new information to participation in leisure activities (World Health Organization, 1998). The WHO's definition of quality of life is in terms of "individuals' perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value system in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations and standards and concerns." (World Health Organization, 1997, p. 1). One strength of this definition lies in its sensitivity to the question of cultural differences, and to that extent it links up well with the meeting at Riyadh in 2023 on "Transculturality." But cultural concerns only exacerbate the problem of knowing what one is trying to measure, working as one needs to do across multiple languages, religions, environments, political systems, and so on.

However, interest in quality-of-life issues, as the WHO understood it, have been supplanted by the widespread interest in the World Happiness Report that since 2012 annually ranks nations on the basis of data collected over the previous three years. The World Happiness Report is published by the Wellbeing Research Center at the University of Oxford in partnership with Gallup and the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network. The basic idea is that in response to questionnaires, individuals report their subjective experiences and these reports are then turned into quantifiable data

presented in a form that can be used to determine policy with an eye to raising the level of happiness both at the governmental and city level.

The academic work supporting these agencies has largely been conducted by economists, not philosophers, and has flourished since at least 1995 (Barrington-Leigh, 2022, p. 66). Previous generations of economists largely focused on GDP, that is to say, gross domestic product understood as the market value of the goods and services within a country over a given period. That has now changed. A study of books published between 1995 and 2019 shows that during that time period the word “happiness” has doubled in usage and the phrase “subjective well-being” increased eightfold as a percentage of the words in print. By contrast, the phrase “gross domestic product” has been declining in frequency since 2010 (Barrington-Leigh, 56). A similar decline can be seen in the phrase “economic growth” (Barrington-Leigh, 58). In other words, at least among the experts, the “beyond GDP” movement has had remarkable success in displacing the previous focus on economic growth, but it is doing so in a context in which everything has to be quantified and assigned passing or failing grades.

That governments can no longer limit their primary concerns to security and wealth production is clear, but difficulties emerge from governments becoming overly preoccupied with this new approach. One danger comes directly from the way that the happiness league tables are constructed. Since 2010 the United Kingdom Office of National Statistics, in its promotion of “national well-being,” has deployed the slogan “Measure what matters” (Barrington-Leigh, 66).

The worry is that it turns into a perspective whereby, on the one hand, *only* what can be measured matters and, on the other hand, the agencies are confronted with the problem of trying to quantify the quality of subjective experiences. With this focus on the immediacy of such experiences, there is a serious danger that governments focus on papering over the cracks instead of addressing systemic issues at their core. A similar concern arises in the context of climate change: sacrifices need to be made today for the sake of the future, but such trade-offs are unlikely to help a country rise in the league tables.

A fourth problem was recently highlighted by the philosopher Peter Singer. He did not do so specifically in the context of the World Happiness reports. Rather, it arose for him as part of a more general worry arising from his version of utilitarianism with its concerns for what he calls the “distribution of well-being.” He recognized that his general position seemed to commit him to the idea that, in a case of limited resources, it might be better to choose helping to marginally improve the lives of a very large number of people who are reasonably well off over marginally improving the lives of a small number of people who are very badly off. But he conceded, “I’m uncomfortable about the thought that there are people who are worse off, and you could help them,

but you don't" (Marchese, 2024). Even this notorious proponent of controversial ideas hesitated when he realized that the logic of his position committed him under certain conditions to sacrifice the people most in need to in order to please those who are relatively advantaged. Indeed, this is already a tendency of many governments, as they direct their policies to helping the middle class, rather than the most deprived. It is also a problem in so far as, even on issues of quality of life, instead of the richer countries cooperating to benefit the poorer countries, they are competing against each other in a race to the top. It might seem that I am exaggerating the possible effect of these league tables, but I should be understood rather to be targeting the kind of thinking it promotes. And I would add that I live in the United States, where all too often university administrators allow their decisions to be guided by the prospect of improving their rankings in the *U. S. News and World Report*: league tables can influence policy, even when they are known to be based on flawed data.

Again, how did we get here? I first want to return to the origins of the focus on viewing society in terms of specifically "quality of life" before seeing that moment in the light of the history of moral philosophy more broadly.

The phrase "quality of life" is a recent invention and its introduction and spread is indicative of modern preoccupations (Gadamer, 1993, p. 134; Gaiger & Walker, 1996, p. 104). A group of historians who searched the literature found that, although the phrase "quality of life" was already current in the 1950s, what "kicked off" the focus on quality of life with "its domino effect on almost every field of human existence" was a speech delivered by President Lyndon B. Johnson at the close of the 1964 United States Presidential election (Barcaccia et al., 2013, p. 188). On October 31, speaking at Madison Square Garden in New York, he tried in the clearest possible terms to shift the discourse from an almost exclusive focus on GNP to embracing quality of life as a priority. This means he was instrumental in initiating this change of focus I just documented. In this speech he reiterated his declaration of a war on poverty that he had introduced at the beginning of the year. By then he was arguing that addressing poverty should just be a beginning. He presented a vision of "a society of success without squalor, beauty without barrenness, works of genius without the wretchedness of poverty." He continued: "These goals cannot be measured by the size of our bank balance. They can only be measured in the quality of the lives that our people lead." He promoted clean air, universal education, and "making sure that machines liberate men instead of replacing them." He added, "It means reshaping and rebuilding our cities to make them safe, and make them a decent place to live." (Johnson, 1964, p. 1560). But when one turns back to his Great Society speech at the University of Michigan on May 22, which he was here recalling, one finds there that one of his sources was Aristotle. In that speech he said, "Aristotle said: 'Men come together in cities in order to live, but they remain together in order to live

the good life.’ It is harder and harder to live the good life in American cities today.” (Aristotle, 1932, I, 1, 8 1252b 28–30). In other words, the link between Aristotle and the current obsession with the quality of life is – of all people – President Lyndon Johnson. Or perhaps his speech writers.

Johnson’s war on poverty had some success, but later it stalled. At the beginning of 1964, the national poverty rate in the United States was 19 percent. Within ten years it had fallen to 11.2 percent and, although there have been significant fluctuations, fifty years later the percentage is still roughly the same with some 36.8 million people in poverty in the United States today. But although the impact of the idea of quality of life faltered in the United States, his call specifically to *measure* the quality of lives has had a lasting impact on economists, even if it seems to have taken them away from his reference point in Aristotle in the direction of utilitarianism. However, moral philosophers have come to understand that Aristotle and utilitarianism do not sit well together. They are addressing entirely different questions. There is no congruity.

In other words, the dream of a society of the kind Aristotle described where ethics was conceived in terms of a good life integrated within the life of a city was sacrificed to the model of a society that measures the quality of lives in a utilitarian fashion. Three points must be made about this radical transformation. First, there is a question about whether the poorest people in the world are being sacrificed for the improvement of the lives of the relatively well off. Secondly, we should remember that Aristotle himself did not conceive of the good life for all the occupants of the city, but only for a few male citizens. Thirdly, it is important to understand that the Aristotelian account and the utilitarian account are not two competing or rival theories trying to answer the same question. Let me explain.

The reflections on the good life at the beginning of Aristotle’s *Ethics* can be understood as an examination of what factors genuinely contribute to quality of life. Certain ways of life are dismissed. Famously, he restated the question in terms of *eudaimonia*, on the grounds that everybody can agree that this is what human beings desire. *Eudaimonia* is usually translated as happiness, but it is quite clear he does not mean a psychological state and that it is thus very different from what utilitarians mean by the word. It is also definitely not what is being measured by the World Happiness rankings. When in his *Ethics* Aristotle warned that any inquiry can only achieve the amount of precision which belongs to the subject matter, one can almost hear him saying that well-being and GDP cannot be measured in the same way. (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, 13–14) Furthermore, the currency in which the World Happiness rankings uses is people’s own reports of their subjective experience, whereas Aristotle is clear that one’s *eudaimonia* can be determined with confidence only after one is dead (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, x, 12–14). This

takes us back to Aristotle's *Politics* in the sense that the meaning of one's actions and indeed of one's whole life is determined by the *polis*, that it is to say, by the way one is seen by members of the community of a certain status, which, from our perspective, is certainly a severe limitation of his outlook. To this extent the question of whether or not one is living the good life is not one that one can determine definitively oneself but includes reference to its outcomes and also the customs, the *mores*, of one's community, the extent to which one embodies them, and the ease with which one fulfills them. *Eudaimonia* in Aristotle is better understood as flourishing or fulfillment as judged, ultimately, according to the values of one's peers.

If anything of Aristotle survives in the promotion of the quality of life, it would sit uncomfortably within the utilitarian perspective of current proponents of quality of life, such as the World Health Organization. The most influential advocate of their incompatibility is Elizabeth Anscombe who in 1958, in her inimitable style, wrote, "If anyone professes to be expounding Aristotle and talks in a modern fashion about 'moral' such-and-such he must be very imperceptive if he does not constantly feel like someone whose jaws have somehow got out of alignment: the teeth don't come together in a proper bite." (Anscombe, 1958, p. 2). That difference is important in the present context. If concern for the quality of life is ultimately motivated by the same kinds of concerns that motivated Aristotle, which Lyndon Johnson's reference to a good life in the city suggests, it is addressing very different concerns, as Anscombe insisted, from the utilitarians who seek to maximize happiness. But the question is whether either of these approaches matches up with the ethical intuitions that lie behind a war on poverty or a call for a great society.

It must be understood that most of our intuitions about what is moral, even as they operate within the context of moral philosophy, owe more to religion than to the tradition of moral philosophy, which asks us to choose between virtue ethics, deontology, utilitarianism, and care ethics. In Western philosophy it is the strange marriage between Aristotle and Christianity that began the academic discipline that we call ethics, both its strengths and weaknesses. Although Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is one of the truly great founding texts of moral philosophy, for long periods it lost its prominence. There are no direct references to it within Hellenistic philosophy and, while it is mentioned in passing by Augustine, he did not appear to have a deep familiarity with it. Fortunately, it survived within Arabic philosophy (Dunlop, 2005, pp. 62–94).

It was the arrival of Aristotle's *Ethics* in Christian Europe in the thirteenth century, initially in a truncated version, that formed the basis for ethics to be established as an academic discipline in distinction from moral theology (Celano, 2022, p. 2; Wieland, 1981, pp. 52–129). Once the full text of the *Ethics* was available, it was taught by Albert Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, (Aquinas, 1964) who used it to investigate what one might know of ethics without

recourse to revelation or papal pronouncements. Inevitably they read the text through a Christian lens, but trying to import Christian ideas into the reading of Aristotle was not so much Aquinas's intention as it was an unintentional byproduct of the fact that Christians' understanding of Aristotle was shaped by their moral experience informed by ideas of the will, intention, (Luscombe, 1971, pp. 42–49) and conscience. These concepts were foreign to Aristotle, but they read them back into his text, as is often still done today (Bernasconi, 2015, pp. 202–207). Of course, what ultimately mattered to Aquinas was not, as for Aristotle himself, the judgment of the community, but rather the judgment of God, a judgement directed not at one's actions, as in Aristotle, but at one's deepest interiority.

During the period from roughly 1300 to 1650 Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* was the dominant text for the study of moral philosophy in the universities (Lines, 2005, p. 8). But, subsequently, Aristotle fell out of favor to be revived in earnest only in the twentieth century under the label of virtue ethics. With the beginning of modernity, the project of secularization was taken up in earnest. This is reflected in the Prolegomena to Hugo Grotius's *The Rights of War and Peace* where he announced his ambition to provide an account that would stand even if there were no God or if God had no concern for human affairs (Grotius, 1919, Prolegomena sec. 11, 7). Whether as a direct consequence of this or not, the rights of the poor, which had been upheld by the scholastics, were at the same time sacrificed in favor of the rights of property (Mäkinen, 2006, pp. 37–62). Today the history of modern moral philosophy is written as a story of its progressive secularization (Darwall, 2023).

But it can also be read as one that has found new ways to nominally embrace all, while at the same time promoting human flourishing for those better off by sacrificing the interests of the poor and hungry. This culminated in the twentieth century in the rise of metaethics, which, whatever its merits on its own terms, is an impoverishment of moral philosophy specifically as a practical discipline, in the sense Aristotle intended (Bernasconi, 2024, pp. 23–38).

To be sure, in suggesting that many of our intuitions about what is moral, even as they operate within the context of moral philosophy, owe more to religion than reason, I am not advocating that philosophers should confine themselves to forms of ethics founded on religion. I am merely lamenting that what is taught in moral philosophy courses today tends to have to rely on intuitions that it cannot explain on its own terms. I am calling for a genealogical investigation of these intuitions, a deconstructing (in Heidegger's sense) of the history of moral philosophy where concepts are traced back to the experiences that shaped them. I am also saying that when Singer seems to have an intuition that there is something problematic about his utilitarian calculus or when President Johnson declared a war on poverty, these ideas are not readily explained from within the secularized tradition of moral philosophy. If our intuitions tell us

that our priority is to try to lift those who are least fortunate, even if we cannot be said to be directly accountable for their misfortune and even though doing so might not increase the happiness of the greatest number, then we must look away from the moral philosophies that seem to be guiding current reflections on promoting the quality of life. We could, of course, abandon these intuitions, and it has to be said that for the most part we do that. We could also look to found moral philosophy on religion. But another possibility presents itself in the form of Emmanuel Levinas, a French Jewish philosopher originally from Lithuania.

Levinas did not provide an ethics. He understood his task not to be that of constructing an ethics, but rather as determining its sense, its direction (Levinas, 1982, pp. 95–96; Cohen, 1985, p. 90).

The direction of ethics is toward the Other – and indeed from the Other. It is not about discovering where and how I might find happiness or even *eudaimonia*. It is about self-sacrifice and giving: one cannot approach the other as such with empty hands (Levinas, 1961, p. 147; Lingis, 1969, p. 172; Levinas, 1982, pp. 121–122; Bergo, 1998, p. 74). He did not talk about the quality of life in the way the economists do. There are sorrows that a questionnaire can reveal, but there are also, as Levinas once put it, “‘the secret tears’ of the Other” that the bureaucrat cannot see (Levinas, 1996, p. 23). Instead, Levinas talks extensively about the demands that the Other—the widow, the orphan, the stranger, and the poor—make on me in the face-to-face ethical encounter. Those concerns are not specifically Jewish. They are found across many religions, but he would not call them religious imperatives, but human imperatives. I am not saying that Levinas is the only option, but he is one I can recommend as deserving renewed attention in this context.

From this perspective, a focus on *my* quality of life, *my* happiness, *my* well-being, while natural and thus to an extent inevitable, especially in certain extreme moments, is not truly ethical. Ethics for Levinas lies *in my responsibility*, mine more than the others; it is infinite; it has no limits (Bernasconi, 2008, pp. 131–146, 222–226). Levinas targeted the tendency within much of modern moral philosophy that focuses on identifying the limits of what we are obliged to do while still maintaining a good conscience. For Levinas, ethics begins precisely at the point where one experiences the demand to do what is entirely gratuitous: there is no sense in which I am formally obliged to act in this way and my action is done without any expectation of return. And yet at the same time when I do it, I do not experience it as coming from my own initiative.

In a world racked by wars, by famine, by the effects of climate change and by oppression on the grounds of religion, race, gender, and sexual orientation, there still is some hope engendered by the possibility that on occasion one might hear within the terms of what is called “quality of life” echoes of

aspirations for a better society, where the rich do not look down upon the poor and where even those marginalized in one society can be concerned about the marginalized in another society far distant. We cannot take this for granted, but it is possible. Levinas wrote: “Under the banal term ‘compassion,’ we are not astonished enough by the force of transference which goes from the memory of my own hunger to the suffering and the responsibility for the hunger of the neighbor.” (Levinas, 1976, p. 109; Bergo, 1998, p. 11). There is a vast gulf between, on the one hand, concern about our own quality of life or even our own nationalistic concerns about how our country fares in the World Health Organization’s league tables and, on the other hand, a concern for others, who are counted as the least members, not just of our society, but of the global community.

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Mechanisms of Philosophical Reasoning and Their Importance in Achieving Quality of Life

Abdelaziz Berghout

International Islamic University, Malaysia

Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the role and importance of philosophical reasoning in directing and enhancing quality of life by offering proper awareness, methods, and philosophical thinking skills. These skills are an integral part of the philosophical mind, which seeks wisdom, sound judgment, and human welfare. The paper argues that quality of life, in its comprehensive and civilizational sense—which balances material and spiritual, intellectual and psychological, individual and collective, as well as innate and acquired needs—is a human necessity and an objective that must be pursued in both individual and societal realities. The quality of life discussed here is based on the principle of human value, dignity, and the vital role of humans as rational, thoughtful, and conscious stewards of the earth. Humans are tasked with advancing civilizational development, building a balanced, responsible society that provides the conditions for well-being, prosperity, tranquility, goodness, moral distinction, and material, spiritual, social, and cultural excellence for individuals and the human community, in all its diversity of cultures, peoples, civilizations, and shared values. The paper proposes the importance of organized and diligent efforts to build a far-sighted philosophical mind engaged in responsible philosophical reasoning. This requires promoting intellectual and philosophical education and enhancing skills such as reflection, contemplation, analysis, reasoning, dialogue, and creativity. These are key to sound thinking at all stages of educational and societal learning.

Keywords: Philosophical Thinking, Quality of Life, Mechanisms of Thinking, Philosophical Education.

Introduction

The intersection of philosophy and the enhancement of the quality of life represents a rich and multifaceted field of study and research. This field has increasingly attracted the attention and interest of philosophers, scholars, researchers, and practitioners in our contemporary reality. This research aims

to present a vision for activating the mechanisms of philosophical thinking and reasoning and highlighting their importance in enhancing quality of life in our complex modern context. The growing complexity of modern life—characterized by rapid technological advancements, escalating social challenges, and accelerating local, international, and global changes—necessitates a deeper exploration and an effective utilization of the tools and frameworks provided by philosophical thinking to enhance quality of life in its integrated and comprehensive sense.

The question of *quality of life* is gaining increasing importance among governments, societies, philosophers, intellectuals, researchers, and specialists from diverse disciplines and fields of interest. Awareness and efforts to improve the quality of life for individuals and communities are growing in a reality where humanity faces a complex and interconnected civilizational, environmental, social, cultural, political, economic, scientific, and technological situation.

This situation confronts modern humans with existential, universal, and civilizational questions—both ancient and renewed in collective, religious, and philosophical human consciousness—such as: Does the question of quality of life add value to the modern human being? What is quality of life? Why does humanity seek quality of life? How does a person envision quality of life in a challenging and complex human reality? How can a person achieve the quality of life they imagine or aspire to? What are the levels and objectives of quality of life? What is the nature of humanity, and what are its necessary needs to achieve an acceptable quality of life? How does one measure their quality of life? What are the factors influencing the attainment of quality of life? Has modern humanity truly achieved an acceptable quality of life? Is quality of life measured by material well-being, self-satisfaction, the fulfillment of needs, spiritual uprightness, moral integrity, scientific intelligence, philosophical reasoning—or by all of these, or none of them? Who determines the standards for quality of life? What is the relationship between religion and quality of life? What is the relationship between philosophy and quality of life? What is the relationship between science and quality of life? What is the relationship between wisdom and quality of life? What is the relationship between justice and quality of life? What is the relationship between goodness and quality of life? Is the question of quality of life fundamentally a philosophical concern for humanity, or is it merely a transient phenomenon in human consciousness and activity? Does posing the question of quality of life necessitate discussing the nature of humanity, its existence, its innate disposition, its life and existential goals, its worldly and otherworldly processes, and its intellectual, spiritual, moral, physical, and sensory attributes? Do politics, civility, civilization, governance, administration, management, education, culture, economy, and technology have a direct connection to achieving quality of life?

The aim of this paper is not to provide exhaustive answers or analyses to the aforementioned questions but rather to highlight the importance of philosophical reasoning and its tools in addressing the issue of quality of life. It emphasizes the need to activate philosophical thinking and embed it in awareness and practice as an entry point to addressing the issues and problems of contemporary humanity.

Through its inherently philosophical nature, philosophical reasoning offers us a unique opportunity to pose serious and complex questions, which may allow us to develop a renewed and comprehensive narrative on the topic of quality of life. This has become a central focus in human activity, as well as in the activities of states, individuals, and global transcontinental organizations. Definitions and objectives of sustainable development, its indicators, and its global strategies listed in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2015–2030) are but one indicator of the importance of the question of quality of life in its multi-dimensional, interwoven, and practical sense. The importance of the topic of quality of life lies in its call to raise awareness of the need to activate philosophical thinking and its tools to improve life and prepare individuals and society to benefit from it in achieving acceptable levels of effective and positive engagement with the complexities and challenges of life.

This brief paper provides a summary of a broader study on employing the mechanisms of philosophical reasoning to address the issue of quality of life. The paper addresses the tools of philosophical reasoning and thinking needed to achieve quality of life and focuses on the following points:

- Introduction
- Mechanisms of philosophical reasoning and the importance of interdisciplinary thinking and research methods
- The complex concept of quality of life and the need for renewed pedagogies in philosophical studies
- Conclusion

First: Mechanisms of Philosophical Reasoning and the Importance of Interdisciplinary Thinking and Research Methods

There is no clearer evidence of the importance of philosophical thinking, its tools, and its functions in human and societal life, both past and present, than the efforts and contributions of philosophers in developing the faculties of questioning, critical thinking, analytical thinking, ethical thinking, epistemological reasoning, and metaphysical exploration, among others. Many thinkers throughout history, from Aristotle to contemporary philosophers, have asserted that rational, logical, analytical, and critical thinking, as well as contempla-

tive, deliberative, deductive, inferential, and generative practices (T. R. Brown, 2019, 931), are essential for humans as they engage with life's problems and complexities in pursuit of satisfaction and happiness (Lyubomirsky S., 2007), success, fulfillment, integration, growth, and progress toward higher goals, ideals, and achievements in life and existence. It can be noted that the concept of quality of life emerged early in Greek philosophy, as Aristotle spoke of happiness and linked it to the activity and vitality of the soul, thereby achieving a form of a happy life that could reflect a certain level of quality of life.

Many applied studies also indicate that integrating philosophical approaches and mechanisms of philosophical reasoning into daily decision-making processes and community development activities (Christine M. Korsgaard, 2020, 341) can facilitate greater self-awareness, resilience, and the ability to confront challenges and obstacles that may diminish the quality of life if left unaddressed.

In this regard, it can be emphasized that many studies and literature highlight the importance of philosophical practices and mechanisms of philosophical reasoning in preparing individuals and societies to become philosophically conscious and qualified to use these mechanisms and tools to achieve quality of life. An individual equipped with critical thinking, argumentation, reasoning, dialogue, Socratic questioning, existential thinking, cognitive analysis, moral and value-based sensitivity, and other skills can accomplish much on the path to quality of life, using the available circumstances, resources, and means. There is no doubt that philosophical thinking enhances critical thinking (Ronald W. Evans, 2010), curiosity-driven reasoning, logical and analytical thinking, and ethical inquiry, contributing to personal growth and societal performance. This is achieved through the use of philosophical frameworks and the previously mentioned mechanisms of reasoning to address the concerns and life challenges faced by individuals and communities.

It is worth noting in this context that, in addition to the contributions already mentioned, many researchers have emphasized the theoretical contributions of philosophical thought and reasoning. However, they have also observed and pointed out a noticeable gap in practical applications and frameworks that could be widely utilized to improve the quality of life through philosophical tools. Therefore, we must enhance training, qualification, and skill-building activities that help individuals translate and transform philosophical theories into practical applications, especially across diverse and varying cultural contexts, from one society to another and from one culture to another.

Contributions of Philosophers Past and Present in the Practical Application of Philosophical Reasoning Mechanisms

To achieve this, we must also propose avenues for future research that address the methods, tools, and approaches for employing philosophical reasoning

mechanisms and utilizing logic and philosophical methodologies in our current environment, which is marked by complexity, contradictions, and unprecedentedly rapid and widespread challenges. It is worth noting here that the efforts of philosophers, both past and present, have played a foundational role in linking philosophical thought and knowledge with issues such as quality of life, happiness, goodness, and justice, among others.

The endeavor to improve quality of life through philosophical thinking and epistemological tools has progressed significantly over time, and it requires further deepening in our current complex reality. Early philosophical contributions emphasized the importance of rational thinking, logic, curiosity, ethical reasoning, critical analysis, systematic thinking, and values-based approaches. Historically, ancient Greek philosophers, including Socrates, Plato, and others, asserted that education and intellectual, rational, and critical training were essential for achieving a virtuous existence, explicitly linking knowledge to personal well-being and fulfillment (L Satish et al., 2017, 53-60).

This foundational conviction regarding the influence of reason and philosophical reasoning on quality of life persisted and shaped later philosophical developments. For instance, during the medieval period, Islamic philosophers engaged with Aristotelian philosophy and adapted it to develop original philosophical frameworks. They emphasized the importance of thought, reason, critique, and logic as essential tools for individual and collective progress, paving the way for the growth of philosophical reasoning to enhance quality of life. Philosophers such as Al-Ghazali and Al-Farabi introduced concepts of happiness intricately linked to intellectual progress and ethical behavior, affirming the hypothesis that rational cognition is vital for social progress and personal well-being (Wang Q., 2016, 1).

In fact, Al-Ghazali, in his work *The Alchemy of Happiness*, goes beyond abstract philosophical reasoning to connect happiness and quality of life with spiritual and moral excellence, bridging the gap between the mind, body, soul, and heart.

During the Renaissance, the focus on human potential, rationality, and philosophical reasoning was revitalized. Thinkers such as René Descartes emphasized the role of “uncertainty” and Cartesian doubt as a catalyst for clear thinking and continuous reasoning, thus contributing to the improvement of quality of life (G. Pokhariyal, 2015, 41).

In contemporary times, the relationship between philosophical reasoning, well-being (Barbara H. Fried, 2020, 540), and quality of life has been further clarified through the integration of psychological and epistemological theories. For example, positive psychology employs philosophical foundations to study how cognitive frameworks influence human experiences, indicating that enhancing cognitive tools can lead to greater life satisfaction (Rice L. et al., 2015, 123-132).

The Practical Application of Philosophical Reasoning and Issues of “Quality of Life”

Contemporary philosophical discourse has increasingly emphasized the practical applications of philosophy, critical thinking, and ethics in daily life, reaffirming the enduring importance of philosophical tools in enhancing the quality of life (Samsudin FHB et al., 2021). Consequently, it can be said that the continuous development of philosophical studies, methods of philosophical reasoning, and their innovative applications has strengthened the interaction between philosophy and cognitive functions, continually influencing our understanding of living well (T. Molokova, 2020). These efforts have shed light on the relationship between philosophical thinking and the issues of quality of life.

Philosophical thinking and reasoning are essential for improving the quality of life by fostering essential cognitive abilities and philosophical reasoning mechanisms that enable individuals to manage the complexities of reality and face life's challenges with intellect, awareness, and an effective philosophical culture engaged in the real-life contexts of individuals and societies. Numerous studies indicate that engaging with philosophical concepts and reasoning mechanisms enhances individuals' deep understanding of their values and perspectives, thereby improving self-well-being and decision-making abilities (L. Satish et al., 2017, 53-60; Wang Q, 2016, 1). This includes the effective use of philosophical tools to deepen our understanding of metaphysical, aesthetic, ethical, epistemological, social, and political issues. Moreover, the efficient use of philosophical research tools in preparing individuals and communities, as well as fostering a culture of curiosity, responsible skepticism, critique, analysis, and synthesis, provides practical pathways to address issues such as quality of life, happiness, and more.

Embedding philosophical reasoning and equipping individuals with mechanisms of philosophical reasoning directed toward societal issues offers greater opportunities to link philosophical thought with activities that enhance quality of life. Studies have shown that individuals who employ mechanisms of questioning, critique, analysis, and positive engagement enjoy higher levels of life satisfaction and can achieve significant levels of personal and societal quality of life through the effective and productive use of reasoning capabilities. Thus, integrating philosophical approaches into daily life enhances individual well-being and strengthens societal interaction, ultimately leading to improved quality of life across various levels. The relationship between philosophy and quality of life has garnered significant attention from diverse methodological perspectives, each offering unique insights into the role of rational thought and philosophical tools. This practical orientation reinforces the notion that philosophy is a fundamental tool for improving quality of life, illustrating its varied contributions across multiple areas of human experience.

The interaction between rationality and philosophical methodologies significantly enhances the quality of life, with numerous perspectives affirming this relationship. Classical philosophy, particularly Aristotle's writings, emphasizes practical wisdom as essential for ethical decision-making and self-actualization.

Developing Critical and Reflective Faculties Enhances Quality of Life

For example, studies highlight the relationship between critical thinking and quality of life, revealing that individuals who engage in analytical thinking demonstrate enhanced resilience when facing life challenges (G. Pokhariyal, 2015). Furthermore, philosophical frameworks and tools derived from both Eastern and Western philosophies provide methodologies and approaches for a purposeful and mindful life. These frameworks encourage contemplative engagement with life, suggesting that self-reflection and philosophical inquiry can lead to a more meaningful existence (Rice L et al., 2015, 123-132; Samsudin FHB et al., 2021), especially when guided by objective scientific perspectives with meaningful and purposeful human aims, rather than by disconnected speculative musings.

The integration of principles such as mindfulness and reflection, which are frequently emphasized in Eastern philosophies, has been proven effective in reducing stress and improving personal satisfaction. Therefore, the importance of philosophical discourse in societal contexts should not be underestimated, especially when accounting for the references, cultures, values, and worldviews of societies. It should also be emphasized that engaging in philosophical discussions fosters social unity, mutual understanding, collaborative problem-solving, and the development of a sense of community belonging (T. Molokova, 2020). This strengthens the opportunities and mechanisms for effectively and positively addressing issues and demands related to quality of life in an informed and profound manner.

Philosophical Reasoning and the Importance of Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches

Qualitative approaches focus on individuals' life experiences, highlighting how philosophical considerations can enhance personal meaning and well-being. Studies suggest that engaging in philosophical discussions and intellectual dialogues enables individuals to address existential inquiries and real-world issues, thereby improving mental health and overall life satisfaction (L. Satish et al., 2017, p. 53-60).

Conversely, contemporary quantitative methods provide a more systematic examination of the relationship between philosophical knowledge and quality-of-life indicators. For example, research utilizing standardized measures of quality of life indicates that individuals who engage in philosophical reflection

tion and wise reasoning generally exhibit higher levels of life satisfaction and lower levels of anxiety (Wang Q, 2016, 1; G. Pokhariyal, 2015, 41).

Some studies highlight a measurable relationship between the use of philosophical tools and the improvement of quality of life, emphasizing the importance of integrating philosophical techniques and tools into various aspects of life, such as health, social, family, environmental, and cultural issues. Moreover, interdisciplinary methodologies that combine philosophy and psychology (Peterson C., 2006) have demonstrated their potential in enhancing the effectiveness of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). CBT, enriched by philosophical inquiry, fosters deep cognitive restructuring, enabling individuals to reassess and reframe their thinking, ultimately leading to improved quality of life (Rice L et al., 2015, 123-132).

Mechanisms of Philosophical Reasoning and the Importance of Guiding Philosophical Education

While we respect, value, and advocate for the establishment of a culture of philosophical reasoning and its connection to human activity, development, and the attainment of actual quality of life, we must also emphasize the importance of rationalizing and directing philosophical reasoning in a way that avoids deepening philosophical chaos. It is crucial to prevent philosophical reasoning from reaching tragic ends where references, natural principles, worldviews, shared values, consistent laws, and existential, cosmic, and scientific truths are completely abandoned.

Some modern philosophical approaches, such as existentialism as represented by writers like Sartre and Kierkegaard, adopt an individualistic model, considering that meaning-making is fundamentally individual and rooted in personal choice. This perspective asserts that the quality of an individual's life is largely influenced by their ability to confront existential challenges and accept the freedom of choice (G. Pokhariyal, 2015, 41). However, postmodern critiques challenge the universality of the individualistic perspective and advocate for a more pluralistic approach that values diverse philosophical ideas (Samsudin FHB et al., 2021). From a postmodern viewpoint, this plurality fosters personal and collective well-being by enhancing cognitive flexibility and applying diverse philosophical methods to improve quality of life in varied contexts (T. Molokova, 2020). Consequently, some argue that integrating different philosophical perspectives not only underscores the importance of philosophical reasoning in enhancing quality of life but also necessitates a reflective engagement with individual and collective ideals.

This highlights how much of what postmodernism has heralded—and continues to herald—through its frameworks that transcend philosophical rationality and intellectual maturity can often devolve into a form of philosophical drift that requires rationalization, guidance, and direction. We emphasize that

philosophical tendencies advocating absolute relativism, total liberation from values, and absolute deconstruction of meaning, nature, law, commitment, and ethics inherently carry the seeds of their own contradiction and demise. Such tendencies are imbalanced and reductive in their treatment of the nature, truth, essence, and cosmic dimensions of humanity—whether physical or spiritual. Thus, there is a need to return to defining the human being and the requirements of their quality of life, recognizing them as a social, participatory, interactive, and integrated entity—not merely a mind and body, and nothing more!

Second: The Complex Concept of *Quality of Life* and the Need for Renewed Pedagogies in Philosophical Education

The Concept of Quality of Life and the Issue of Its Multidimensionality

There is no doubt that there are many definitions and analyses of the concept of quality of life. This paper can refer to the definition provided by the World Health Organization (1998), which summarizes several important points to form a useful preliminary conceptualization of quality of life: “An individual’s perception of their position in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live, and how that aligns or misaligns with their goals, expectations, values, and concerns related to their physical health, psychological state, level of independence, social relationships, personal beliefs, and their relationship with their environment in general.” (James W., 2009, 317; McNally).

This definition places the concept of quality of life in a useful cultural, social, and environmental analytical context, allowing for the identification of some of its key dimensions. It emphasizes the centrality of the individual and their awareness of their role, importance, needs, and goals in achieving quality of life. It also highlights the importance of culture and values, as well as several key aspects that quality-of-life programs should focus on, such as physical health, psychological well-being, independence and freedom, social relationships, beliefs, and the general environment. This definition can serve as an entry point for addressing the concept of quality of life both conceptually and practically, demonstrating the multidimensional and interrelated nature of the issue. This, in turn, enables the development of indicators, measurements, and plans during the practical phase to achieve quality of life in reality.

Many of us are aware that the topic of “quality of life” encompasses multiple and overlapping dimensions, including the philosophical, psychological, social, spiritual, economic, political, educational, scientific, technological, legal, administrative, environmental, cultural, and civilizational. It also spans theoretical and practical aspects, individual and collective perspectives, objectives and goals, methods and mechanisms, approaches and applications, realities and ideals, and indicators and measurements, among others. Thus, a philosophical researcher must leave room for a holistic and integrated view of

the topic to grasp some of its key aspects and offer ideas that others who aim to enhance quality of life across various practical human activity levels can benefit from.

From this standpoint, the philosophical value of the issue of quality of life emerges as a central point where the threads of human awareness converge. It is viewed as a dynamic and growing goal that directs the conscious mental energy of modern humans, encouraging them to use their intellectual and philosophical tools to achieve it, as permitted by the circumstances, available resources, and means accessible to individuals and societies.

To meet the conditions, requirements, objectives, and outcomes of “quality of life” for individual and societal well-being, it is essential to activate the role of rational and insightful thinking in theorizing, directing, and influencing human and societal activities aimed at achieving the highest levels of quality of life in its various dimensions. In this context, the philosophical mind, with its mechanisms, tools, methods, approaches, and skills, aids in fostering philosophical thinking directed toward improving quality of life. This is achieved by addressing issues related to humanity, society, development, the environment, health, well-being, values, ethics, aesthetics, governance, management, conscious societal organization, and addressing sustainable development issues from a developmental, value-based, and humanistic philosophical perspective. Thus, philosophy and philosophical thinking become integral to the process of enhancing quality of life. Therefore, deepening applied philosophy and expanding its tools, mechanisms, and applications will play a stronger role in the future management of quality of life within the complex reality of global human development.

Preliminary Framing of the Complex Concept of “Quality of Life”

Philosophically, addressing the concept of “quality of life” requires systematic and structured thinking to analyze the concept methodically and logically. This approach helps us view it as a network of interconnected meanings involving multiple, intertwined dimensions that cannot be fragmented or reduced to some of its parts. Quality of life is a concept that calls for interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary perspectives because it is tied to numerous factors and diverse domains of our lives, existence, reality, and human activities. It is a holistic concept with interconnected parts and dimensions that can only be understood through an integrative vision and a comprehensive framework. This framework must define its dimensions and the points of connection between them to form a complete understanding of quality of life without neglecting its essential components.

Bruce Jennings summarizes multiple perspectives on the concept of “quality of life” into four different directions. Proponents of the first direction view quality of life as an individual property owned and managed by the person

themselves. In this case, quality of life is neither measured by what one lacks nor by what one possesses. It also says nothing about the intrinsic value of life or even the moral worth of a particular life at a given time. The second direction sees quality of life as a goal of care, focusing on sustaining and improving life. In this sense, quality of life becomes a criterion for guiding human activity, a concept for appreciation and evaluation. This perspective emphasizes that quality of life is the result of care provided by another party. An improved quality of life may signify a change (for the better) in an individual's symptoms or perceptions or a change in the individual's relationship with their environment.

The third direction presents quality of life as a social condition or state rather than a unique attribute of the individual. It considers quality of life a function of the individual's way of life. According to this understanding, a low-quality life assessment does not necessarily indicate a negative evaluation of the individual or their worth. Similarly, it may involve a critical evaluation of the individual's environment, identifying ways to change that environment to improve quality of life based on certain criteria such as justice, freedom, health, happiness, and so on. In his analysis, Bruce Jennings adds that the fourth direction highlights quality of life as a moral value, referring to the moral worth of an individual or their life. However, he cautions that the concept of moral worth is logically distinct and separate from the concept of quality of life. The measure of moral worth relies on an inherent value assigned to humanity as a whole or to the individual as a human being. On the other hand, the concept of quality of life depends on the individual's innate and potential capacities and external conditions. Quality of life may tell us what is required for an individual to become "more human," but it does not tell us about the value of the individual or their being (Bruce Jennings, 2021).

Philosophers, on the other hand, offer various and differing perspectives on quality of life and how it can be achieved. One of these perspectives is the theory of pleasure, which focuses on what the individual perceives and attains in terms of enjoyment, pleasure, happiness, and added value as an expression of quality of life or an improvement in it. This theory may be overly centered on subjective perception, leaning more toward material or sensory pleasure as a primary criterion for quality of life or happiness. Another perspective is the theory of human well-being and flourishing, which sees human development and empowerment with appropriate faculties, skills, and abilities as central to achieving quality of life. The theory emphasizes that as an individual's growth, development, and well-being improve, so does the quality of their life. Rational preference theory, on the other hand, defines quality of life through actual satisfaction and the fulfillment of an individual's desired goals. It focuses on the realization of happiness, objectives, desires, or needs in practical and real terms (Bruce Jennings, 2021).

Analyzing the Concept of Quality of Life and the Importance of Awareness of Human Complexity and Innate Nature

Indeed, the great philosophers have enriched us with their opinions, insights, and reflections on humanity, its composition, innate nature, and needs. They have produced numerous perspectives that have astonished us due to the strength and validity of some, and the contradiction, divergence, or incoherence of others. One reason for this may be the differences in references, philosophical approaches, and the application of reasoning and philosophical tools within the specific contexts, conditions, circumstances, and objectives of each philosopher. Despite this, we must acknowledge that serious philosophers have significantly enriched the discussions and debates on “quality of life,” happiness, goodness, justice, and the virtuous city through their narratives, references, and worldviews. We also recognize that philosophy and rational discourse have consistently engaged with these discussions throughout the different periods of history, contributing actively to the intellectual and philosophical dialogues of their time. This acknowledgment brings us closer to affirming that understanding the truth about humanity, its composition, needs, and relationships is essential for describing what constitutes quality of life according to perception, reality, and available means. Thus, understanding human creation and innate nature (*fitra*) may serve as a useful entry point for outlining appropriate frameworks to achieve quality of life based on the reality, circumstances, and cultural and social context. Generally, it can be said that the innate nature and original composition of humanity—if not corrupted—tends toward integration and harmony between the material and spiritual, psychological and intellectual, individual and social, worldly and otherworldly, unseen and witnessed, physical and metaphysical. Therefore, attempts to define quality of life for individuals and societies must, by necessity, adhere to an integrative framework that combines and balances all these dimensions. Neglecting certain aspects of humanity’s innate and comprehensive needs or prioritizing some dimensions over others will not allow for the attainment of an optimal or exemplary quality of life for human beings.

From a general logical perspective, we cannot reduce humanity to some of its aspects or dimensions. To do so would reveal profound ignorance about the true nature, innate disposition, and multifaceted needs of humanity—needs that extend vertically and horizontally, spiritually and materially. Thus, the starting point for defining and attaining human quality of life lies in understanding the comprehensive truth about humanity, rather than fragmenting or isolating its components, which undermines and contradicts the actual nature of humanity. This comprehensive understanding enables the development of an integrative framework of human needs—one that includes the human, spiritual, ethical, artistic, social, civilizational, environmental, cultural, and cosmic dimensions in a single, conscious, and cohesive system.

It can be argued that many of the issues related to defining and achieving “human quality of life” are partially rooted in our understanding of humanity, its needs, and its relationships with the unseen, life, the universe, and humanity itself. The problem also lies in the reinforcement of dichotomies, such as spirit versus matter, reason versus revelation, unseen versus seen, individual versus society, worldly versus otherworldly, self versus the universe, and so on. Human consciousness has strayed when it established contradictions and turned integrative dimensions into opposing dualities, promoting notions such as spirit or matter, this world or the next, reason or revelation, tradition or modernity. This necessitated the development of philosophical and reconciliatory frameworks to address these dichotomies, as seen in the efforts of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Rushd, despite their differing contexts and approaches.

As humans are endowed with various powers, needs, and capabilities—spiritual, sensory, emotional, intellectual, physical, innate, and others that connect them to the Creator, the unseen, and the vast universe—each power requires its sustenance and training to grow, strengthen, and function within this integrated construct called “humanity.” This enables individuals to achieve quality of life in its comprehensive and undivided sense. To understand, describe, analyze, and formulate a vision of this human being and their quality of life, one must grasp the totality of the human being, encompassing all their powers and faculties in a way that astonishes and amazes, as daily discoveries from scientific research centers and laboratories continue to unveil remarkable truths about this creation. These discoveries help us approach the concept of quality of life and how to achieve it in our complex human reality.

Achieving quality of life logically requires identifying the essence of humanity and its multiple relationships—spiritual, existential, cosmic, human, and life-related. We must uncover the balanced dynamic within humans, whose components and needs interact and contend, such as: Personal needs: spiritual, material, psychological, intellectual, physical, sensory, emotional, social, cultural, artistic, aesthetic, and civilizational. Needs related to their connection with the unseen: metaphysical, religious, spiritual, and transcendent details. Needs related to their connection with the cosmos and the physical world: their present and future reality. Thus, the concept of quality of life must encompass this human being with their multifaceted nature and relationships, striving toward a universal framework that brings us closer to achieving optimal, exemplary, or at least feasible quality of life in a world that is increasingly complex, interconnected, and unprecedentedly intricate.

The Centrality of Self-Awareness and Engagement in Achieving Quality of Life

Optimal quality of life is achieved when an individual possesses self-awareness and a sense of responsibility for their own happiness, success, satisfac-

tion, and well-being, engaging directly in this complex and multifaceted process. To achieve this, the individual needs awareness, knowledge, experience, faculties, values, ethics, habits, and behaviors that enable them to become the active agent in managing their quality of life. This must be done in accordance with circumstances, reality, capabilities, needs, obstacles, constraints, opportunities, risks, facilitations, incentives, discouragements, and the internal and external factors surrounding them in their personal and broader local and international contexts.

Because the process of achieving quality of life is relative, influenced by numerous factors beyond the material and financial, interpreted in diverse ways, and measured through subjective and objective indicators, it becomes essential for individuals to learn to position themselves as the central point in the equation of striving for quality of life. Here, the individual requires wisdom, insight, maturity, rationality, as well as the faculties, attributes, and tools to arrive at balanced equations that align with their circumstances, conditions, realities, and needs. They must also work to harness available resources and opportunities to enhance their life. Anderson (2003) emphasizes that when individuals become aware of their lives, they can personally evaluate their surroundings and form ideas about themselves, their realities, capabilities, needs, challenges, and circumstances, enabling them to achieve satisfaction with life (Anderson, 2003).

Quality of life is realized through deep self-awareness of the complex equation that suits each individual, considering their reality, circumstances, worldview, traits, and psychological, intellectual, mental, and spiritual characteristics. These factors influence their awareness, habits, and daily behavior in the face of events, challenges, and situations. It can therefore be said that one person's quality of life may not solely be measured by material prosperity, social distinction, scientific success, good health, or other factors, while another person's life might hinge on achieving just one of these elements. As such, each individual's quality of life is tied to the complex equation that works for them, and that same equation may not be suitable for another individual or group living under different circumstances, specifications, and within another society or culture. Thus, achieving quality of life begins when individuals understand the equation that suits them, one that integrates the system of factors through which they can achieve the optimal quality of life for themselves.

Toward Renewed Pedagogies for Philosophical Education

In addition to the various aspects discussed above regarding the issue of quality of life and the importance of mechanisms of philosophical reasoning in achieving it, it is equally important to emphasize the need for renewed pedagogies and didactics in teaching philosophy (Ronald W. Evans, 2018), as well as promoting societal philosophical practice. Studies have demonstrated

that educational methods prioritizing philosophical thinking and reflection in academic curricula enhance critical thinking skills, enable students to navigate complex life choices and ethical dilemmas, and foster resilience and adaptability in the face of life's challenges (Samsudin FHB et al., 2021; T. Molokova, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to advocate for the revival of philosophy and philosophical reasoning in ways that prove beneficial to humanity. This can be achieved through promoting education, learning, and research in the field of philosophical reasoning and its mechanisms, institutionalizing insightful philosophical thinking, and fostering rational reasoning. These efforts aim to restore philosophy's significance and vital role in humanizing, moralizing, and rationalizing civilization, society, and human interactions to achieve the ideal quality of life that reinstates humanity's completeness, dignity, and civilizational vitality. Philosophy, in this sense, aligns with natural dispositions, historical laws, universal truths, and governing scientific principles.

Consequently, there is a pressing need to integrate philosophical education, philosophical training, and philosophical culture into the fields of education, learning, and practice. This can be done through personal development programs, school curricula, and community activities designed to enhance individuals' skills and experiences in using philosophical tools to improve both personal and societal quality of life. Among the critical areas that demand attention are fostering the essential functions of reasoning, inquiry, critique, argumentation, dialogue, reflection, contemplation, and the diverse philosophical tools. These functions can improve quality of life by enhancing the aforementioned skills, creating educational environments that promote philosophical thinking, and achieving higher levels of global civilizational development rooted in the values of justice, goodness, happiness, and human excellence.

Thus, philosophers and researchers must explore new methods and innovative pedagogies to present philosophical lessons, awareness, and reasoning to students and interested individuals. They should consider the nature of modern learners and practitioners, as well as contemporary approaches to teaching philosophical concepts, so learners can apply them to activities that enhance quality of life, satisfaction, well-being, and prosperity (S. K. Lee, 2019, 1031).

Final Thoughts

In conclusion, the more we approach the "issue of quality of life" with a holistic, systemic, and integrative philosophical perspective—one grounded in interdisciplinary, cross-disciplinary, and transdisciplinary studies—the more we value the importance of insightful and rational philosophical reasoning in opening analytical, synthetic, and creative horizons that help us understand, conceptualize, and theorize quality of life in the real world. This requires direct-

ing philosophical reasoning not only toward questioning, critique, deconstruction, and synthesis but also toward practical guidance in philosophical practice aimed at achieving quality of life. In other words, it is beneficial to channel philosophical reasoning from abstract creative philosophy to interactive practical philosophy (applied philosophy) that uses quality of life as a domain for problem-solving and innovations. This approach reinforces the value of philosophy and philosophical reasoning in advancing human civilization by improving life, enhancing human dignity, and promoting well-being, happiness, tranquility, integration, and balance. Philosophical reasoning is capable of contributing effectively to enriching and advancing contemporary discussions and narratives about quality of life. It can delve deeper into and provoke fundamental questions about the goals, standards, and metrics of a good life (Nussbaum M., 2008, 257). These include global indicators such as happiness, health, well-being, religiosity, competitiveness, progress, environmental sustainability, economic prosperity, democracy, justice, equality, freedom, ethical living, family empowerment, and childhood welfare. The existence of these metrics and standards highlights humanity's desire to improve the quality of life not only at the theoretical and abstract philosophical level but also at the practical and applied level. This underscores the importance of activating and utilizing philosophical mechanisms and tools to achieve quality of life at the individual, societal, and global levels.

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Philosophy and Quality of Life: Existence, Truth, and Goodness

Theory and Practice: Which Path Leads to Achieving Quality of Life?

Azelarabe Lahkim Bennani

Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University, Morocco

Introduction

In this article, we address the transition from the theoretical study of quality of life to exploring the obstacles to its application. The challenges of linking freedom and quality of life emerge in the form of confusion between acts of worship ('ibadat) and social transactions (mu'amalat). We will highlight that a rational balance between the two allows for the optimal utilization of individual freedoms. Thus, for many people, quality of life is associated with their right to enjoy the freedoms that ensure a dignified life for individuals, while resolving the ambiguities between acts of worship and social transactions. However, we will illustrate that this normative constraint is absent in consumerist societies, which tie quality of life to the increasing demand for non-essential needs according to individual whims. We will show how wealthy nations often do not hesitate to bear the damages caused by individual freedoms, nor the high financial costs resulting from the consequences of consumption on individuals, communities, and the environment. However, the emergence of global financial crises has led states to impose restrictions on excessive consumption. This has given rise to the concept of the "care state," which seeks to protect individuals from themselves and safeguard society from the harm caused by reckless behaviors. Consequently, the quality of life becomes linked to the care state's efforts to reform individual behavior from a social and moral perspective. We will also highlight how social sciences assist the care state in assessing the losses caused by corrupt consumer habits, with the hope of achieving a quality of life that does not conflict with the requirements of preserving the natural environment. Faced with the inability of social sciences to address the social imbalances resulting from consumerist vices under the banner of quality of life, punitive systems have emerged to penalize the risks individuals pose to one another. When individuals' reckless behavior becomes an imminent threat to the physical safety of others, punitive measures fulfill the

function of both general and specific deterrence to counter misinterpretations of quality of life. Nevertheless, we will argue that harsh laws, in turn, lead to legal instability and reinforce social violence, which contradicts the very essence of quality of life. How, then, can we overcome the obstacles that hinder the understanding of quality of life, both in the way individuals perceive it and within the constraints imposed by the care state on its implementation?

Quality of Life as a Pursuit of Human Perfection

In the Islamic framework, quality of life is tied to values of purifying the soul from defilement, combating evil, striving for perfection, and forgiving wrongdoers. In contrast, the modern state's framework has moved beyond the issues of quality of life, fighting evil, and striving for purification of the soul. It shifted its focus to actions rather than judgments of individuals and sought to protect society as a whole rather than exact retribution against offenders solely to uphold victims' rights. In this context, Niklas Luhmann highlighted the difference in the meaning of "quality of life" as it is understood in modern states compared to religious conceptions. Religions traditionally considered the attainment of human perfection a hallmark of achieving quality of life. However, in the modern functional sense, quality of life has become associated with calculations of personal utility, the common good, and the use of public policies to reinforce individual desires and employ science to dominate nature. A deep divide has emerged between the religious sense of conscience, hopes, and human needs on the one hand, and the functional requirements that have arisen within social systems, psychological structures, and the interconnected globalized frameworks on the other. Returning to religion no longer holds significant meaning when entering the realms of economics, politics, and science, nor in family formation, education, or even in treating the sick—despite the persistence of outdated religious forms, such as expressing gratitude for blessings through religious education, prohibiting legal interference in religion, or granting tax exemptions (Luhmann, 2000, p. 286).. Unlike the modern conception, we argue that quality of life in the Islamic world does not prioritize the individual at the expense of the family. It does not accept economic transactions in domains that conflict with human nature or with the moral framework of society.

Religion has largely receded in its role of regulating the rules of economics, politics, and governance within Western states. However, it remains present in its holistic view of the human being in Islamic societies, contrasting with the partial perspective that the law holds regarding human actions and the requirements of quality of life. Religion addresses the entirety of the human experience, speaking to the religious sense of conscience, hopes, and human needs. In contrast, the law (particularly in its criminal dimension) addresses human actions in a fragmented manner, holding them accountable in a similarly par-

tial way, without examining the deeper issues of the source of condemned actions within the human soul. While religion confronts evil in its entirety, the law confines itself to addressing the limits of crimes committed within a specific place and time.

Ethics, from a religious perspective, aim to achieve human perfection, while the ethics of positive law—particularly criminal law—focus on addressing specific issues related to the legitimacy of punishment from a moral standpoint. Here, the distinction between modernity and pre-modernity in the Western perspective becomes evident. The holistic foundation that once encompassed criminal matters, for example, has disappeared. Human perfection is no longer an ethical goal that punishment seeks to achieve in order to transcend evil. Instead, the focus has shifted to specific, fragmented issues within the criminal justice field itself, rather than considering them from a broader, external perspective.

Quality of Life from the Perspective of Individuals

Despite the differences between the “care state” in Western thought and the “state of human perfection” in Islamic thought, freedom remains the foundational principle in both, necessitating justification for any exceptions or restrictions imposed upon it⁽¹⁾. In both Islamic principles and political philosophy, freedom is unlimited unless restricted by either divine law (sharī‘ah) or positive law. This is evidenced in the fundamentals of religion, where permissibility is the default rule in matters of social transactions (mu‘amalat), while prohibition is the default in acts of worship (‘ibadat), with permissibility being the exception. In the realm of transactions, those who include punishment operate on the basis that permissibility is the default, thus granting broader freedom and limiting the scope of prohibition. However, confusion arises when there is no clear distinction between acts of worship and transactions, with some treating punishment as a divine prerogative that cannot be interfered with. For example, the obligation to wash the deceased (ghusl al-mayyit) is a duty if considered under the category of acts of worship. However, if washing the deceased is viewed as part of social transactions, the act becomes permissible, raising the question of its worldly wisdom. In this case, only God knows the wisdom behind washing the deceased if it is deemed a part of worship. The example of washing the deceased serves as a prototypical case for

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1. Criminal laws around the world respond differently to escape attempts. Prisoners of war and detainees share the same right to freedom. According to Article 319 of the German Penal Code, “Anyone who enables a prisoner to escape is subject to prosecution. However, any person who escapes from prison or an institution on their own is not directly punished. If the escapee is recaptured, no criminal penalties are imposed.” In the Moroccan Penal Code, an escape attempt is punishable by imprisonment ranging from one to three months. The use of force increases the severity of the penalty to between two and five years (Article 309).

an infinite number of human actions in which ambiguity persists—where it is unclear whether an act falls within the domain of worship or remains open to personal interpretation within the realm of social transactions. There is no doubt that quality of life is closely tied to a clear distinction between devotional acts, which allow no personal discretion, and the freedom individuals have in determining their destinies and choosing their life projects. This distinction is evident in the diversity of individual lifestyles regarding clothing, housing, and communal living, as well as in the freedom to take initiative, assert oneself, and engage in fair competition in the fields of scientific knowledge and economic activity. Ambiguity between acts of worship and social transactions becomes particularly pronounced when trying to differentiate between usury (*riba*) and bank interest, between adultery and consensual relationships, or between free-market competition and adherence to Islamic rules of trade. These ambiguities either lead to an expansion of freedom in transactions or to its restriction.

When we seek to root new social and economic customs within the framework of acts of worship (*‘ibadat*), the gap widens, and permissibility becomes an exception that, in such cases, requires justification. Freedom, in turn, is seen as recklessness that must be monitored and curbed, as long as freedom risks deviating from the immutable values and principles that do not allow for compromises inspired by human reasoning. In this sense, the fields of praiseworthy (*mahmūd*) and blameworthy (*madhmūm*) ethics have expanded, and questions about the legitimacy of personal choices, natural inclinations, and protected interests have multiplied. This has resulted in a blending of social norms with religious rules, which developed mechanisms for criminalization and treated religious principles as simultaneously legal and social foundations on which society is built. It appears that the reasonable moral justification for social norms lies in their contribution to achieving social deterrence and addressing the transition of individuals from the principle of permissibility to an excessive indulgence in permissiveness.

The ambiguity between acts of worship (*‘ibadat*) and social transactions (*mu‘amalat*) can lead individuals to refrain from exercising some of their personal freedoms or compel them to do so, which, in turn, reduces their perceived quality of life and deprives them of the joy of living. In reality, the domain of worship does not pose an obstacle to achieving self-projects and living life in a manner individuals find satisfactory. The problem arises when we restrict an individual’s right to exercise discretion and independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) in worldly matters, even when they may be the most knowledgeable in such areas. Quality of life is partly linked to one’s ability to innovate, create, and manage life projects in alignment with personal goals. The issue does not lie in acts of worship or social transactions themselves, but rather in the necessity of achieving a rational balance between the two. Such balance is essential for

dispelling the ambiguity that arises between them and for avoiding doctrinal and sectarian conflicts that can undermine the stability of societies.

Regulating the blurred boundaries between permissibility and prohibition does not aim to legitimize forbidden acts, excessively exploit natural resources, or jeopardize the future of future generations. This is because the excessive exploitation of the environment, the manipulation of nature, or the creation of consumer goods harmful to public health are actions that do not positively reflect quality of life. Quality of life is not necessarily tied to the obsessive pursuit of satisfying individuals' peculiar and infinite desires.

The Ambiguity Between the Pursuit of Human Perfection and the Fear of Social Decay

There is a reasonable emphasis on enhancing quality of life through the development of public institutions, constitutional reforms, and the creation of social organizations capable of fostering cooperative relationships among free and equal citizens. These efforts help individuals showcase their potential and empower them to flourish and develop themselves. In Islamic ethical thought, the pursuit of perfection has been the ultimate goal of human existence. This principle led Muslims to interpret *sharī'ah* in light of achieving the wisdom behind human existence, fulfilling objectives (*maqasid*), and meeting legitimate interests (*masalih*). By contrast, unlike legal systems that do not inherently rely on mechanisms of ethical formulation, *sharī'ah* considers the attainment of human perfection to be the ultimate aim, which aligns with the concept of natural rights in Islam (Benhamza, 2019, pp. 123–175). Ethical concepts in *sharī'ah* are therefore tied to limiting injustice, preventing harm, and promoting benefit to achieve salvation (*najah*) (Nekroumi, 2018, pp. 110–175). Here, we observe a contrast between the appreciation of the goal of human perfection—achieving the “virtuous city” (*al-madina al-fadila*) and completing noble ethics—and the rejection of the moral decay found in Western societies, which is often justified under the banner of individual pursuit of quality of life. The result is that the pursuit of quality of life, from an Islamic perspective, requires achieving the virtuous city as an essential condition. On the other hand, from a Western perspective, it is tied to surrendering to individual whims and directing the state to support the self-determined will of individuals.

Virtue had become a value sought for its own sake in Aristotelian ethics, distinct from the ethics of pleasure and utility. Thus, the interpretation of Aristotelian ethics aimed to achieve “the knowledge that enables people to understand the transition from humans as they exist to the realization of the essential existence of humanity” (McIntyre, 2007, p. 53). This Aristotelian perspective on perfection left a significant impact on Islamic thought.

However, the modern view of humanity has retreated from the goal of achieving human perfection in its Aristotelian sense. Contemporary thought no longer links quality of life to the creation of ideal institutions (just and equitable) capable of embracing free and equal citizens. From this perspective, Amartya Sen's theory of empowerment challenges John Rawls' ideal theory of justice by arguing that quality of life does not depend on the assumption of the existence of perfectly ideal institutions. Instead, it relies on the possibility of overcoming obstacles that hinder the development of individual skills. Accordingly, perfection is not a prerequisite for achieving quality of life. Rather, quality of life is contingent upon the ability to apply fundamental rights, such as removing barriers and creating opportunities for capacity development. Amartya Sen discusses these ideas in his work *Human Rights and Global Imperatives*, emphasizing the concept of "right." In this context, he distinguishes between the notion of rights as he conceptualizes them and the notion of rights as presented by Ronald Dworkin (Sen, 2010, p. 387).

Ronald Dworkin begins with the question: Wouldn't a person's condition always be better if that right were turned into reality? According to Dworkin, this rhetorical question nullifies any possible objection to the necessity of enforcing that right, as obtaining any right is always better than not obtaining it. However, Amartya Sen, in contrast to Dworkin, believes that taking rights seriously requires posing a counter-question regarding the natural rights of humans, as follows: Wouldn't things become worse if we violated an existing right?

Through this rhetorical question—one that prioritizes avoiding the worst rather than achieving the ideal vision of society—Amartya Sen advocates for a focus not on creating the best of all possible worlds but on avoiding the worst possible worlds. He shifts attention away from striving for the utopian "virtuous city" (utopia) and toward preventing dystopian "ignorant cities" (dystopia). Accordingly, quality of life does not necessarily mean securing the best absolute rights. Rather, it seeks to ensure living in an environment or world that is less harmful.

Quality of Life from the Perspective of the Care State

Contemporary Western societies refrain from making value judgments about the waves of liberation experienced under the banner of individual rights and the belief that the state has no right to interfere in individuals' private affairs. Quality of life in this context is linked to individuals' ability to realize themselves without state intervention to mitigate harm unless they explicitly request it. Individuals do not refrain from exercising their personal freedoms, which forces the state to take two fundamental actions. The first involves adding a new burden to the state's responsibilities: establishing social care centers and compensating for the harms caused by the misuse of freedom. These

include creating rehabilitation centers for delinquents, programs for treating drug and alcohol addiction, facilities for single mothers, and homes for abandoned children. Wealthy states do not seek to balance profit and loss in the face of the right to unfettered personal desires without restriction. Instead, they view the financial costs allocated to rehabilitation and care programs as a necessary tax to ensure quality of life as envisioned by the free and equal citizen. The financial support for individual freedoms remains substantial, and the state does not shy away from spending public funds to compensate for the losses caused by the misuse of freedom. This financial burden is regarded as equally important as allocating public funds for economic and social projects. However, in light of economic downturns and global financial crises, wealthy states are now compelled to reconsider the relationship between quality of life and the pursuit of unchecked individual desires.

Financial considerations have become a justification for restricting the scope of individual freedoms when they lead to heavy burdens in terms of economic and human losses. Heated debates have erupted in France regarding the legalization of light drug consumption, with France still refusing to adopt laws in this regard, unlike the legalization of limited light drug use in Germany, the Netherlands, and some other countries. The prohibition of light drug consumption in France is tied to its consequences for addicts and public health. It has been proven that an absolute ban on their consumption allows for sufficient funds to be allocated to more important expenses, pending serious scientific studies that confirm the effects of some of these substances on public health.

However, the financial justification based on reducing social costs leads to side effects that conflict with individual freedoms and restrict the liberties that modern societies have worked to secure. The proof of this lies in the possibility of using the justification of high financial expenses as a pretext to neglect the care of people with disabilities in favor of allocating those funds to healthy children who achieve greater productivity for society⁽²⁾. Similarly, spending large amounts of money and devoting significant time to rehabilitating children who have shown a natural predisposition toward delinquency and committing crimes is not considered a rational economic behavior. A simpler solution could suffice: criminalizing actions that threaten society or issuing harsh punishments that deter other potential offenders from committing such acts. Severe punishment allows for deterring potential criminals and saving substantial funds otherwise spent on social rehabilitation.

2. If a mentally challenged child requires additional lessons to improve their abilities, compared to a gifted child who does not need such support, are the financial burdens resulting from mental disabilities a justification for prioritizing care for healthy children over those who are ill?

Economic calculations thus become a path that leads to the criminalization and social disapproval of individual whims. The obsession with economic austerity becomes a factor that deprives individuals of their right to fairness and may serve as a motive to economize on education and social rehabilitation measures funded by the state, on the grounds that harsh punishment might be effective in deterring potential criminals.

The French model, which does not associate quality of life with the legalization of light drug consumption, driving under the influence, the establishment of prostitution businesses (as in Germany), or incest, demonstrates that not all forms of individual whims can be accepted in the name of protecting quality of life. Fundamental solutions emerged as early as the mid-19th century to address social deviations resulting from demands to support individual rights. This alternative appeared within the fields of the humanities and social sciences.

Social Sciences in the Service of Quality of Life

Social sciences have become a source of inspiration for legal scholars as they began examining societal transformations and the breakdown of social relations in Europe due to the expansion of freedoms in human interactions. Meanwhile, philosophy's contribution to criminal justice research has remained limited when it comes to examining the impact of generalizing the principle of freedom on criminal law from normative and ethical perspectives. There is no doubt that philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Bentham worked on the subject of law. However, their works did not receive the attention they deserved, as they were written in the later stages of their lives and failed to secure a prominent place within traditional philosophical disciplines. Today, the field is open for philosophy to address new issues at the core of problems such as evil, guilt, the proportionality of punishment to crime, the ethics of criminal procedures, judicial and administrative individualization, and violence.

If the West has worked on developing social sciences and methods of education and rehabilitation, it is because the broad expansion of freedoms has allowed young people and adolescents to deviate from traditional social norms. The wider the scope of freedom and the greater its negative side effects, the more demand there has been for social sciences (such as criminology, psychiatry, social psychology, and educational sciences) to address the adverse consequences of these effects. When social solutions are unavailable or become too expensive, criminalization becomes a cost-effective alternative. The care state has sought to incorporate calculations of profit and loss in economic terms, as well as in human terms. Trust within families, among friends, and in the workplace is a significant asset and an important indicator of quality of life. However, what undermines quality of life is the presence of valid reasons

that compel every individual to be cautious of others. The problem of evil is tied to the harm we may cause, whether intentionally or unintentionally. From this perspective, quality of life is evident in avoiding exposing others to unjustified risks. Undoubtedly, we sometimes justify exposing others to danger without reasonable justification, particularly when we possess criminal immunity. This becomes apparent when our bodies turn into ticking time bombs that might harm others—for instance, when driving a car or any other vehicle, even a motorcycle or a regular bicycle. We may also cause psychological or emotional harm to others (in classrooms or police stations), regardless of the good intentions behind our actions. The harm people inflict on one another is infinite, and its “black figures” (unreported cases) are only revealed to a limited extent—either when they come to the attention of the judiciary or by sheer luck.

We need social sciences to address the consequences of exploiting individual freedoms and to confront the effects of poverty and instability during social and political upheavals. In his introduction to Condorcet’s *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (Condorcet, 1987, p. 57), Alain Pons explains how Condorcet “perceived the possibilities offered by probability theory for studying human decisions and thus the ‘probability of managing the future.’” Condorcet presents a program for controlling nature and social mechanisms through what he calls “social mathematics.” However, this program is also an ethical project, aiming to eliminate disparities and inequalities between nations, promote equality among individuals, and achieve the actual progress of humanity (Condorcet, 1987, pp. 265–266).

To support this effort, probability theory should aid in allocating financial resources to affected groups and in developing insurance plans to address the impacts of illness, poverty, and social vulnerability. However, Condorcet avoids drawing utopian or hasty populist conclusions. While the French politician Robespierre (1758–1794), one of the figures of the French Revolution, proclaimed, in the name of the revolution, the existence of radical and absolute equality among people, Condorcet was more cautious in asserting absolute and unconditional equality. He acknowledged the inevitable and, perhaps, necessary disparities among individuals in talents and wealth. Nevertheless, he maintained that equality in rights among people is an absolute necessity. Thus, everyone must bear the consequences of individual inequalities, while noting that “an authoritarian elimination of these disparities would lead to the worst evils, as it would suppress the hard-won freedom achieved through such long struggles” (Condorcet, 1987, p. 67). Condorcet is concerned with risks that can be anticipated—specifically, predicting imminent crises caused by social vulnerability. In this sense, Condorcet’s clarity stands in contrast to Robespierre’s populism.

We also need social sciences today to mitigate the risks arising from indi-

viduals' behavior toward one another and toward society. There can be no enjoyment of quality of life without a sense of peace and security. In this regard, it is necessary to prevent harm before pursuing benefit.

Quality of Life and Confronting Evil in Criminal Philosophy:

In the medieval era, the concept of evil assumed the existence of malicious intentions that were unrestrained and equated with "cursed" satanic acts until the Day of Judgment. However, in modern times, the principle of law shifted to judging actions rather than persons, with the hope of reforming consciences rather than despairing of them. Nevertheless, the risk of harm to others remains, even when harmful actions are justified by the presence of good intentions. This directly impacts quality of life. Even with the emergence of criminal law codes, institutions of justice turned into institutions of punishment and enforcement, perpetually needing to justify their existence, given that punishment is an act of violence disconnected from societal norms, ordinary life circumstances, and the need to ensure quality of life. This view does not question the legitimacy of surveillance and prohibition as much as it demands justification for free, voluntary behavior—even if it deviates from standard conduct. It raises the question of why we demand justification for freedom rather than justification for restricting it. The ultimate goal should be for criminal law to become an exception that might one day be dispensed with in democratic countries dedicated to ensuring quality of life. Nothing prevents a return to Islamic *diyyah* (blood money) and civil penalties as alternatives to physical coercion. Nietzsche warned against treating human nature, animal instincts, or natural drives as exceptions that must be compensated for by transcendent social rules. Defenders of criminal law often dismiss critics of its existence as mere utopians and dreamers, seeking to confront violence without violence and underestimating the danger posed by the animalistic nature that threatens peaceful living and quality of life.

Undoubtedly, the expansion of the margin of freedom compels us to justify restricting some of it when individuals pose a danger to others or to public order. Quality of life is tied to limiting the exercise of violence in the name of the law to prevent an increase in violence within society, as indicated by the harshness of criminal sentences. An increase in the severity of legal punishment leads to the amplification of violence within society. "Today, the proliferation of laws has reached such a level that it subjects individuals and the groups they form to the constant possibility of repression. This inflation does not necessarily lead to legal security in organizing social relations. Innocence no longer results from refraining from wrongful acts but from the repression system choosing not to intervene—a system that cannot be reduced to the apparatus of justice and the police" (Boucher, 1978, p. 103). What exacerbates the atmosphere of caution and mistrust within society is the criminal

perspective's encouragement of the notion that any individual could become a potential threat to others at any moment.

A suitable balance between the rule of law and the achievement of quality of life can be found by incorporating ethical frameworks that emphasize human responsibility for actions and rational choices, which require individuals to bear the consequences of their decisions.

Conclusion

Punishment does not erase material harm from existence, even though quality of life requires punishment to “erase the crime” and for both victims and offenders to benefit from the right to forget. The purpose of law is general deterrence, not revenge or the spread of social animosities⁽³⁾ (Blumenson, 2006). A repentant and remorseful offender can only benefit from the purpose of punishment if they are able to erase and forget the crime, hoping to enjoy quality of life once again, as long as they have distanced themselves from crime and since good deeds erase bad ones.

The quality of life that repentant offenders enjoy applies even more so to citizens who live in safety, feel secure, and experience life without fear of structural social violence. At that point, every individual feels safe and does not seek to harm themselves, let alone harm others, except unintentionally (Nietzsche, 2024, § 190, p. 98). Those who do not wish injustice for themselves will not wish it for others. Quality of life is thus tied to individuals' ability to find convincing philosophical justifications that prevent them from harming themselves or others.

From this perspective, a general sense of security within society is a necessary condition for ensuring quality of life, though not a sufficient one. A climate of freedom and the absence of ambiguity between acts of worship and social transactions amplifies the feeling of safety. Western liberal states have linked quality of life to individuals' rights to pursue their personal desires.

Although wealthy states initiated the creation of social institutions to address the negative consequences of quality of life as perceived by individuals, they have become increasingly focused on estimating the financial costs required to address the burdens of personal deviance. Social sciences emerged parallel to the rise of individual rights and the call for establishing the care state, which prioritizes the interests of individuals. These sciences aimed to address all risks resulting from individuals' consumer habits without passing

3. Among researchers, figures like Quinton defend the idea that the purpose of punishment is to “erase the crime,” integrating this aim into the benefit derived from it rather than as a means of retribution. This means that the function of punishment is to “create a state of affairs in which it appears as if the wrongful act never occurred.” This justifies the existence of punishment based on its effect, that is, the desired outcomes it achieves.

value judgments unless such behaviors became an imminent threat to society. As modern society has called for overturning all traditional values in the name of promoting quality of life, it has become necessary for criminal law to correct individuals' behaviors in the absence of moral constraints. However, the harshness of criminal law has negatively impacted social violence rates and lowered quality-of-life indicators. Therefore, it has become necessary to offer a critical perspective on the role of law in perpetuating social violence and its impact on quality-of-life levels. Accordingly, we have reviewed various aspects of quality of life from the perspective of individual rights and the contribution of the care state in fostering it. We have also highlighted the importance of considering the costs of addressing social issues stemming from excessive individual desires to achieve quality of life, without overlooking the significant role of cultural and religious differences in influencing quality of life or the role of social violence in undermining it. Thus, we conclude with the following observations regarding Arab societies:

- To achieve quality of life, we must recognize that the rate of violence should decrease in parallel with an understanding of the legislator's objectives, while the legislator must also consider the prevailing level of violence within society and work to reduce it.
- The higher the rate of social violence, the weaker the quality of life.
- Quality of life emerges in countering moral nihilism, which does not oppose harm to oneself or others, in order to guarantee quality of life for the greatest number of people.

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What Is a Flourishing Life?

Antonia Case

Editor-In-Chief of *New Philosopher*

What is a good life? What is a flourishing life? These are the sorts of inquiries philosophers have pondered for thousands of years, and still today, we ask ourselves similar questions.

For me, flourishing has been a central focus of my studies, prompting many questions over the years – such as: How do I find happiness in life? What is my purpose? What is a good life? My research has since led me down many paths and across continents. I have interviewed hundreds of experts from around the world in a bid to investigate happiness and meaning across cultures. My quest to find answers led me to launch a philosophy magazine, *New Philosopher*, which is distributed globally. And I have written a book called *Flourish* which is published by Bloomsbury.

I wanted to discover the ingredients, if you will, of a flourishing life – much like one selects the ingredients to bake the perfect cake. To flourish, what must you have? What must you do?

The word flourishing in English means to grow, prosper, to be in a state of activity or production; to reach a height of development or influence. For Aristotle, the Greek word ‘eudaimonia’ – which is often translated as ‘flourishing’ – is comprised of two parts: ‘eu’, meaning ‘well’, and ‘daimon’, meaning ‘divinity’ or ‘spirit’. In Aristotle’s ethical philosophy, eudaimonia refers to the ultimate goal of human life: living well and fulfilling one’s potential as a rational and virtuous being. It is not a momentary state but a lifelong process of growth and striving towards the highest good.

Interestingly, German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, too, was especially interested in the subject of human flourishing. He asks the question: “What is important to you? What matters? What makes for a good and meaningful life? What do you prioritize, and why?” Nietzsche thinks that it’s during moments when you feel restless and discontent that you must get up close to this feeling and to study it. When you stop one day and say, “What am I doing with my life? Is this a good way to live? How could I be doing things better?” then you are beginning to ask the right questions.

Some ten years ago, I set out on an adventure around the world in search of people who are flourishing. I journeyed through Latin America and on to Europe, and back to Australia; I sought to investigate the attributes of a flourishing life so I could pinpoint the key elements.

I have a friend who is eternally perplexed. He is always confused and undecided about what he wants to do with his life. He often sits in his room and contemplates the options; should I study music? Or should I pursue philosophy? What should I do? He often tells me that he just needs more time to think things over. And I say to him that he should just begin something – sign up for a course, go to an event, take lessons, but he just insists that he hasn't yet finished contemplating the options.

It's typical to think that flourishing can happen by just thinking about it. It'll happen, we assume, as a light-bulb moment. We will be driving along in the car, or we'll be walking in a city park at night, and the idea will hit, bang. "Of course, this is what I am going to do with my life. This is who I am. This is the path that I must take." We fool ourselves into thinking that the answer lies within our mind somewhere, and one day the answer to the meaning of our life, and our purpose, will suddenly dawn on us. But this is misguided.

Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset puts it nicely. He says: "Man's destiny is primarily action. We do not live to think, but on the contrary: we think in order that we may succeed in surviving." This is a very apt way of describing it. Our destiny is primary action.

Take this conference as an example. The organisers of this conference could have devoted an entire month to sitting in the library and thinking about philosophy. But, instead, they dedicated their time to action – inviting guests, decorating the venue, organising exhibitions and workshops – and through these activities, 'philosophy' comes alive in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. We are all this week partaking in philosophy as action beings. Our reality has shifted; we meet new people; we are introduced to new thought; we engage with philosophy as embodied beings. I met a man yesterday in Riyadh who is organising philosophy in cafes each month. This is another example of philosophy in action. Taking the ideas of philosophy and discussing them, analysing and debating them with others. This is key, I think, to flourishing.

Spanish poet Antonio Machado's well-known poem 'Proverbios y Cantares XXIX', reminds us that a life is what one makes of it. Machado writes: "Wanderer, your footsteps are the road, and nothing more; wanderer, there is no road, the road is made by walking." In other words, we create our purpose in life by dint of taking action. We create the road, not by pondering, ruminating, and contemplating the steps we must make, but by walking. We create our purpose in life by taking that first step.

French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, too, was also one to

share the belief that dreams, expectations and hopes are wonderful (and certainly important) – but at the end of the day it's action that counts. For Sartre we are the sum of our actions. In this sense, reality is not an abstract concept but something that is actualised by what we do. For example, one cannot merely think of themselves as kind or courageous; they must perform acts of kindness or courage to substantiate these qualities. You cannot be a fine artist, unless you draw, paint, or engage in some sort of creative endeavour.

If we are, then, what we do, it's important, therefore, at some point to stop contemplating the options in life and to act. It's by taking action that we begin the journey to flourishing.

During my travels in Latin America, interestingly, I spent time with a community that did not work. This community lived at the far southern-most point in Argentina, in a town called Ushuaia. The scenery was nothing short of exquisite – snow-capped mountains shading a rugged beach, and this community of non-workers lived in huts along the shore. To keep costs down they handstitched their clothes, made bulk food with water and stock, all in the spirit of not working.

Some philosophers argue that 'Homo sapiens', man the thinker, should be 'Homo faber', man the maker, because a defining characteristic of humans is the need to work, create, innovate and build. The things we make are externalisations of our existence. When we create the world around us, we create ourselves. A meaningful life therefore entails having meaningful work, or something to do.

So, when meeting a group of people in Argentina who did not work, I was curious. Were they happier than people who spent their time working? Were they less stressed, less rushed, did they dedicate their time to more important activities other than paid work?

Interestingly, what I noticed most in this group of non-workers was a pervading sense of apathy, lack of energy, and purpose. For most of the day, they didn't quite know what to do with their time – and struggled greatly with making a choice. Should we walk into town, or cook lunch? For these non-workers, each day unfolded in much the same manner as the last, and with nothing to build on, they were simply passing time, neither improving, nor building, nor constructing; in fact, they were in stasis.

British philosopher Bertrand Russell outlines two reasons why work is good for us. The first is that we can exercise our skill at something and, in turn, improve, much like we gain pleasure from getting better at sport or a musical instrument. When we work, we naturally get better at it – and provided that our skills can continue to improve, we gain monumental satisfaction. And second, work's constructiveness is good for us. In other words, work allows us to build on something, which becomes a monument when the work is complet-

ed. Bertrand Russell writes: “The satisfaction to be derived from success in a great constructive enterprise is one of the most massive that life has to offer.”

In ‘Why is Economics not an Evolutionary Science?’, Thorstein Veblen writes: ‘It is characteristic of man to do something... He is not simply a bundle of desires that are to be saturated by being placed in the path of the forces of the environment, but rather a coherent structure of propensities and habits which seek realization and expression in an unfolding activity.’ It’s true, we all need something to do with our time. Even the ultra-wealthy, freed from economic need, continue to work, engaged in various projects at the same time. Without projects to occupy their time, the comfortably rich can be beset with maladies of all sorts, worry, apathy and so forth. Bertrand Russell writes: “Most of the idle rich suffer unspeakable boredom as the price of their freedom from drudgery. The satisfaction of killing time and of affording some outlet, however modest, for ambition, belongs to most work, and is sufficient to make even a man whose work is dull happier on the average than a man who has no work at all.”

It takes but a quick glance at the physical and mental health statistics of unemployed people, typically afflicted with bouts of depression, obesity and low self-esteem, to realise the importance of work in life.

Philosopher Bertrand Russell, of whom I’ve just spoken, did not have the happiest of childhoods. His mother and sister died of diphtheria when he was just two years old. A year later, his father died of bronchitis. Russell was then raised by his grandparents – but his grandfather, too, passed away when Russell was just age six, leaving him under the stern control of his grandmother. Russell spent his youth wandering about the gardens in his grandmother’s large estate. He was lonely, isolated, and when he was a teenager, he suffered from depression.

But as Russell aged, a mysterious emotion enveloped him – that of, for want of a better word, contentment, or even happiness; and as every year passed, he enjoyed his life even more. As a writer, Russell started to explore this sensation of - shall we call it happiness, or flourishing. What was the source of this elusive emotion?

After much consideration, Russell tried to pinpoint the reason for his own sense of heightened contentment as he aged. He surmised it was due, in part, to a diminishing preoccupation with himself. As the English philosopher aged, he naturally began to take a keener interest in the world around him, such as various branches of knowledge, individuals for whom he cared; he loved playing chess, gardening, hiking, and socialising with other intellectuals; he founded schools and was actively engaged in political activism and philanthropy. To put it very simply, Russell was flourishing because he surrounded himself with

the things he loved, and he spent an increasing amount of time directing his attention away from himself, towards these other facets of interest.

In typical perspicuous fashion, Russell puts it simply. Strawberries, for example, are neither good nor bad. But for the man who likes them, he gains pleasure from them that is denied to the man who does not. Bertrand Russell writes: “To that extent his life is more enjoyable and he is better adapted to the world in which both must live.” He goes on to say that the man who enjoys football is to that extent superior in zest to the man who does not gain pleasure from the sport. And the woman who loves to read is superior in zest to the woman who does not read for pleasure. Russell writes: “The more things a man is interested in, the more opportunities for happiness he has, and the less he is at the mercy of fate, since if he loses one thing he can fall back upon another. Life is too short to be interested in everything, but it is good to be interested in as many things as are necessary to fill our days.”

The secret to flourishing, proposes the philosopher, is to be outward looking – towards the world and its myriad offerings – and less focused on the self. The self can only offer so much fodder for contemplation, and a life centred on oneself risks stagnation. Self-obsession kills pleasure in every activity for its own sake, and inevitably leads to boredom.

On the contrary, the more interests you have, the more actively engaged you are, the more attentive you to your friends and family, to your interests and passions, the more you will open up your life to flourishing.

Friedrich Nietzsche, too, tells us to be curious and mindful of moments in life’s journey that elevate and inspire us. “What have you truly loved?” he questions. “What has drawn you upward?” he writes. He impels us to acknowledge the things we love, or honour, as these are keys to the ‘fundamental law’ of our self. If it were at all possible to do so, Nietzsche urges us to set our loves before us, as though we were laying them out upon a table in order to compare them like objects. In the essay ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’, he writes: “Consider how one completes and broadens and transcends and explains another: how they form a ladder on which you have all the time been climbing to find your true self. For your true self does not lie deeply hidden within you. It is at an infinite height above you, or at least, above what you commonly take to be yourself.” Follow your happy moments – for these are the pebbles that lead you to your life’s quest. As Epicurus says, “Not what we have, but what we enjoy, constitutes our abundance.”

Many people in Western countries, such as Australia where I reside, regard flourishing as mostly material; for instance, owning a big house, a fancy car, having yearly holidays and sending children to private school. For many of these city folk, the path to flourishing is very dependent upon the size of one’s

bank balance. Yet, in my travels around the world, I met a group of people who were, by all accounts, flourishing, and yet, in material terms, they owned very little. They were a group of recently arrived missionaries on a two-year assignment to Nicaragua. And they were dispatched to a roadless, forgotten camp on Isla de Ometepe; a place of so little comfort, no paved roads, restaurants or shopping malls, merely a dusty field alongside a windy lake.

I accompanied the group on a trip to the supermarket because we needed food for the evening meal. But little did I know that the supermarket excursion would take hours, and be, well, for the missionaries at least, so exhilarating. At the supermarket, the missionaries were deeply captivated by the world around them - food items on shelves, ingredients, and packaging. It was as though the world were in technicolour. And, as we drove back to the camp in the car, the missionaries continued to comment on the world unfolding beyond their window – the exquisite beauty of the setting sun, the patterned colours of parrots and how they compare to the parrots in Costa Rica. Would I call it a zest for life, or even joy?

In all the places I'd travelled, it was in a barren dusty field in Nicaragua that I found people who were, by most definitions, flourishing.

What, should we say, can we attribute to this sense of flourishing? The missionaries had purpose of course; a deep spirituality; social engagement; they were focussed on external happenings rather than thinking primarily about themselves; but there was one extra ingredient I noticed, and that was limited choices.

The problem that many of us face, and a habit that detracts from flourishing, is that we're rarely satisfied in the present and always seeking for something better. This trait is evolutionary. As biologist Daniel Nettle writes, we are programmed to seek out things that are best for us. To survive, or even better, to flourish, we must be "constantly scanning the horizon on the lookout for a better environment, a better social network, a better mode of behaviour." And there should always be "a little space of discontent open, just in case something hovers into view which is really special," he says. If we didn't behave like this, we wouldn't be very successful organisms. It could be argued, therefore, that our capacity for dissatisfaction is among our greatest gifts - a driving force that has enabled humanity to surpass nearly every other organism on the planet. Yet, this gap of yearning remains an ever-present aspect of our nature, and unless we recognise it as intrinsic to our being and learn to master it, it risks condemning us to a perpetual state of discontentment.

You often hear people say, "when this happens then I will flourish". Once I buy a house, or get a pay rise, or finish the renovations, then I will be happy. Or for some, it may extend to finding a partner, losing weight, having a child, stopping work, or finding meaningful work; once I find my passion, then, only

then, will I be happy. Happiness, in this context, is a place sometime, somewhere in the future. “Once this happens, then I will be happy.”

Ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus would have taken exception to this way of living. “Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not; remember that what you have was once among the things you only hoped for,” he wrote. Always pining for the ‘next thing’, thought Epicurus, will set you on a course of eternal dissatisfaction. Desiring what you do not have dilutes appreciation for what you do have. And even if you were able to secure all your desires, then it just puts you back at square one – desiring the very next thing. It’s called the ‘hedonic treadmill’ and it lurks in our subconscious, etched into the seeking part of our brains.

In an interesting study, economist Richard Easterlin at the University of Southern California asked a cross-section of the US public in 1978 what it meant to live the ‘good life’. “What do you want out of life?” he enquired. He handed them a card listing 24 big-ticket items, such as a car, a television, holidays abroad, a swimming pool and a vacation home. He asked the question: “When you think of the good life, the life you’d like to have, which of the items on this list, are part of that good life?” Respondents were then asked to tick off items on the list that they already owned.

The survey was then conducted on the same people 16 years later, in 1994, and what was most telling was that, while respondents indeed owned more items 16 years later (3.1 items in 1994 compared with 1.7 items in 1978), they also desired more items on the list (5.6 items were now required for the good life, as opposed to 4.4 items in 1978). In other words, over 16 years, the gap between what people had and what they so desperately desired remained steady, at two and a half items.

They were two and a half items short – eternally, so it appears. This finding suggests that perhaps this gap – this small margin of yearning, this nagging sense of inadequacy – remains no matter where you’re stationed in life. While few among us dream of adorning our living room wall with a Rembrandt etching, it becomes into a coveted acquisition for those with the means to obtain it. While the person earning an average salary dreams of buying a holiday home, the billionaire dreams of a public gallery that bears his name, complete with restaurant and hotel. So, it seems, no matter how hard we run in an effort to hurdle that elusive ‘gap’, we never actually close it. It’s just not in our DNA.

I think it’s important to acknowledge that we are naturally inclined to be eternally disappointed. It’s how we grow, we flourish. But we need to direct this natural tendency towards dissatisfaction towards activities and goals that are perpetually rejuvenating. For instance, creative people who paint or write novels or build businesses, for instance, are forever re-creating and pushing forward towards the next project. This perpetual cycle does not lead them to

disappointment, but on the contrary, they are renewed every time they embark on a new project. However, if we channel this 'seeking' tendency towards buying consumer goods, we have to realise that we will never be satiated. The next house, or car, or piece of jewellery will not be the last.

In conclusion, what insights have emerged from my decades-long inquiry into the concept of flourishing? The central tenet is this: true flourishing arises from active engagement with the external world. This involves a commitment to study, learning, meaningful interactions with others, and deliberate efforts toward realising one's aspirations. Flourishing is achieved through action, not merely through contemplation. A disposition of curiosity, attentiveness to the surrounding world, and an outward focus enables the discovery of a dynamic world replete with opportunities for growth and fulfillment.

Equally important is cultivating an awareness of what elicits joy, inspiration, and awe, for these elements serve as signposts guiding one toward a meaningful and fulfilling life. By intentionally pursuing the sources of one's intrinsic motivation, it becomes possible to generate the momentum necessary to actualise a deeply satisfying existence. This message is simple yet frequently overlooked: while action does not inherently guarantee happiness, happiness is unattainable in the absence of action.

Indeed, the importance of living in the present is at the heart of the thinking of ancient philosophers. Don't always look for what you don't have or hope for things to be different to what they are now. "Do every act of your life as though it were the very last act of your life," advises the Roman emperor and Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius. But how does one reconcile living in the present with the ongoing battle to 'become' – to project outwards towards some future point? The answer is not to 'project out', but, instead, to manifest that condition of becoming in the very present, by doing. The question then becomes not "How would I ideally like my life to pan out?" but, "How can I turn my present reality into what I dream?" This is not to push the future outwards, but to bring it into the present. In doing so, you take your dreams and move them into the living room, place them on the coffee table and say: "How do I take these dreams and release them into the present day?"

Aesthetic Consciousness and Quality of Life

Said Tawfik

Cairo University, Egypt

The primary task of philosophy lies in cultivating consciousness in all its manifestations —scientific, religious, political, historical, ethical, and aesthetic— or, more broadly, fostering an understanding of the overarching concepts that define our existence and shape our way of life. Undoubtedly, this consciousness remains cohesive and integrated, with each dimension reinforcing the others. However, it is regrettable that aesthetic consciousness, in particular, remains marginalized in our cultural life in the Arab world, as though it holds no significant role in the development of culture and civilization.

Let us begin with some self-evident premises: First, let us agree that no civilization can exist without art and culture in the broadest sense of the term. This has never been the case throughout human history. If civilization is tied to the quality and value of life, then such quality becomes impossible in the absence of art. This is because artistic creativity is a marker of a civilization reaching its pinnacle after fulfilling the essential needs of human life. Second, let us agree that the advancement of art is directly linked to the elevation of aesthetic consciousness. Here, we might ask: which creates the other? This is a complex question, open to many debates. However, I generally hold the view that awareness is what gives rise to the tangible in any field, including art. After all, art is ultimately the product of an evolution in awareness, an awareness that seeks to transcend basic human needs such as shelter, food, and security. This awareness expands to encompass culture in its broadest sense, as well as the currents of artistic and literary criticism. All of this, in the end, traces its roots to philosophy, the origin and source from which it flows. This awareness alone can transform our way of life, enabling us to rise far above the mere fulfillment of our physical or bodily needs—even beyond the material comfort afforded by science and technology. It enables us to live a life truly worthy of being lived, on the intellectual and spiritual levels that are humanity's ultimate purpose and perfection. Such awareness is of great importance because it expresses our vision of the world and, in turn, our capacity to change and improve it. Thus, we can understand the process of developing aesthetic con-

sciousness in relation to life as a dialectical process: natural beauty provides us with an initial sense of aesthetics, which then becomes a driving force for creative beauty in art and in the world we inhabit. This creative impulse calls forth aesthetic thought, which in turn deepens our understanding of art and its creative methods.

The origin of consciousness, in all its manifestations, is philosophy. It may even be said that aesthetic consciousness is not a luxury compared to other forms of consciousness; rather, it represents the pinnacle of consciousness, deeply rooted in thought and emotion. We can assert that aesthetic consciousness is a prerequisite for the interpretation of art and the proper understanding and appreciation of artistic works. This is because the process of interpretation inherently involves –or is founded upon– a prior consciousness of the subject being interpreted. A deficiency in consciousness of the subject of understanding and interpretation hinders, from the outset, the possibility of achieving meaningful understanding and interpretation.

It is equally important to note that the cultivation of aesthetic consciousness regarding the phenomena of art and beauty not only deepens our perception of art and enhances our reception of it through the process of aesthetic appreciation, but it also improves our perception of the environment in which we live. This, in turn, inspires us to create environments that are imbued with aesthetic sensibilities. Fortunately, philosophy in our contemporary era –and for many decades now– has demonstrated a growing interest in this practical dimension of art, beauty, and related fields. In doing so, philosophy appears to be returning to its original wellsprings.

This is the essence of the vision I present here, which I will elaborate upon in detail. Let us begin first with the foundational concepts we employ:

Consciousness: This refers to the self’s perception of any phenomenon in the world with the aim of understanding its essence, as Husserl taught us through the notion of “intentionality,” which he brought to the core of contemporary philosophy. This consciousness possesses the power to transform the world through understanding, as Hegel demonstrated when he argued that the world does not change on its own but is changed by consciousness.

Aesthetic Consciousness: This is a concept whose scope has expanded in contemporary thought to encompass not only consciousness of art and its phenomena but also awareness of natural beauty and the aesthetics of natural and constructed environments. Furthermore, it includes our outlook on life and the way we approach things in an aesthetic manner.

The Quality of Life: This is an ancient concept that has also been referred to as “the good or virtuous life.” It is, however, an extremely broad concept that encompasses the physical aspects related to well-being, psychological and social satisfaction, as well as the spiritual, cultural, and aesthetic values that

occupy the highest rank in the hierarchy of quality-of-life requirements. Due to its expansive nature, this concept has become widely discussed in social, psychological, and philosophical studies.

Now, let us delve into the details by asking first: what are the conditions for realizing aesthetic consciousness, which can ultimately play a significant role in achieving the quality of life?

Conditions for aesthetic consciousness (What Does Aesthetic Consciousness Require)

Aesthetic Consciousness and Our Relationship with Art

Art is one of the primary realms where beauty manifests itself, often referred to as “the aesthetic.” Reflecting on our contemporary cultural reality reveals that *one of the most prominent symptoms of its crisis lies in the state of our aesthetic consciousness –particularly, in our attitude toward art, as evidenced by how we understand and interpret artistic creativity and its role in our lives.* I state this with the awareness that the root cause of the ailment in our cultural reality is the lack of consciousness regarding foundational concepts. At times, this deficiency manifests in the grotesque form of conceptual confusion. Indeed, the absence of concepts is less harmful than their presence in a distorted or muddled state. One example of this confusion is the conflation of science and religion, wherein the logic of scientific discourse becomes entangled with that of religious discourse. This leads to a fundamental misunderstanding of science as a worldly pursuit and the evaluative perspective of science, which may belong to the domain of religion. Such confusion has given rise to phenomena like the so-called “Islamization of science,” which has burdened us for years. Another example is the conflation of artistic and aesthetic values with moral values (Tawfik, 2022a, pp. 62–63), resulting in the misinterpretation of art as being synonymous with ethics. This conflation has had serious consequences for our relationship with a world that is rapidly evolving. In developed societies, such issues are rarely encountered. There, people have a clear understanding of art and creativity, enjoy engaging with them, and benefit from their presence, while leaving artists to create and interpreters to interpret. Meanwhile, we remain consumed by debates over fundamental concepts—concepts that humanity has long resolved and for which clear boundaries have been established.

We can assert that aesthetic consciousness is a prerequisite for interpreting art, understanding artistic works, and appreciating them. The process of interpretation inherently involves –or is based on– prior awareness of the subject being interpreted. However, it is important to note that this prior awareness does not mean that the interpreter imposes their own preconceived notions on the subject or approaches an artwork or literary text with pre-existing, ready-

made ideas to then apply to it. Rather, the intended meaning here is quite the opposite: the absence of prior awareness about what is being examined and questioned obstructs the very possibility of inquiry and, consequently, interpretation itself. Understanding, in its essence, is a form of questioning that continuously generates new questions. It is impossible for a person to understand a subject and undertake its interpretation unless that subject has previously provoked questions in their mind—capturing their attention and arousing their concern and interest. Without this, there can be no genuine understanding capable of interpreting the subject; in fact, it could even be said that there will be no empathetic engagement with it. Empathy here refers to the ability to approach the subject with a sense of familiarity and prior experience on the part of the interpreter, whether they are a critic or an audience member. It is likely that a person lacking this condition will not only fail to empathize with the subject but will also adopt a hostile stance toward it. Hence, it is often said that “people are enemies of what they do not understand.”

Beauty Is Not a Relative Matter

When we speak of the “conditions” for aesthetic reception, this inherently challenges the simplistic claim often repeated by the general public: “There is no disputing taste.” This statement implies that taste or aesthetic preference is relative and thus beyond debate. According to this view, our preference for specific works of art is akin to preferring certain colors or cars, with no objective standard to assert that one taste is superior to another. This is the epitome of subjective relativism in its most reductive form. *The error here lies in conflating the logic of taste with the logic of value.*

Value—any value—entails the appreciation of something, whether it is an object, behavior, or experience, which elicits our admiration and approval. A commonly held notion among the general public is that beauty, and therefore aesthetic values, are entirely relative and variable, differing across time and place. This variation seems self-evident to most people, and they often cite the shifting standards of human beauty as proof. For instance, in early history, the standard of female beauty emphasized a fuller body, particularly the breasts and hips. There exist ancient statues, predating the established civilizations, which lack what we might today consider “aesthetic” (or fine art by modern standards). Nonetheless, they remain testament to the aesthetic preferences of primitive humans. These preferences were shaped by utilitarian necessities rather than pure aesthetic considerations. This perception persisted among ancient Arabs and is still evident in some circles in our modern era. It was also present in Europe as recently as two centuries ago.

The confusion here lies in the assumption that while aesthetic taste may indeed be relative, this does not imply that beauty itself is relative. Beauty pertains to aesthetic value, which is rooted in objective, universal qualities

inherent in the object we describe as beautiful. This distinction highlights the maturity of aesthetic consciousness, which has evolved throughout human history and understanding. Aesthetic consciousness of the value of art always surpasses the artistic taste shaped by the specific conditions of an era—its ideological, doctrinal, or religious stances, as well as other transient and relative circumstances. Although art is born within history, it transcends the historical context in which civilizations rise and fall. Thus, something enduring remains in art despite the changing circumstances and events that shape human values, including aesthetic ones, during a particular time. This explains why great works of art, though they may fade into obscurity during certain periods, are often revived and regain their prominence in subsequent eras. It is the same phenomenon that puzzled Karl Marx, who associated art with political ideology. Marx expressed amazement at how the works of ancient Greeks continue to inspire awe and admiration despite the stark differences in political, social, cultural, and religious conditions between their time and ours. This very observation demonstrates that Marx possessed a greater depth of awareness and openness than many of his doctrinaire Marxist successors, who rigidly tied the value of art to specific ideological, political, or economic positions in contemporary thought.

In reality, there are numerous other examples that highlight the importance of distinguishing between aesthetic value and the perception of beauty as something that pleases or delights us in art and nature. Ordinary people often believe that artistic and aesthetic values must express what is delightful and pleasing, as is often the case with natural beauty in the real world. This includes, for example, the depiction of a beautiful face in a portrait, a scenic natural landscape, or the use of literature to narrate entertaining, beautiful stories drawn from life. The error in this perception lies in conflating the logic of aesthetic value in art with the logic of natural and realistic beauty, treating them as one and the same. This view fails to understand that while natural beauty can serve as a subject for aesthetic representation in art, it is not synonymous with aesthetic value. To clarify, subjects that are considered ugly in reality—or at least appear repellent, such as disfigured faces, tragedies, pain, death, and other unpleasant aspects of life—can be portrayed or expressed by an artist or writer. In such cases, what delights and captivates us is not these subjects themselves but the artist's or writer's ability to depict and express them through the language of art. In this sense, modern aesthetics has explored extensively the concept of "the aesthetics of the ugly," which involves the artistic and aesthetic representation of subjects that may seem ugly or unappealing in life and reality (Tawfik, 2022a, pp. 80–88).

This underscores the significance of focusing on the process of aesthetic reception and its conditions, as this awareness is intrinsically linked to artistic education and cultural development. Through aesthetic consciousness, we

can better understand ourselves and human nature, as well as discover and appreciate the beauty of nature through the artist's perspective. Ultimately, this contributes to achieving a higher quality of life.

The Connection Between Art, Quality of Life, and Civilizational Progress

Artistic and aesthetic trends in today's world strive to restore the value of art by linking artistic and aesthetic values to the social context in which people live. This approach enables individuals to see forms of beauty in artistic works as expressions of their lives, enriching their lifestyles and enhancing their environments. For instance, architecture that meets societal and functional needs also aligns aesthetically and artistically with people's ways of life and cultural heritage, whether in residential buildings, schools, or places of worship. It is no surprise that these considerations have become central criteria for prestigious awards in architectural design. These standards, however, do not undermine the aesthetic criterion, which must remain the primary measure of the value of any artistic work. Nevertheless, even this aesthetic standard loses its significance if the substance of aesthetic expression is not also connected to people's lives, their ways of living, and their identity.

We can assert that this formalist tendency also contributed to the popularization of the notion of "art for art's sake", which implies that when contemplating art, we should exclude all references to nature or the realities of life and limit ourselves to reflecting solely on the artwork itself. In truth, such proclamations hastened a state of artistic bankruptcy—a condition foreseen by Hegel when he spoke of the "death of art." By this, Hegel did not mean the end of art or its disappearance in the future but rather that art had ceased to fulfill its true purpose of expressing the sacred, the sublime, and everything related to human and religious life. Art, in this context, has become a mere expression of the artist's subjective state rather than a representation of the human world. While artistic beauty is indeed not synonymous with natural beauty, excluding nature and human life from the artist's representation inevitably leads to the impoverishment of art. Nature—and by extension, human life—must always remain present in art, though not necessarily in their direct forms, but rather through symbolic representations, which are the language of art itself.

This is why Kelly Comfort emphasizes the need to reconsider the validity of the claim of "art for art's sake" (*l'art pour l'art*), which is tied to the notions of pure art and autonomous art. The critical question concerns the relevance and truth of this claim regarding humanity's place and role in life and existence (Comfort, 2008, p. 1ff). This perspective led to the concept of the "de-humanization of art," which essentially isolated art from what is human, detaching it from life and rendering it morally, socially, and politically neutral. In response, critics introduced the concept of "re-humanization of art," which

seeks to reconnect art with life and with the human experience through creative expression. This approach aims to restore art's engagement with humanity and its meaningful participation in the broader context of human existence.

Art is not for art's sake, as the elite might claim, but rather for life. Art is intrinsically connected to truth, to the lives of people, and to their ways of living. It possesses the power to transcend reality and, consequently, the ability to change the world. Without art, what would we know about life and ourselves? What would we understand about the self, the other, freedom, suffering, love, or social values if not through art, including literature?

The notion of "art for art's sake" reflects the crisis of aesthetic consciousness throughout the modern era, which is itself part of the broader crisis of consciousness characterizing this period. It can thus be said that contemporary human consciousness has awakened to its true crisis: the separation of human consciousness (or the human spirit) from its lived world, in the name of science and scientism—or more precisely, a "pseudo-scientific mindset"—that seeks to study humanity in isolation from its world. This danger was insightfully identified and warned against by the great philosopher Edmund Husserl in his seminal work *The Crisis of European Sciences*.

Similarly, this helps us understand Hans-Georg Gadamer's critique of the concept of aesthetic consciousness as it was established in the modern era, particularly since Kant. Gadamer argued that this concept led to the isolation of aesthetic consciousness within the realm of the aesthetic (understood as beauty in art) and the reduction of this aesthetic or artistic beauty to the notion of formal beauty. This, in turn, resulted in distinguishing and isolating the concept of beauty from our lived world and from the entirety of human life, a phenomenon Gadamer terms "aesthetic differentiation" (Gadamer, 1997/2019, p. 34ff).

Does this explain our nostalgia for the art of the past and the reverence for the art of the ancients? While we often feel a longing for the art of bygone eras—including the art of the West—we also observe that art in the West continues to evolve to some extent in various forms (though perhaps not with the same grandeur and unique essence of its golden age). In contrast, art in the Arab world has largely declined, except for rare and exceptional individual efforts here and there, which do not constitute a widespread phenomenon. I have elaborated on this issue in one of my articles titled "The Decline of Arab Art." This observation might prompt us to ask: Are shifts in the state of art connected to the civilizational conditions of nations? This seems to be an almost self-evident truth. Indeed, we now clearly see that the transformations occurring in our contemporary world are paralleled by changes in the realm of art. This may also explain why Eastern art, particularly from Asia, is now gaining global prominence—whether in drama or cinema, as these are among the most accessible and widely spread forms of art in our digital age. A case

in point is the growing recognition of Asian cinema at international awards; for example, Asian films have been competing for Oscars for years, with one film, “Everything Everywhere All at Once,” winning seven awards just a few years ago. In contrast, Arab films rarely even qualify for nomination, let alone compete for such accolades.

The ancient Egyptians understood that existential question and overcame their sense of finitude through their absolute belief in immortality—that life is but a passage to another eternal life. This belief drove them to celebrate life itself through their works and achievements, which they saw as intercessors for their place in the afterlife. They also revered the bounties of nature as gifts bestowed upon them from this transcendent, otherworldly realm. Reflecting on all this, I pondered and said to myself: This is the essence of faith—within it lies salvation. It is the source from which our actions of goodness, morality, and creativity in this life flow. And within these deeds resides a fragment of immortality, a way to confront our own finitude.

Aesthetic Consciousness and the Environment

Some aspects of environmental beauty belong to natural beauty, found in what we call natural environments. Other aspects, however, belong to constructed environments, which are created by human hands. The study of this type of beauty falls under the field of Environmental Aesthetics, a relatively new discipline that has only crystallized in terms of its subject matter and research methodologies over the past few decades. It has since gained significant attention and has become a field of study with countless contributions in contemporary philosophical discourse. This raises a key question: What is the connection between this new field and traditional aesthetics as it was established in the modern era, focusing on the study of the aesthetic or the beautiful in art—essentially, the aesthetics of the arts? Alternatively, how can we consider this new discipline a form of aesthetics or aesthetic inquiry?

The discipline of Environmental Aesthetics was initially excluded from environmental studies for several reasons or misguided justifications. One such claim was that the environment does not inherently possess an aesthetic dimension, and therefore cannot be a subject of aesthetic experience. This justification is flawed because it dismisses the very possibility of experiencing the environment, reducing it solely to an object of scientific inquiry. According to Arnold Berleant, the pursuit of understanding environmental aesthetic experience may seem alien to conventional environmental studies. This is because the environment is typically considered from a scientific or quasi-scientific perspective, treated as a research subject that can be defined and studied through branches of natural sciences, such as physical geography, climatology, and ecology. This approach results in an objective study of the environment, treating it as an entity independent of human subjectivity

(Berleant, 2014, p. 65). Berleant emphasizes the phenomenological approach, which recognizes the role of the subject as a condition for understanding the object of experience. He critiques the stance of European sciences, or what Husserl called their “crisis,” for isolating the object from the subject’s experience. This reductionist view turned even human subjects into natural objects, stripping them of their experiential and subjective dimensions. Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, advocated for a science that describes experiences or phenomena as they appear in consciousness.

One of the common misconceptions is limiting the view of environmental issues to their connection with ethics and the optimal way of preserving the environment for the health and well-being of humans. This reduction confines the philosophical perspective on the environment to “Environmental Ethics,” viewing environmental experience as an ethical one, concerned with methods of interacting with and preserving the environment, among other things. However, this intellectual error has led to the delayed recognition of the environmental subject as an aesthetic issue. Consequently, it becomes possible to view the experience related to it as an aesthetic experience, albeit distinct from the experience of art. This constitutes the core focus of “Environmental Aesthetics.”

The natural aesthetic subject that surrounds our world and environment has long been considered marginal within aesthetics, dismissed as “non-aesthetic” and therefore not studied for its own sake as a subject of aesthetic contemplation. Instead, it was examined primarily to distinguish it from aesthetic subjects. However, beginning in the second half of the 20th century, environmental aesthetics began to gain recognition, with the beauty of environmental landscapes being reconsidered and gradually taking center stage in the field of environmental aesthetics. It would not be an overstatement to say that writings in environmental aesthetics –alongside studies in applied philosophy in general– now constitute a significant portion of contemporary philosophical research.

Environmental Beauty Beyond Natural Beauty

There is no doubt that the aesthetics of natural landscapes encompass the natural environment in all its diversity: the beauty of the wilderness, the scent of fields, and the treasures of nature, including seas, beaches, rivers, streams, forests, mountains, rocks, wildlife, and natural parks. All these are part of nature’s abundant creations, and they must be preserved and engaged with as an essential and vital component of our lived world. Preserving these natural wonders does not merely mean avoiding encroachment on them by reducing their expanse due to the relentless advance of industrialized societies that continuously diminish their presence. It also means refraining from distorting what remains of them by unjustly altering their inherent nature—such as

inserting cement blocks amidst pristine landscapes or erecting towering structures that overshadow and fence off the scenery, thereby spoiling the view and alienating us from it. Perhaps for this reason, contemporary humanity has begun to realize the harm it has inflicted upon itself by isolating itself from nature. This realization has also driven efforts to establish nature reserves on land and at sea, which are now considered markers of the ethical conduct of civilized societies. Thus, it can be said that the aesthetics of natural landscapes themselves inspire us to adopt a moral stance toward nature.

However, natural beauty is not the only subject of environmental aesthetics; the beauty of constructed environments also plays a crucial role. This includes all the spaces we engage with directly in our daily lives, such as our workplaces, homes, and the various places we traverse on our way to work or while running errands. Here, the importance of architecture and urban planning comes to the forefront. These fields must prioritize connecting architecture to the natural world, emphasizing the integration of interior and exterior spaces. In advanced societies, even interior design and home decor have come to recognize the necessity of avoiding homes becoming prisons or confining spaces where individuals are trapped between walls. For instance, it is unreasonable to place a desk—where a person sits to articulate ideas or develop concepts—facing a blank wall, which obstructs the connection with the expansive natural world, even in its simplest forms or fleeting glimpses. Such an arrangement stifles one's vision, preventing the imagination from opening up to the boundless external world.

Thus, it can be said that environmental aesthetics emerged originally as a response to reaffirm the value of natural beauty, which had been marginalized by traditional aesthetics. As noted by Allen Carlson and others, the first significant step in the development of environmental aesthetics was Ronald Hepburn's influential article, "Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty," published in 1967. Hepburn demonstrated that 20th-century aesthetics had largely confined itself to the philosophy of art and argued that aesthetic inquiry could extend beyond the realm of art (Carlson, 2014, pp. 13–14). This marked the beginning of environmental aesthetics as a field of knowledge, meaning that its history spans just over half a century. Despite its relatively short lifespan, the field has undergone significant developments, particularly over the past three decades. Its scope has expanded to include not only natural environments but also human-constructed environments. Moreover, this interdisciplinary field has grown further to encompass both the public and private spheres of daily life, giving rise to what is now known as "everyday aesthetics." On this topic, Carlson remarks: "...This development in environmental aesthetics has involved a further broadening of its focus, extending beyond natural and human environments to include all the objects, activities, and events that inhabit our surroundings. This area of inquiry is

aptly termed ‘everyday aesthetics,’ and it studies the aesthetic appreciation of the world we live in on a day-to-day basis” (Carlson, 2014, pp. 21).

Thus, we can speak of an aesthetic experience that exists beyond the traditional concept of “the aesthetic,” specifically beyond the realm of “the beautiful in art.” Aesthetic experience extends beyond art to encompass our engagement with nature and the environment. While our experience of art may teach us something about how to perceive environmental and natural beauty, this latter form of beauty possesses its own unique qualities. From it, we can draw inspiration and cultivate our primary sensitivities to light, shadow, composition, texture, fragrance, and other elements of aesthetic experience.

The subject of aesthetic appreciation in this context is the environment itself—the objects and surroundings that envelop us. In this experience, we are immersed in the subject; as we move through it, our relationship with it changes, and it engages all our senses. Carlson observes: “When we exist within or move through this subject, we see, hear, feel, smell, and perhaps even taste it physically. In short, the experience of appreciating the environmental subject is one of intimacy and immersion” (Carlson, 2000, p. xii).

There is no doubt that the experience of a natural landscape possesses distinct aesthetic qualities that set it apart. Perhaps the most defining characteristic of this experience, as highlighted by Jason Boaz Simus in his doctoral dissertation, is the nature of the space, which appears to us as an open horizon rather than a bounded or framed area, as is the case with a painting or the enclosed boundaries of an artificial garden. This open horizon stimulates our imagination, inviting us to interact with the allure of the landscape through lived experiences. These might include activities such as strolling through its pathways and corridors, camping, kayaking, skiing, or sailing, etc (Boas, 2009, p. 46).

Aesthetic Consciousness and Harmonious Living

By harmonious living, I mean a life lived in alignment and familiarity with the world. Modern aesthetic consciousness has not laid the foundation for this state of harmony because it confined itself to the notion of formal beauty, as previously mentioned. This limitation led to its isolation from the social, religious, and mythical world of human beings. This was not the case with art in ancient times, where the sacred was intimately connected to beauty. The sacred was expressed through various forms of art: religious dance in temples, poetry such as the Upanishads, and visual art, as seen in Christian iconography, for example. Modern aesthetic consciousness, however, has created a rupture between the beautiful and the sacred. This is what Hans-Georg Gadamer refers to as alienated consciousness. In this alienated state, art fails to resonate deeply with people’s souls, and instead fosters hostility toward

art and beauty due to a lack of psychological balance and harmony with the world. The separation of art from religion, for instance, can lead to disastrous consequences. This explains events such as the iconoclastic movements in Europe, as well as the destruction of religious statues by groups like the Taliban and ISIS in Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq.

Aesthetic consciousness is inherently tied to balance in both art and the human psyche, reflecting how a sense of harmony and aesthetic equilibrium in art and nature mirrors the state of the human soul. Consequently, it can be said that those who lack aesthetic consciousness and sensitivity are unlikely to possess a balanced and harmonious psyche. This idea was noted by Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, known as “Proof of Islam” (*Hujjat al-Islām*), in the second volume of his seminal work *Ihya Ulum al-Din* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences), specifically in his discussion on the ethics of listening (*Adab al-Samaʿ*). Al-Ghazali observed the profound impact of sound on the heart, stating that: “The effect of rhythmic sounds on the heart is undeniable. Anyone who is not moved by melodious tones is deficient, lacking balance, far from spirituality, and coarse in nature. Rhythmic tones stir the heart and even the body’s movements. It has been said: ‘He who is not delighted by the spring and its flowers, nor by the lute and its strings, suffers from a corrupt temperament for which there is no cure’” (Al-Ghazali, 1957, p. 266).

The characteristic of balance has always been one of the fundamental traits distinguishing all forms of art and aesthetic expression. Its roots are deeply embedded in the context of human thought across various civilizations. For instance, consider the connection between this characteristic, as an aesthetic criterion in art, and the philosophical thought of the ancients, particularly the ancient Greeks. In reality, the aesthetic criterion of balance in art was closely tied to the Greek philosophical understanding of balance in the universe and nature, as well as in ethics and human behavior.

Let us first reflect on the idea of balance as expressed by the ancients in their contemplation of the cosmos, a subject that preoccupied them from the time of Thales, the first philosopher of ancient Greece, who was captivated by observing the universe, nature, and the search for the origin of things. This same concern was shared by the philosophers who followed him, particularly the natural philosophers. Pythagoras, for instance, perceived balance in the universe through its mathematically regulated motion, aligned with the cycles of planets, days, months, and years. Since music achieves balance and harmony through the mathematical ratios of the musical scale, he believed that the universe itself is composed of numbers and sound. He even imagined that the motion of the celestial bodies produced music—though we cannot hear it! In fact, this Pythagorean theory of the mathematical foundation of music is not far removed from modern theories of music, which consider it a branch of mathematical physics. The differences between musical instruments, and

thus the sounds they produce, are explained by variations in sound waves and frequencies. From this perspective, music can be understood as mathematics expressed in ratios of sound frequencies flowing through time—in other words, mathematics in motion. Even when philosophy, through Socrates, shifted its focus to the study of human beings, particularly human behavior and ethics, this shift did not alter the emphasis on balance and harmony. Aristotle, for example, viewed virtue as a mean between two extremes: courage, for instance, lies between recklessness and cowardice; generosity is the mean between stinginess and extravagance, and so on. This notion of balance in the universe and ethics was reflected in the ancients' reflections on art and beauty, as well as in the civilizations and cultures that succeeded them. This can be further clarified in the following lines.

We can say that the idea of balance, understood as proportion and harmony, originated in its distant past through contemplation of the cosmos and nature. The beauty we observe in the countless forms of natural beauty—whether in humans, animals, birds, or other phenomena—is based on symmetry in composition, shape, and color between the right and left sides (assuming a central line dividing the two). This symmetry is most evident when we consider the beauty of the human face, the wings of a butterfly, the leaves of trees, or the intricate color patterns on the skin of many fish. This natural origin is the distant foundation from which artists across the ages derived the principle of symmetry, which creates visual equilibrium through the balanced arrangement of elements, masses, and colors. This concept can be further illustrated with examples from the arts. In architecture, the concept of balance emerged initially through the property of symmetry, where parts of a structure mirror one another. Every element—whether in size, height, length, width, or even ornamentation and architectural embellishments—is equivalent or repeated on opposing sides, creating a sense of harmony. This symmetry is clearly evident in the construction of renowned cathedrals around the world.



The symmetry in Notre-Dame Cathedral

Architecture remains the original art form in which symmetry was distinctly manifested, that is, in a tangible manner. This origin is deeply rooted in ancient civilizations, particularly in ancient Egyptian civilization. This is evident in the architecture of the ancient Egyptians, as well as in their sculpture, painting, and wall carvings. Thus, it can be said that this symmetry also manifests in various arts as an embodiment of harmony among the parts of a work of art: every part corresponds to another, as if in response or repetition. For instance, this can be observed in the repetition of rhymes or rhythm in poetry, in the harmonious proportions of calligraphy, and in music through the return of a melody to its initial resolution, and so on. The principle of symmetry continued to feature in the arts of both the medieval and modern eras. This is clearly noticeable in Gothic architecture, which emerged in Europe in the mid-12th century under the influence of Arab architecture. Here, symmetry is evident in elements such as towers, turrets, and other architectural features. Indeed, Islamic architecture did not strictly adhere to the principle of symmetry in structural design, as we do not always find consistent symmetry between minarets and domes. Often, a structure might consist of a single minaret and a single dome. Nevertheless, this symmetry is strongly present in the infinite repetition of geometric shapes in ornaments, embellishments, and carvings.

It is crucial to note that symmetry has not always been a definitive standard for art and beauty. In contemporary arts, symmetry is no longer the sole form expressing the idea of balance. Balance can also be achieved through asymmetry, which involves contrasts between different parts of a work of art. Examples include the juxtaposition of two groups in dance, differentiated by movement, performance, and costume, or the interplay of melodies in orches-

tral music, where seemingly dissonant sounds maintain an underlying balance. Thus, it can be said that the principle of balance has replaced symmetry as a broader concept, encompassing both symmetry and asymmetry. Balance has become a more general and versatile standard for artistic expression. It might also be argued that contemporary art, particularly that associated with postmodernism, has liberated itself from all such principles. The postmodern approach in thought and art is characterized by fluidity, allowing for the coexistence of everything and anything in juxtaposition. This state permits contradictions to exist simultaneously, embodying the well-known principle that “everything goes.”

Thus, it is accurate to state that contemporary postmodern art does not adhere to traditional principles such as symmetry and harmony. However, it is not correct to say that such art can entirely disregard the principle of balance. It is inconceivable for any art form to possess aesthetic value while lacking balance, even if it deliberately seeks to break the principles of harmony and symmetry within the components of the artwork. This applies even to contemporary architectural achievements, which often intentionally disrupt these traditional principles.

One of the more extreme movements in postmodern architecture is known as “deconstructivist architecture,” which involves breaking architectural structures into jagged, skewed, and disjointed components. This style is also referred to as “fractured architecture.” However, I do not believe that this type of architecture—which flourished during the last quarter of the 20th century—can completely disregard the principle of balance without negatively impacting the process of aesthetic reception. When this principle is broken, the viewer may lose the sense of comfort typically associated with observing an architectural structure—not merely as a momentary visual experience, but as something designed for inhabitation or long-term use.

However, our understanding of the principle of balance should not be confined solely to creativity in art and aesthetics. While it is indeed rooted in ethics, as noted by the ancient Greeks, it extends to encompass all aspects of human behavior, serving as a supreme value. Even those creators whose personal lives lack a sense of balance or stability often exhibit control and mastery over their creative work, whether it be a piece of art, a literary text, or a philosophical work. Only when their psychological imbalance escalates to the level of severe disorder or mental breakdown—such as in the case of Nietzsche, for example—do they cease to create or produce works of diminished quality.

The principle of balance, which manifests in art, creativity, and ethical behavior, also finds expression in wise politics. This principle underpins the policies of certain nations that choose to distance themselves from conflicts that drain their resources, focusing instead on internal development. This was

evident in the cases of Japan and China, which turned inward after World War II, surprising the world with their emergence as major global powers, standing alongside other great nations. Similarly, this principle is evident in the balanced policies of certain European countries, such as Austria and Switzerland.

It might be argued that creativity is always associated with breaking away from the conventional, and thus stands in opposition to the state of balance or equilibrium that we commend. However, this perspective overlooks the fact that breaking away from convention has no intrinsic connection to the concept of balance or equilibrium being discussed. Breaking conventions may involve violating traditional artistic rules, such as the rules of harmony in music, the principles of composition in prose and poetry (like meters and rhyme schemes), or the dominant themes in various arts. Yet, artistic creativity cannot violate the principle of balance itself. Without this principle, we would be faced with art devoid of meaning, a fragmented assemblage of artistic elements and media that fails to form a coherent whole or convey a recognizable image or idea. The importance of the principle of balance stems from an innate human inclination tied to the nature of existence and the universe itself.

Conclusion

The appreciation of the value of beauty and its manifestations depends on aesthetic consciousness, which in turn relies on artistic and aesthetic culture—namely, the philosophy of aesthetics. This realization occurs when civilizations reach the pinnacle of their brilliance. Ultimately, art possesses the power to transcend reality through imagination, thereby holding the potential to transform both the world and human life.

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From the Quest for Meaning for Life to *Mathesis*

The existential and the epistemic role of philosophy in a complex world

Fausto Fraisopi

Aix-Marseille University, France

On the website of the conference one can read, I quote:

“What is Philosophy? Philosophy revolves around fundamental questions. These questions examine who we are; as individuals and as part of a larger community. They are the framework on which humans understand their purpose and the logic on which they interact with the world around them. Furthermore, philosophy perpetuates the importance of coexistence despite differences. In addition to investigating what beauty and aesthetics are, considering that they are both values and concept common to all peoples.”

And, just scrolling down to the conference objectives, one can find:

“Supporting multidimensional philosophical dialogues to all different segments of society”.

Now, as it happens, the project I have been carrying on since 2001, even before 9/11, and which continues to this day, i.e. my speculative approach to knowledge, is based on the fundamental questions (but in an other, stranger, way) precisely in order to take into account the multidimensionality of our complex world (Fraisopi, 2016; Fraisopi, 2012). In more detail, I have struggled to develop (systematically organised) forms of knowledge [*mathesis*] from the ‘equivocal’, ‘oblique’ nature of fundamental questions such as:

1. “What/who am I?” as an essentially pre-philosophical question, as existential search for meaning par excellence.
2. “What is philosophy?” as a meta-theoretical question.
3. “τί τὸ ὄν”; [roughly translated as “what is being?”] as question about the meaning of the whole declined in the ontological way.
4. “What is (the) real?”, as the metaphysical question par excellence, but this time also re-entered from the open horizon and the neutral meta-ontological perspective.

By taking into consideration each of the four fundamental requests/questions we can sketch, define new forms of knowledge, *matheseis*, that give us access to the complexity of our world as it is experienced and scientifically defined: Briefly presented, through their assumption and the analysis of their inner dynamics, each of these questions leads to a situation which, by its development and exploration, opens up a new dimension of knowledge (Fraiosopi, 2024). The aim of this new look at our questioning, and more specifically at our situation as beings in search for meaning, was to grasp the complex and multidimensional nature of our world today. So, let us introduce to such open-sea exploration.

Questioning and reflecting on the quality of life implies that a question is immediately posed, where such a question is not intended to appear merely hedonistic. The question is: ‘can the qualitatively good life of the individual be conceived independently of the life of the *polis*, of the State’. The answer that Plato, the founding father of the West, gives us is clearly negative. If,

- on the one hand, the good life of the individual is nothing, an evanescent and extremely weak subsistence without the ‘good life’ of the society in which he lives, and operates,
- on the other hand, the ‘good life’ of society cannot exempt itself from a transcendence with respect to the unconscious immanence of ease, of luxury: this transcendence can be only token in charge from philosophical thinking.

This emerges where Socrates, in the second book of the Republic, presents - somewhat ironically, somewhat polemically - the genesis and the affluent life of the plutocratic city. Glaucon’s objection is not long in coming: ‘Socrates’ do Glaucon object “suppose you were putting together a city of pigs: would the fodder you’d provide for them be any different from this?” (Plato, *Rep.*, 56d5-e1). However, it seems that, nowadays, that founding idea of philosophy - which already anticipates the Aristotelian concept of metaphysics - no longer has any reason to exist. Indeed, such an idea is threatened from many sides. From external threats like the new and old obscurantist tyrannies, or like the sirens of artificial intelligence, the antipodes of what we might call discernment, understanding. As Sir Roger Penrose says: “Understanding is, after all, what science is all about - and science is a great deal more than mindless computation” (Penrose, 2002). But there are also endogenous threats to philosophical, speculative thinking itself:

- on the one hand, there is the temptation to make philosophical thinking an activity of existential consolation, all geared towards the discourse of origin, or the apologia of the everyday - an everyday that is clearly very comfortable and protected from the violence of the world.
- on the other is the temptation of a highly technical philosophical thinking,

the so called Carnap's conceptual engineering, in which the existential is dissolved for the benefit of a 'logical' construction of the world which, as we shall see, is itself logically and conceptually anachronistic.

The second question that therefore confronts a thinking oriented to the *protè epistème*, to a first radical knowledge, is the following: how is it possible, today, in the complexity of the global world, to articulate the existential and epistemic character of a radical thinking that can structure the 'good life' of the cosmopolis in which we live? The old recipes, especially if repeated on the basis of a feeling of cultural supremacy that no longer has any reason to exist, prove to be unsuitable, sometimes nostalgic. We must invent a path, which in turn is also *nòstos* (return) to the original founding idea of philosophical thinking. This path begins, as in the Homeric epic, with a man looking at the horizon: "Then he sat down on the shore of the sea" (Homer, *Odyssey*, VI, 236). This situation could perhaps be called an *Ur-èthos*, an original and constitutive situation.

But first of all what is "èthos" according to Greek culture?

"Originally, ethos meant 'the pasture', that is, the area within which a living creature gets its food and in which it stays with satisfaction, but then also the permanent area of residence in general, the seat of a community. Here, èthos refers to the position that a person takes in their own being, the location that they take up and in which they settle, so that they relate to themselves and their world in a human way" (Honnefelder, 2016).

We define consequently *Ur-èthos*, the primordial èthos, as, so to speak, the pure situation that anticipates and founds every taking of place of existence. It's an original subsistence that takes the form of a question, an irresponsible [unanswerable] question, one of those fundamental (or mortal) questions that analytic philosophical engineering would like to marginalise as superfluous. This question sounds: What/who I'm?

By asking the question, in its dual nature (addressed to the individual, to the "who", and to a 'what' that is supposed to ideally characterise him), we remain in the impossibility to answer. We remain in a tension, in a field of forces governing our quest of meaning. But it is precisely in the impossibility of answering the question that the questioner accesses an experience, an originary phenomenon, *Ur-phänomen* (to use a term from Johan Wolfgang Goethe's Theory of Colours). In opening himself to all possible answers, or to all experiences that may contribute to the answer to this search for meaning of existence, the questioner experiences what he really is. By persisting in the questioning and experiencing (the dynamic) of the question, he cannot but reveal himself to himself as an horizon. 'I am an horizon: I do not have a horizon, as if I could be and live by ascribing a horizon, an exterior, to a core. Such an interior, a spiritual cocoon that would house a sacred space is

dissolved. When everyone experiences the demand and unity of the absolutely neutral gaze that holds his/her life together, he cannot but say: 'I am only a horizon', 'I am a horizon', 'Openness is my being'. There is no interiority in the sense of a place protected from the externality of manifestation and its essentially dissipative nature, into which one can pretend to retreat in search of a whispered truth. This protected place erupts whenever the individual, who asks, experiences the indissoluble and constitutive link that holds together the 'whereabouts'

- his/her situation, which does not stop at his/her skin but constitutes his/her pulpit (*Leib* in German) -
- and the horizon of life on which the meaning of the request itself is fixed.

That could be similar to what Deleuze claims about each of us...but in more maritime way:

'In each of us there is a kind of asceticism, a part directed against ourselves. We are deserts, but populated by tribes, fauna and flora (...) And all these tribes, all these crowds, do not prevent the desert, which is our very asceticism, on the contrary they inhabit it, they pass through it, over it (...) The desert, the experimentation on ourselves, is our only identity, our only chance for all the combinations that inhabit us' (Deleuze & Parnet, 1996)

"I am horizon" is the anti-metaphysical *cogito* from which to seek the pristine idea of knowledge, *prima philosophia* or *protè epistème*. Being the horizon of existence is basically revealed as the *Ur-ethos* that comes to manifestation by the question, in the gaze on the question, and on the original phenomenon that it reveals. This gaze as first form of vision, theory, *theôria* also emerges, as the primordial form of knowledge (*épistèmè*). It is in this structural specularity, and independently of any cultural or scientific orientation, as well from any moral code, we must consider here the co-belonging of the existential and the epistemic. This co-belonging reveals that there is no a pure reflexive introspection, looking in the mirror of interiority and a detached, epistemic opening to the world, what is called a 'view from nowhere'. This is a dichotomy imposed (on the Western world at least) by Augustine (Fraisopi, 2015, p. 124 -145). Rather, there is a reciprocal mirroring, that specularity that characterises *fundamentally* what is termed 'speculative thinking', so much disliked by contemporary philosophy.

Far from the dichotomies mentioned above, speculative thinking is the mirroring of an *Ur-Ethos*, the sense of situatedness (and finiteness) of life and the original theoretical dimension of openness to the horizon of phenomena. This is the first step of a thinking that experiences the complexity of the world, a world that is reflected, mirrored in the dimension of our lives. He/she who is

in search of a 'Meaning' finds in the constitution, in the weaving of the webs of his/her own existence that world whose complexity is at the very root of the emergence itself of the question. This Meaning does not reside exclusively in the interior of something, *in interiore homine*, nor in an exterior that displaces, decentralises, all those (fictitious/factitious) answers to the question.

Meaning is articulated in the multiple and irreducible plots of life itself as a mirror image of the world. These multiple plots are realised in the life-forms of life, singular, dual, plural, communitarian in their historical depth. In this sense, the first step towards a *mathesis* capable of holding together the existential and the epistemic lies in a science of the lifeworld - according to Husserl, where *mathesis* does not mean a look at the everyday business but at the very structure in which the formations of meaning are articulated in a unitary horizon as forms (also and above all historical forms) of subjectivation (Foucault, 1984, p. 10; Zarka, 2002; Fraioli, 2019, p. 51- 68). This first form of *mathesis* can be called meta-egological.

Through the description and structural analysis of these forms of subjectivation, Meaning is found in all those concretions of the original openness of the *Ur-Ethos*, forms of religious life and wisdom as well as in the historical secularised forms of *theôria* that we call sciences. This is not a matter of any relativism, but of the deep awareness of the anthropological relativity of the forms of subjectivation, of the plurality of normative codes of *praxis*, as well as of the epistemic relativity of the forms of access, even objective access, to the phenomenal world. It is rather a matter of recognising, beyond these forms of plurality, a structural necessity. This specularity between *Ur-Ethos* and *theôria*, and consequently the specularities and correspondences between the forms of their historical and communitarian concretions, unfolds in an overall view of encounter - and of dialectical conflict - which today takes place concretely on a global level.

Philosophising, beyond its institutionalisations, is the activity that keeps this horizon open and unfolds the possibility of a structural, historical as well as epistemic analysis of the (sometimes, often dialectical) relations between these concretions. In other words, it is what keeps open the horizon within which the quest(ion) of meaning, declined not only at the individual but also at the community level, can receive a concrete ground for development - and construction. This is why talking about an essence of philosophy seems as senseless as talking about an essence of man/woman, of the individual. Because the opening up of a horizon cannot be reduced to 'objective' definitions.

The question 'what is philosophy?' indeed, like the question 'who/what am I?' is not one of those responsible, answerable questions. Rather than giving in rhetorical but very often only extremely arbitrary tones his/her own version, the one who meditates on the question "what is philosophy?" should dwell on the dynamics of the question itself. In searching in vain for a definitive answer

- because after all, we do not know what that ‘*Sophia*’ can or should consist of - we still live in a pure thematic openness.

In its fundamental equivocity, the question discloses to us that horizon of the concretions of “*theôria*” that unfold to us in a well-defined dynamic, both historical and structural. This form of meta-theoretical experience is that which unveils to us the forms of knowledge in their pure structural consistency but also in their historical and genetic transformations. Just as in the first question (what/who I’m?), where the fetishism and narcissism of social forms (in all their shapes) leave the questioner - in his/her bare subsistence - faced with a pure interrogative openness, so here, where all the concretions of *theôria* show themselves in all their partiality, both historical and epistemic, the questioning thinking can open itself up to a dynamic of knowledge that is quite peculiar.

This phenomenologically pure dynamic of knowledge, in all its complexity, in all its transformations and hybridisations, shows theoretical, epistemic or proto-epistemic structures interacting in their proper form, with all their contradictions, hybridisations, evolutions. It is precisely this very peculiar thematic openness that shows the partiality of a single, structuring worldview, and above all one that is capable of defining the phenomenal world once and for all. Regardless of the strength of the epistemic criteria of objectivation, proper to the sciences, every knowledge, if every form of *epistème* - precisely because it is a crystallisation of that *theôria* that is rooted in the open horizon of the *Ur-ethos* - cannot claim to rise to a single, unifying worldview.

The impossibility of a view from nowhere goes hand in hand with the impossibility of a single worldview, of a single *Weltbild* (Heidegger, 1977; Bohr, 1987; Frairopi, 2024, p. 232 - 254), which was the dream of classical rationalism in the modern era. This is not only claimed by us, but demonstrated by the negative results of the foundational programme of science almost a century ago. Incompleteness, indeterminacy, bifurcation, emergence are epistemic ‘names’ that,

- on the one hand, strengthen and broaden the scope of knowledge (just think of the acceleration they have imparted to the elaboration of new forms of *science and technology*) and,
- on the other hand, weaken the metaphysical claim that a unique form of human knowledge can have the last word on the multidimensional horizon of phenomena.

The last word that a non-open knowledge, especially through reduction, could think to say about the complexity of the world is that of the world’s ultimate inventory. In a kind of depot-owner syndrome, a large part of contemporary ontology and metaphysics, especially analytic, as well as cognitive sciences, have committed themselves to wanting to draw up (or think about how to draw up) reductionistic inventories of the world. It’s sufficient to consider the

program sketched by Putnam and Oppenheim in 1958 and largely adopted by analytical philosophers (Oppenheim & Putnam, 1958, p. 3-36).

The programme would be that, by drawing up an inventory of the world's last constituent elements, and, working by reductionist means, recompose all the more complicated phenomena. In this case, still more or less following the programme of the Carnap's *Aufbau* (Carnap, 2003) - perhaps amplifying it, illegitimately, with modal versions of the possible worlds - one would think to reduce our biological life to a compositional mechanism (how many times have we heard, or heard our children told, that the body is a perfect machine?), our spiritual life to an algorithm (how many times have we heard it repeated that our mind is like a hyper-developed software).

In fact, the scientific evidence behind these projects is zero, and they are revealed for what they are, namely forms of neo-liberist propaganda embellished with philosophy. Apart from the impossibility of a fundamental ontology, i.e. of a body of notions that, however refined, can neither be self-asserted as describing the essential properties of the whole being - I have demonstrated it with sufficient logical clarity elsewhere but I'm not so cruel to reconsider it in its social details - there are very strong epistemic reasons to state that the reduction of all phenomena to a fundamental ontology is an ideological programme. By this we mean that it is the result of a political hegemony whereby control, computation and accounting should be the foundations of human living and good living.

The promises of a perfectly secured, algorithmically structured world are nothing but illusory promises:

- without taking into account those, the forgotten, the wretched of the earth, who are at the bottom of the supply chain...
 - without taking into account the alienation that millions and millions of young people feel when faced with the reduction of their lives to algorithmic sequences,
 - without taking into account the ecological and geopolitical consequences,
- we are once again told that a world of products and a life sublimated into algorithms and interfaces is the good life. However, *life is more than that, the world is much more than that*. They present themselves first and foremost as a *multiplicity of levels or interconnected planes*, of (ontological) *dimensions*, that do not allow themselves to be reduced *to the singularity of an ontology nor to the ontology of singularities*. It's matter of multiplicities that do not accept the reduction of their complexity, of their multidimensionality, except at the price of a substantial loss of understanding, of a distortion and a radical inability to govern the processes that constitute them.

From the smallest cellular organism up to the largest global networks (societies, civilisations, economic markets, mass migrations, animals as well as

humans, up to ecosystems) we are dealing not with objects, but with complex systems. The lexicon and grammar of complex systems exceed the grammar of the thing, or the pure and simple object, established by metaphysics as a cipher of the real, that is, as an all-encompassing grammar of description of the phenomenal world. This is something that not only exceeds philosophical grammar (of the West, at least) but also disquiets man as such, because it confronts him with processes that are ungovernable or only partially governable, because it inscribes the unexpected, the *kairòs* in the constitutive dimension of the world to which he is exposed. What is complexity?

If one wanted to give a fairly broad definition of complexity, one could define it as follows: Complexity is the global property of a (numerous) set of elements in dynamical (often seemingly disordered, non-linear) interaction, that we call a system. Complexity or complex behaviours/patterns emerge in relation to many part of the system itself, interacting each other by feedbacks with its own environment. From the human brain to the global climate, we find complexity “everywhere” (Mitchell, 2009, p. 1; Ladyman & Wiesner, 2020): living cells and microorganisms, economy and global supply chains, communication or transportation systems, cities, migrations, ecosystems, pandemics and so on.

By such systems, and due to the numerosity and multiple, multi-layered interactions of their elements, “bifurcations” are *not exceptional, but constitutive*. In the emergence of life from chemical interaction, for example the ‘combinatorial explosion’ in emergent phases of life is the class of possible interactions that can give rise to a living being. It is not limited to logically coded possibilities, but expands immeasurably: eco-evolution is then the actual characteristic of even the irreversible character of biological temporality, because such an eco-evolution is constantly forming through symmetry breaking.’ This shows how the bifurcations in the processes of such systems, hence the *kairòs* of unexpected events, are not something exceptional, but the rule, a constitutive dimension of deregulation and reemerging new kind of order as a result of adaptive needs in relation to the context.

Add to this the multiplicity of ontological dimensions that a complex system implies, a multidimensionality that makes it rich but also unpredictable or not fully predictable.

Management has explicitly coded a method for acting in such a context: V.U.C.A. It’s matter of the leadership theory formulated from Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, to describe or to reflect on the **volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity** of general conditions and situations (Bennis & Nanus, 1985).

The VUCA framework is a conceptual tool that underscores the conditions and challenges organisations face when making decisions, planning,

managing risks, driving change, and solving problems. It primarily shapes an organisation's ability to:

- Anticipate the key issues that emerge.
- Understand the repercussions of particular issues and actions.
- Appreciate how variables interrelate.
- Prepare for diverse scenarios and challenges.
- Interpret and tackle pertinent opportunities.

“VUCA serves as a guideline for fostering awareness and preparedness in various sectors, including business, the military, education, and government. It provides a roadmap for organisations to develop strategies for readiness, foresight, adaptation, and proactive intervention. Within VUCA, several thematic areas of consideration emerge, providing a framework for introspection and evaluation:

- Knowledge management and sense-making: An exploration into how we organise and interpret information.
- Planning and readiness considerations: A reflection on our preparedness for unforeseen challenges.
- Process management and resource systems: A contemplation on our efficiency in resource utilisation and system deployment.
- Functional responsiveness and impact models: Understanding our capacity to adapt to changes.
- Recovery systems and forward practices: An inquiry into our resilience and future-oriented strategies.
- Systemic failures: A philosophical dive into organisational vulnerabilities.
- Behavioural failures: Exploring the human tendencies that lead to mistakes”.⁽¹⁾

The VUCA approach is “just” the clear awareness - applied to strategy in a global complex world - of something inhabiting the culture of every great old civilisation, western as eastern, reinterpreted by the means of most advanced issues in science. For coming, almost at the end of our exploration, to this nobody (*outis*) sitting in the front of the sea, take in consideration a beautiful page of Fritjof Capra's Preface to ‘The Tao of Physics’:

“As I sat on that beach my former experiences came to life; I ‘saw’ cascades of energy coming down from outer space, in which particles were created and destroyed in rhythmic pulses; I ‘saw’ the atoms of the elements and those of my body participating in this cosmic dance of

1. Quoted from Wikipedia Article: V.U.C.A. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/VUCA> [last opened December 12, 2024].

energy; I felt its rhythm and I ‘heard’ its sound, and at that moment I knew that this was the Dance of Shiva, the Lord of Dancers worshipped by the Hindus” (Capra, 1975, p. 11).

This view must be implemented, however, to a clear project of rationality able to conceive, describe, categorise the weaving of the world complexity as *constitutive of its manifestation*. What research into the forms of *mathesis* then transmits to individuals, what it opens up within the horizon that we all are, and inspire to our way of being in a global world is a new vision. But such view is, in truth, the oldest and first form of vision: our exploration looks like a *nòstos*, a return. It is the vision of knowledge that gives meaning, through research, to the speculative situation of life, to the horizon that we all are. To quote a comment I took some years ago on a preface to Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s *West-Ostliche Divan*: It is the ability to grasp, in terms of refraction, reverberation, disturbing proximity, mystery and beauty, the precarious contemporaneity of this epiphany, the chiaroscuro of the fold and the reality of manifestation.

The aim of such *nòstos*, the aim the return to an idea of *mathesis*, the aim of research into its forms within the lives of individuals, is not then the ability to grasp once and for all, as a closed fixed configuration, the final order of knowledge (and, by extension, of the world). It is a question of revealing, within the horizon that we all are, these universal catoptrics and dioptrics that govern our life, a dizzying whirlpool of rays, vanishing points, spectra and mirrors. Only this grammar of vision (*theôria*), informing our practices (our *èthos*) can give individuals, societies, civilisations the awareness of not being possessors (of things, of a unique fixed identity, of a single being and sexuality, of a soil with a own right [*jus soli*], of a metaphysical core, of a single destiny, etc.) but of being capable of cohabiting not only with each other but with everything around them.

The two questions that arise then are:

1. are we capable of arriving at a knowledge that, free from the dream (or nightmare) of an ontological image of the world fixed and fixed once and for all, while maintaining its epistemic precision, knows how to think about the complexity of the world in which we live and in which we act?
2. Are we capable of thinking ourselves, as individuals, societies, civilisations, within this world?

Perhaps this also depends on how (and for whom) we would like to conceive a ‘good life’ in the decades to come. But if we look closely, this faculty to think, and to imagine scenarios in a complex world, depends on what fundamental concept of knowledge underlies our lives, and our societies. At the end of the day, it depends on that *knowledge*, that *mathesis* of stabilities and instabilities that will once again provide a horizon for our knowledge and humanity, then

for a common, shared, good life. In this sense, our science and our culture will be capable to do it once ceased “to deny, to pretend to be alien to the concerns and questions of the societies in which they develops, when they are finally capable of a dialogue with nature, whose many enchantments it will be able to appreciate, and with people of all cultures, whose questions it will henceforth be able to respect” (Prigogine & Stengers, 1979, p. 52).

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Virtus ad beate vivendum se ipsa contenta est⁽¹⁾

Happiness and the good life in ancient Greco-Roman Philosophy

Michael Chase

CNRS - Centre Jean Pépin, UMR 8230, France

Ancient Greek moral philosophy, said Nietzsche, is like an experimental laboratory in which many recipes for the art of living have been practiced and fully lived (Nietzsche, 1881/1973, pp. 552-553, as cited in Hadot, 2002, p. 277). Although its division into competing schools can be confusing for students, the French historian of philosophy Pierre Hadot has argued that the main schools of classical Greek philosophy – Platonism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism, Epicureanism, Cynicism, and Skepticism — may correspond to different basic human personality types. A person who believes in the importance of rigor, attentiveness, and fulfilment of duties, for instance, will probably tend to join the Stoic school, while someone who places great value on relaxation and enjoying conversations with friends will probably join the Epicureans⁽²⁾.

These various philosophical schools devoted much of their energy to arguing against each other, sometimes in rather harsh, polemical terms, in an effort to demarcate their own identity and attract students. Yet beneath these surface differences one can discern some features that were common to all the schools. One such element, as Pierre Hadot and others have pointed out, was the belief that most human beings, most of the time, are not as happy as they could be. Consequently, ancient Greek philosophy can be largely understood as a collection of different and sometimes conflicting recipes for how to achieve happiness or the good life, and what differentiates the various schools may be said to be the different ways in which they conceived of what happiness is

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1. Zeno in Cicero, *De finibus*, V.79.27: “Virtue is content with itself for the happy life”.
 2. Most of us, Hadot adds, are probably combinations of several of these character traits, so that what it comes to adapting ancient philosophy to be used in our lives today, we are entitled to a certain amount of eclecticism; picking and choosing doctrinal elements form various different ancient philosophical schools: as long as these elements remain compatible, of course, and that is a major issue for those of us who are interested in adopting ancient philosophy to make it useful for life in the 2020s.

(Hadot, 1969, p. 99). As Aristotle points out at the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle, 1926, 1.2, 1095a17-22)⁽³⁾:

... both the multitude and persons of refinement speak of it as Happiness (*eudaimonia*) and conceive 'the good life' (*to eu zên*) or 'doing well' (*to eu prattein*) to be the same thing as 'being happy' (*eudaimonein*). But what constitutes happiness is a matter of dispute; and the popular account of it is not the same as that given by the philosophers.

Note the traditional Greek word which we translate as "happiness": was *eudaimonia*, which means etymologically "the state of having a good divinity" (*daimôn*). This word *daimôn*, in turn, is obviously the origin of the English word demon. But for the pagan Greeks, a *daimôn* was not necessarily an evil being, but rather an entity halfway between man and the gods, and which acted as an intermediary and a messenger between them (Hadot 1995, 164; 2002, 42-3). This is what Plato alludes to at the end of his dialogue the *Timaeus* (Plato, n.d., 90c)⁽⁴⁾, where he writes:

He who takes care of the divine he has within him, who maintains in perfect order the *daimôn* that lives within him, is necessarily singularly happy (*eudaimôn*).

In what follows I will propose a brief survey of some Greek views of happiness and the good life. In doing so, however, I will not follow the traditional order, which begins with the Presocratic philosophers and continues with their successors Plato and Aristotle. My reason for disregarding this traditional chronological principle is that what is most relevant to Islamic thought is the state of Greek philosophy at the end of Late Antiquity. At this time, from the 4th to the 7th centuries CE, the dominant philosophy was Neoplatonism, a school which, while it had absorbed some elements of the doctrines of the other Greek philosophical schools, basically represented a kind of combination of the thought of Plato and Aristotle. It is this Platonized Aristotelianism, or Aristotelianized Platonism, that was most influential on both Syriac and Islamic philosophy.

Happiness among the Stoics and Epicureans

For the Stoics, happiness was provided by virtue; or rather, happiness, virtue, and perfected reason are, in sense, different names for the same thing (Hadot,

3. τὴν γὰρ εὐδαιμονίαν καὶ οἱ πολλοὶ καὶ οἱ χαρίεντες λέγουσιν, τὸ δ' εὖ ζῆν καὶ τὸ εὖ πράττειν ταῦτόν ὑπολαμβάνουσι τῷ εὐδαιμονεῖν. περὶ δὲ τῆς εὐδαιμονίας, τί ἐστίν, ἀμφισβητοῦσι, καὶ οὐχ ὁμοίως οἱ πολλοὶ τοῖς σοφοῖς ἀποδιδῶσιν.

4. ἅτε δὲ ἀεὶ θεραπεύοντα τὸ θεῖον ἔχοντά τε αὐτόν εὖ κεκοσμημένον τὸν δαίμονα σύνοικον ἑαυτῷ, διαφερόντως εὐδαίμονα εἶναι.

1969, p. 100; see also Hadot, 1969, p. 102)⁽⁵⁾. In the words of Seneca (Seneca, 1920, 76.16)⁽⁶⁾:

It is this that is called virtue it is man's unique good. For since reason alone brings man to perfection, reason alone, when perfected, makes man happy. This, moreover, is man's only good, the only means by which he is made happy.

Thus, virtue alone suffices to ensure happiness (Hadot, 1969, p. 101, n. 17, citing Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius*, 9; 92.24). It was a basic Stoic principle that there is no happiness other than moral good or virtue, and there is no unhappiness except in moral evil and vice (P. Hadot 1998, 86). Yet virtue was a complicated affair for the Stoics (Hadot, 1969, p. 101)⁽⁷⁾. On the one hand, living virtuously, and hence being happy, meant living according to nature (SVF I. 184; III. 16; Michael of Ephesus, *In NE*, p. 598, 20 Heylbut = SVF III. 17)⁽⁸⁾, but nature itself could also be considered identical to Fate, Zeus, or the *Logos*⁽⁹⁾, a rational, material substance many of a fiery pneuma ('breath' or 'wind' that ruled the world in a benevolent, providential way. The Stoics thought our own rational mind was a fragment of this cosmic *Logos*.

On the other hand, the traditional three parts of philosophy, logic, physics, and ethics, could also be considered as virtues. By the first two centuries of the common era, however, in addition to these parts of philosophy as studied and taught on a theoretical level in the classrooms, there was also a lived logic, in which we pursue objectivity and clarity in our thought; a lived physics, in which we try to achieve and maintain cosmic consciousness, or the constant awareness that we are integral parts of the cosmos; and a lived ethics, in which we dedicate ourselves to the welfare of the human community, and to the practice of justice, and love of all other human beings (Hadot 1998, 89ff.; Hadot 2014, 104).

5. As a fragment of the divine *Logos*, identified with God, human reason is also divine. Yet it is granted to us in an imperfect state, and it is therefore our main duty to develop and perfect it

6. *hoc est honestum et unicum hominis bonum. Nam cum sola ratio perficiat hominem, sola ratio perfecta beatum facit; hoc autem unum bonum est, quo uno beatus efficitur.*

7. In Stoicism, complete or perfect reason, wisdom, virtue, happiness, and the greatest good are all equivalent terms, and all can be used to designate mankind's highest goal.

8. according to the Stoics, living one's life according to nature (*to kata phusin diagein*) is living well (*to eu zên*), and living well is (...) being happy (*eudaimonein*), then living one's life according to nature is being happy". By the time of the Roman Empire, Seneca understands this ancient Stoic principle as meaning: live in accordance with *human* nature, i.e. reason.

9. *Logos* was itself a highly polyvalent word, which could mean, among things, "definition, word, discourse, account". In some contexts, especially in the Stoics, it can be translated as "Reason"

For the Epicureans, a school that was founded around 300 BCE, roughly the same time as the Stoa, happiness did not consist in pursuing virtue and fulfilling one's duties in a disinterested way, as it did for the Stoics: it consisted in the search for and achievement of pleasure. Yet, contrary to the distorted presentation of their views by their opponents, both ancient and modern, the pleasure they sought was not that provided by temporary, potentially damaging overindulgence in food, drink, and sex. Instead, it was the calm, stable pleasure provided by the elimination of pain, fear, worries, regrets, and all kinds of disturbance. According to an Epicurean saying, the person who can satisfy hunger, thirst, and the need for warmth and shelter — needs that can all be satisfied in the present moment— can rival Zeus himself in happiness (Hadot, 1995, p. 299; see also *ibid.*, p. 22, citing Epicurus, *Gnomologicum Vaticanum* 33)⁽¹⁰⁾. Pleasure is characterized by its limited nature: it extends only to the elimination of pain. For instance, if I am thirsty, I feel pain. When I have enough water to quench my thirst, I feel as much real pleasure as it is possible to feel, because the pain of thirst has been eliminated. If, however, once I have quenched my thirst, I continue to drink, or if I drink expensive wines instead of water, I am not increasing my pleasure but only causing non-substantial variations in it. And if I drink too much wine, I will feel unpleasant consequences later on: hangover in the short term, possible long-term damage to my health in the long run.

For the Epicureans, stable pleasure can also be provided of friendship and conversation, and contemplation of the serene, untroubled existence of the gods (Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods*, 1.114)⁽¹¹⁾, whose defining characteristics are their eternity and their happiness (Krämer, 1971, p. 153), and who do not trouble themselves by intervening in human life or the physical world: here the gods serve primarily as a model for the Epicurean Sage, whose goal is to imitate the gods.

Despite their differences, both Stoics and Epicureans agree that happiness is only to be found in the present, which — since the future does not yet exist, while the past no longer exists — is the only time period that truly exists. This idea lends a certain urgency to the quest for happiness that underlies both these philosophies: we must not put off this quest, but enjoy happiness right now, in this present moment (Hadot 1995, 224, 268). In the words of the emperor Marcus Aurelius (*Meditations* 12.1.1-2):

All the happiness you are seeking by such long, roundabout ways: you can

10. Σαρκὸς φωνὴ τὸ μὴ πεινῆν, τὸ μὴ διψῆν, τὸ μὴ ῥιγοῦν· ταῦτα γὰρ ἔχων τις καὶ ἐλπίζων ἔξειν κἂν <Δι> ὑπὲρ εὐδαιμονίας μαχέσεται. The 3rd century CE Church Father Clement of Alexandria considers this doctrine impious and worthy of dung-eating pigs.

11. God is engaged (they say) in ceaseless contemplation of his own happiness, for he has no other object for his thoughts. ('Cogitat' inquiunt 'adsidue beatum esse se; habet enim nihil aliud quod agitet in mente').

have it all right now. . . . I mean, if you leave all of the past behind you, if you abandon the future to providence, and if you arrange the present in accordance with piety and justice.

Epicurean pleasure, in the words of Hadot is “the pure pleasure of existence”: as Aristotle argued; it cannot be increased by duration (Hadot, 2002, p. 115; cf. Epicurus, *Principal Doctrines*, 19)⁽¹²⁾. Since pure pleasure does not admit of degrees and is perfect and complete in the present instant, there is as potential as much pleasure in brief instant as there in pleasure that lasts for many moments, or even for hours, days, or an eternity. This is the theoretical justification for the key Epicurean spiritual exercise of concentrating on the present. Hence, for Aristotle, the Stoics, and the Epicureans, the present moment can be viewed as a source of potentially infinite happiness. To cite the title of one of Pierre Hadot’s groundbreaking articles: “Only the present is our happiness” (Hadot, 1995, pp. 217-237; 2023, pp. 3-23).

Contemplation, happiness and the good life in Plato and his successors

For Plato and Aristotle, albeit with differences in emphasis and degree, happiness consists in the return to what is divine within the self. Just as the Greek gods were traditionally designated as “the happy ones” (*hoi makarioi*), so Plato and Aristotle believed it was possible for human beings to imitate and to participate, albeit fleetingly, in that divine happiness. This tendency may go back to Socrates, who claimed to have a divinity (Greek *daimôn*) within him, a kind of inner voice that advised him, in particular, to refrain from carrying out certain acts. This inner presence of something divine, however, was not enough to ensure happiness: in the Socratic-Platonic tradition, one also had to become *aware* of that inner divinity, cultivate it, care for it, and eventually identify with it.

Plato’s nephew and successor at the head of the Academy Speusippus (Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* II.22.133)⁽¹³⁾, who rejected the pursuit of pleasure, defined happiness as “the perfect state/possession (*hexis*) in things that are according to nature, or the state/possession of good things”, but he added that what produces happiness are the virtues. For Speusippus’ successor Xenocrates, happiness is defined as “the acquisition of one’s proper virtue and the faculty that subserves it” (Krämer, 1971, p. 204, citing Xenocrates, fr. 77 Heinze).

Thus, for Xenocrates as for Speusippus and later for Aristotle, the virtues are the causes of happiness, while external goods are its necessary conditions.

12. «Infinite time has the same pleasure as limited time, if one measures its limits by reasoning”.

13. Σπεύσιππος τε ὁ Πλάτωνος ἀδελφιδοῦς τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν φησὶν ἔξιν εἶναι τελείαν ἐν τοῖς κατὰ φύσιν ἔχουσιν ἢ ἔξιν ἀγαθῶν, ἧς δὴ καταστάσεως ἅπαντας μὲν ἀνθρώπους ὀρεξὶν ἔχειν, στοχάζεσθαι δὲ τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς τῆς ἀοχλησίας.

For Aristotle, happiness consists in the activity of what is most divine within human beings: the intellect. This activity is contemplation (Greek *theôria*). Contemplation, and the indescribable pleasure that accompanies it, characterize the life of the gods: not only God, the Prime Mover or First Principle, who is a separate Intellect that thinks only itself, but also the 56 other separate intellects, also described as gods. In all living beings, including the gods, pleasure is a kind of side-effect of the exercise of that being's proper natural function (Cf. Aristotle, *NE*, 1153a14)⁽¹⁴⁾. Therefore, since the natural function of the gods is to exercise their contemplative faculties, this contemplation is accompanied by the best and greatest pleasure, and they experience it without interruption. Human beings also experience the most intense, highest-quality pleasure of which they are capable when they are active according to what is best in them, reason: that is, when they live the life of the mind. This might imply a lifestyle of disinterested scientific investigation, and philosophical debates among friends and colleagues. Yet the greatest happiness was provided by contemplation (Greek *theôria*). When human beings engage in contemplation, they enjoy –albeit temporarily– a state of happiness that resembles the state which the gods enjoy eternally. As Aristotle writes in the *Metaphysics*, *Λ* 1072 ,7b16-14:

contemplation (ἡ θεωρία) is that which is most pleasant and best. If, then, the happiness which God always enjoys, is as great as that which we enjoy sometimes, it is marvelous; and if it is greater, this is still more marvelous.

Likewise, as Aristotle writes in Book X, 1177b20ff. of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, human beings can obtain philosophical happiness only by practicing contemplation (*theôria*): that is, by living the kind of life that is entirely dedicated to the mind:

the activity of the intellect ...consisting as it does in contemplation (*theôrêtikê*), (...) contain (s) a pleasure peculiar to itself (...) it follows that it is the activity of the intellect that constitutes complete human happiness....Such a life as this however will be higher than the human level: not in virtue of his humanity will a man achieve it, but in virtue of something within him that is divine If, then, the intellect is something divine in comparison with man, so is the life of the intellect divine in comparison with human life.

Here we encounter a paradox that Pierre Hadot has often emphasized: as for Socrates, Plato, and the later Stoics, what is most divine within man — his intellect — is both immanent, as a part of him, and transcendent, insofar as the

14. "Pleasure is the activity or actualization of a state that is in accordance with nature" (ἐνέργειαν τῆς κατὰ φύσιν ἑξέως).

divine Intellect is the highest principle of the world⁽¹⁵⁾. According to Aristotle, however, because of their ontological inferiority, human beings cannot enjoy the happiness of this state of contemplation constantly, as the gods do (Aristotle, *Metaph.* 1072b28) but only from time to time. Yet these brief moments of contemplation still constitute mankind's truest happiness. As Hadot puts it (2002, 79) :

It is as if man's true essence consisted in being above himself (...) as in Plato, philosophical choice leads the individual self to go beyond its limits to a superior self, and to raise itself up to a universal, transcendent point of view.

The Aristotelian path to a happy human life is therefore a life dedicated to what Pierre Hadot calls "theoretical praxis": a life of disinterested scientific research in the company of like-minded colleagues, not unlike the one he himself led in the school he founded, known as the Lyceum. Aristotle's ethics, based on the notion of *theôria*, thus entails setting aside our own selfish, egoistic interests and seeing things as they really are, in themselves.

Disinterest, detachment, and immortality in Aristotle and the Peripatetic tradition

This disinterestedness corresponds to a detachment from the self that enables the individual to raise herself up to the level of the mind and the intellect, which is her true self. As Aristotle writes (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1178a):

If, then, the intellect is something divine in comparison with man, so is the life of the intellect divine in comparison with human life (..) **but we ought so far as possible to achieve immortality (*athanatizein*)**, and do everything possible to live in accordance with the highest thing in him (...) It may even be held that this is the true self of each person...

One may be surprised to find Aristotle, who is famous for his denial of the soul's immortality, claiming that we must strive to become immortal (*athanatizein*). And yet, this idea does not contradict Aristotle's basic philosophical principles. According to him, when one immaterial entity like the human mind cognizes another immaterial principle, like one of the separate intelligences, the two poles of the cognitive process – both subject and object – become identical (Aristotle, *De Anima*, 3.4, 430a3-5)⁽¹⁶⁾. Thus, if the separate intelli-

15. This paradox is also present in the later Stoicism of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, who adopt the Platonic notion of a *daimôn* that is present within us but which, as a fragment or offspring of god, is also transcendent of us. As in Plato, the goal of philosophy is keep one's *daimôn* pure, obey its advice, and perhaps even identify with it.

16. In the case of things without matter, that which thinks and that which is thought are the same; for speculative knowledge (*hê epistêmê hê theôrêtikê*) is the same as its object.

gences are always supremely happy, omniscient, and immortal, it is not surprising if our mind, too, can acquire such characteristics, at least temporarily, in the moment in which we think them.

This notion was extremely influential. It was taken up by the great Peripatetic commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias, whose works were widely translated into Arabic and were influential on the thought of the *falāsifa* (al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā etc.). Alexander distinguished various degrees of intellect, including the productive intellect which he considered identical to the First Cause. In his own treatise *On the Soul* (Alexander, *De Anima*, p. 95, 5-6, ed. Bruns)⁽¹⁷⁾, written nearly 500 years after Aristotle, Alexander writes as follows about the productive intellect:

Therefore, those who are concerned with have something divine within them (*ti theion en hautois*) should make sure that they can think of something like that.

In the Islamic tradition, this Peripatetic notion took the form of the debate over the possibility of union (*ittiḥād*) or contact (*ittiṣāl*) with the divine Agent Intellect. *Ibn Sīnā*, for instance, usually rejected the possibility of *ittiḥād*, attributing it to ignorant Porphyrians with Sufi tendencies. Yet the influence of this Aristotelian idea of some kind of union with the Divine Principle as constituting happiness continued to be essential among the *falāsifa*. For instance, al-Fārābī's *Great Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics* is now lost, but we know from the *Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima* by the medieval Latin theologian and philosopher Albertus Magnus (*De anima* 3.3.6, p. 215, 15-27 ed. Stroick) that in this work, al-Fārābī dealt with the question of happiness and contemplation:

...if our material intellect were conjoined to the separate agent of intelligences in this second way⁽¹⁸⁾, then this would be a felicity and some [kind of] divinity greater than the human intellect can achieve. (...), as Farabi transmits, let it be considered solved by him (i.e., by Aristotle) in the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where this seems to be what he says about contemplative felicity (*de felicitate contemplativa*).

Happiness as contemplation in Plotinus and the *Theology of Aristotle*

The final philosophical school of Greco-Roman Antiquity was that of Neoplatonism, founded by Plotinus, who died in 270 CE. As we mentioned at the outset, this school, which dominated the intellectual scene in the West

17. διὸ οἷς μέλει τοῦ ἔχειν τι θεῖον ἐν αὐτοῖς, τοῦτοις προ- νοητέον τοῦ δύνασθαι νοεῖν τι καὶ τοιοῦτον.

18. I.e., if the human material intellect were united to the divine Agent Intellect as an efficient cause and a form for the human intellect.

from c. 300 CE until the Emperor Justinian closed the Neoplatonic school of Athens in 529 CE, was primarily a systematization and combination of the doctrines of Plato and of Aristotle, although it also absorbed modified versions of the doctrines of other schools, especially the Stoics. It was also the school that was most influential on Islam, primarily through such works as the *Theology of Aristotle*, written in the 830s CE, which, despite its title, actually consists in paraphrastic translations of extracts from the *Enneads* of Plotinus. For Plotinus, as for Plato and Aristotle, human happiness is based on the presence of the divine in the human soul, and on the soul's love for the Good. As in his great predecessors, however, this innate presence of the Good in the soul not by itself sufficient for happiness, but is a call for the conversion of all one's being toward the Intellect. Union with this intellect then, is — as it was already for Aristotle and his Peripatetic successors — the crowning moment of human happiness, although Plotinus also hints that we can also ascend even higher than the Intellect and experience the presence of the One in what he refers to as a “loving intoxication” (*Ennead* VI.7.35.24). As Pierre Hadot writes (P. Hadot 2014, 99) about this experience :

Supreme happiness for the soul is thus an experience that can be called mystical, and which is characterized, among feature features, by an immense joy.

We have seen that, according to the Greek Peripatetics like Alexander, the human intellect can temporarily unite with the divine Productive or Agent Intellect, based on the Aristotelian principle that when one incorporeal entity thinks of another, the two of them become identical. In the Arabic *Theology of Aristotle*, based, as we have seen, an adaption of passages from Plotinus, this doctrine is adopted and transformed (*Theology of Aristotle*, p. 34, 18-35, 7 ed. Badawi):

when the soul is in the intelligible world, she is united (*tattaḥidu*) with the intellect, and there is nothing intermediate at all between her and the intellect. Likewise, when the soul leaves this world and comes to be in that upper world, she makes her way towards the intellect and adheres to it; and when she adheres to she is united (*tawaḥḥadat*) with it, without her essence perishing, but she becomes clearer, more pure, and more blameless because she and the intellect are made one thing, (...) She is in this way because she herself becomes what thinks and what is thought¹⁹. And she only becomes like this because of the intensity of her connection (*ittiṣāl*) with the intellect and her unification (*tawaḥḥud*) with it, such that it is as if she and it were one thing.

19. *li-annahā taṣīru hiya al-‘āqil wa-l-ma‘qūl*.

Here, the Peripatetic doctrine of union⁽²⁰⁾ between the human and the divine intellect is explained in terms of Neoplatonic metaphysics. In the beginning, the human soul is united with the intelligible forms in the realm of the Intellect, the second hypostasis of reality, after the Ineffable One, in Plotinus's metaphysical scheme.

For reasons that are variously explained in the Neoplatonic tradition, the soul leaves behind its blissful union with the hypostatic Intellect and descends to earth to become incarnated in a human body. However, by leading a philosophical way of life on earth, human beings can separate their soul from their body and allow it to gradually rise back up to the Intelligible World, where it will be re-united in ineffable union with the divine hypostatic Intellect. Thus, when the philosopher, while his soul is still incarnated here on earth, undergoes the mystical or peak experience of union or contact with the divine Intellect, this experience is both a temporary restoration of the blissful union with Intellect which our soul knew prior to its fall down to earth, and a foretaste of the permanent union with that Intellect that our soul will enjoy after death, if we lead a pure, pious, and ethical life.

As Plotinus' student Porphyry wrote in his *Treatise On the Soul*, preserved only in Arabic (see Chase, In Press), we can achieve this mystical foretaste of eternal post-mortem happiness merely by changing the orientation of our attention, from the impure realities of the earthly world to the pure realities of the Intelligible world. When this happens, the human intellect can transform itself: once united with the First intellect, it can achieve the latter's mode of timeless, non-deliberative, non-discursive thought. In other words, the human intellect can now perceive or comprehend all things at once, in a timeless, global intuition that seems to be identical with the modality of divine thought as described, for instance, in the fifth book Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, according to which God sees all things in an eternal present (Chase, 2014; cf. Chase, 2023, p. 397)⁽²¹⁾.

For Porphyry, this mode of divine thought – which can, however fleetingly, be enjoyed by human beings in this life on earth – is one in which the distinc-

20. *ittiḥād*, *ittiṣāl*: note that there seems to be no difference of meaning between these two terms in this passage, although they were later to be carefully distinguished. Ibn Sina, for instance, allows for the possibility that the human intellect may come into contact (*ittiṣāl*) with the Agent Intellect, but he usually rejects the possibility of unification (*ittiḥād*) between the human and the divine Intellect.

21. In the 20th century, Einstein suggested that this way of perceiving, reality, sometimes known as the “block-time perspective, may in fact correspond to the way things really are. In the *Plotiniana Arabica*, the modalities of divine thought correspond with the modalities of divine creation: the First Principle knows all things at once because he creates all things all at once, in a timeless, instantaneous now. Analogously, if the human discursive intellect is limited to thinking one thing after another in time, that is because the divine Intellect creates things one after another in time.

tion between subject and object has been abolished, and in which “the knowable and knowledge are identical”⁽²²⁾.

Conclusion

Over the period of some 700 years, then, from Plato to Plotinus, we seem to witness an interiorization of the concept of happiness. Or rather, what we perhaps see is accentuation of tendencies already present in Plato and Aristotle. For Plato, as for his teacher Socrates, and even for later Stoics such as Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, there is something divine within us, and happiness consists in becoming aware of, caring for, and eventually identifying with that divine part of the Self, which is in some sense our true self. For Aristotle, the highest kind of happiness come from the contemplation, carried out by the highest part of ourselves (the human intellect), of the higher realities (the separate intellects and the Unmoved Mover). Nor does this contemplation provide only happiness: given the Aristotelian principle that when an immaterial entity (the human intellect) contemplates another immaterial entity (the divine Intellect), these two intellects become identical, contemplation of the highest realities can transform the human being, rendering him immortal and omniscient as well as supremely happy. This doctrine, elaborated and developed first by Alexander of Aphrodisias and then by Plotinus, was to be highly influential on Islamic thought, where it became the ideal of intellectual felicity. In turn, when Arabic philosophical works gradually began to be translated from Arabic to Latin beginning in the 12th century CE in Toledo and Southern Italy, this ideal of intellectual felicity (Stettler 2024) became extremely important for Latin Scholasticism and the Rhineland mysticism of Meister Eckart and his followers.

Thanks to the crucial role of Arabo-Islamic thought in preserving, developing and transmitted Greek thought, access to much of which had been lost in the Latin Middle Ages, Greek conceptions of happiness were thus made available once again to the medieval West, where they flourished. Not only did this process remind the West of the profound Greco-Arabic doctrine of intellectual felicity, but it served as a reminder of the Greek conception of philosophy itself which, according to them, consisted not so much, as in Latin Scholasticism, in the writing and study of voluminous treatises on systematic metaphysics, as in learning, thanks to the practice of concrete spiritual exercises, how to transform ourselves so that we can lead lives that are more authentic, happy, and free.

22. Compare the Latin Church Father Marius Victorinus, *Adversus Arianos*, IV, 24, 3-4 ed. Henry-Hadot: “Thus, that which is knowable is identical with knowledge” (Idem ergo cognoscibile et cognoscentia). An Arabic version of this dictum might read something like *fa-inna al-ma’lūm wa-l-’ilm šāy’un wāḥidatun*. In the 20th century, the founders of quantum mechanics, such as Bohr and Heisenberg, also saw part of the task of science as overcoming and transcending the gap between subject and object of knowledge.

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Research Papers

Artificial Intelligence and Its Impact on the Quality of Human Life

New Horizons and Ethical Challenges

Engy Hamdy Abdul-Hafiz

Ain Shams University, Egypt

Abstract

The focus of this research paper, titled “Artificial Intelligence and Its Impact on the Quality of Human Life,” is to provide a philosophical perspective on artificial intelligence and its contemporary applications in various aspects of life, as well as the potential risks it may pose to the future of humanity. These risks represent ethical challenges that fall within the purview of both philosophy and ethics. Artificial intelligence—machines capable of performing tasks that require human-level intelligence—has become a tangible reality and an enabler for many industries and aspects of human life, including scientific research, education, manufacturing, logistics, defense, law enforcement, politics, advertising, art and culture, and other fields. The characteristics of artificial intelligence—its ability to learn, evolve, and astonish—will lead to changes in all realms of human experience, transforming the way humans understand reality and their role within it. Through this study, we present an ethical and philosophical perspective to introduce the concept of responsible artificial intelligence, affirming that while the advancement of artificial intelligence is inevitable, its destination is not. It is contingent upon the human element that is brave enough to face the consequences of its innovations. This study employs the critical-analytical method to answer its questions and achieve its objectives.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, quality of life, human, robotics, philosophy, ethics.

1. Introduction

For thousands of years, humanity has been engaged in the exploration of reality and the pursuit of knowledge. This endeavor has been founded on the belief that applying human reason to problems with care and focus can yield measurable results. When faced with mysteries such as changing seasons, planetary movements, or the spread of diseases, humans have been able to formulate

the right questions, collect the necessary data, and devise methods for interpretation. Over time, the knowledge acquired through this process has created new possibilities for action. The journey of the human mind to the forefront of history took centuries. The Renaissance witnessed a rediscovery of classical writings and research methodologies, which were employed to understand an ever-expanding world. With Descartes' famous declaration, "I think, therefore I am," rational thought was affirmed as the defining capability of humanity.

The world of Enlightenment, rooted in optimism regarding human reason, has remained our world for a long time. The central assumption of the Enlightenment, that reality is knowable and is gradually being revealed by human intellect, continues to this day. For three centuries of discovery and exploration, humans have interpreted the world, as Kant predicted, according to the structure of their minds. However, as humans approached the limits of their cognitive abilities, they became willing to recruit machines and computers to augment their thinking in order to overcome these limitations. Computers added a separate digital world to the physical world in which humans lived. As we increasingly rely on digital enhancement, we are entering a new era in which the human mind no longer holds exclusive authority as the sole discoverer, knower, and cataloger of worldly phenomena. We have reached a turning point where some of our innovations can no longer be perceived as mere extensions of what we already know, particularly as technological advancements accelerate the pace at which they transform human experience.

Scientific revolutions, particularly in the twentieth century, have developed both technology and philosophy. The digital revolution and artificial intelligence (AI) have produced entirely new phenomena rather than merely creating more powerful or efficient versions of past tools. As computers became faster and smaller, they were integrated into phones, watches, appliances, security systems, vehicles, weapons, and even human bodies. The instant connectivity of these digital systems has become fundamental. Tasks that were once manual just a generation ago, such as reading, research, shopping, communication, record-keeping, surveillance, planning, and military guidance, are now digital, data-driven, and exist within a unified domain. Humans have delegated aspects of their cognitive processes to technology. With vast amounts of information available online, we have turned to software to filter, refine, and analyze data, identifying patterns and guiding us toward answers (Kissinger, Schmidt, & Huttenlocher, 2023, p. 26).

In reality, no aspect of human life is untouched by the rising applications of artificial intelligence. AI is evolving rapidly, marking a transformative milestone in civilization and a key objective of sustainable development, given its significant contributions to various fields, especially those most pressing and essential, such as healthcare, medicine, education, security, industry, and commerce. The introduction of AI-assisted functions, from autocomplete sugges-

tions while typing to recommendations for books, stores, and entertainment based on previous behavior, often began as subtle enhancements rather than revolutionary changes. However, as AI becomes integrated into more aspects of daily life, it fundamentally alters the traditional role of human cognition in shaping choices, actions, and evaluations.

Nonetheless, there are growing concerns regarding the implications of AI's rapid evolution. AI is now progressing not only toward matching human intelligence but also toward surpassing it. This trajectory raises questions about whether AI will eventually gain an independent identity, as posthumanist⁽¹⁾ theorists predict. According to posthumanist thinkers, technological advancements will inevitably lead to a moment of "technological singularity," at which point artificial intelligence will exceed human cognitive capabilities and become capable of creating autonomous intelligent machines. This, in turn, will generate profound ethical dilemmas and challenges, compelling us to ask: How will AI affect human cognition, knowledge, and interaction? How will it shape our culture and our understanding of what it means to be human?

This study aims to explore the nature of artificial intelligence, its origins and development, and its applications across various knowledge domains, particularly those linked to computer science. Additionally, it seeks to identify the key challenges facing AI today and examine how to strike a balance between its benefits and potential risks. Moreover, the study emphasizes the urgent need for a philosophical and ethical framework to regulate, monitor, and assess AI development and implementation. Establishing a global practical framework of rules and principles governing AI development is essential to ensuring that AI remains a force for good, one that enhances human life and positively impacts the overall quality of life.

Previous Studies

- **Al-Otaibi's Study (2018):** *"Ethical Issues and Relevant Considerations Related to Artificial Intelligence and Autonomous Systems."* This study aimed to examine and critique the ethical issues associated with artificial intelligence and autonomous systems while evaluating AI developments. The researcher adopted a documentary research method, and the findings revealed that real-world changes resulting from the excessive use of

1. Posthumanism is a philosophical movement that gradually emerged and developed since the 1980s. It advocates for understanding and assessing the opportunities created by technological advancements to improve and enhance human conditions. This movement emphasizes the use of various technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, information technology, and genetic engineering, to augment human capabilities and design super-intelligent machines. Ultimately, posthumanism envisions a future where humanity evolves into posthuman beings with capabilities far exceeding those of present-day humans, potentially even achieving human immortality.

AI-based and autonomous systems have raised genuine concerns regarding their negative impact on job opportunities, inequality, humanity, and security. Furthermore, global spending on safety measures is rapidly increasing as a means to ensure the safe application of AI technologies.

- **Khadija Derrar’s Study:** “*Artificial Intelligence and Robot Ethics: An Analytical Study.*” This study sought to explore the concept of AI ethics, analyze the ethical aspects and concerns related to AI, and investigate the potential risks arising from robots attaining self-awareness. It also aimed to propose localized ethical policies for AI by studying and analyzing the AI policies of five global entities. The study concluded with several key findings, the most notable being the absence of ethical AI and robotics policies in the Arab world. Additionally, the analyzed policies did not fully meet the criterion of equality, highlighting a pressing need for further development and refinement of AI ethics standards.
- **Saleh Al-Asad’s Study:** “*Artificial Intelligence: Opportunities, Risks, and Reality in Arab Countries.*” This study aimed to assess the opportunities and risks associated with AI technologies and systems while examining the current state of AI in Arab nations. The study found that AI presents promising opportunities that should be harnessed through the establishment of scientific and technological infrastructure. On the other hand, the risks and threats posed by some AI applications due to negative use must be taken seriously. Regarding the state of AI in Arab countries, the study revealed that while some nations have made notable progress in practical AI initiatives, others remain in the phase of formulating strategies that have yet to be implemented.

Commentary on Previous Studies

Most of the previous studies, including the present study, share a focus on the concept, origins, and evolution of artificial intelligence. However, they differ in their approaches to AI ethics depending on their objectives and research methodologies. The current study distinguishes itself by emphasizing the philosophical perspective as the ethical guiding force for responsible AI development. It explores technological singularity, AI consciousness, the dimensions of technological evolution, and its ultimate purposes etc., to contribute to the design of AI systems that align with human values, uphold rights, and support sustainable progress.

2. Artificial Intelligence: Definition and Origins

2.1 What is Artificial Intelligence?

Like many widely used terms, artificial intelligence lacks a universally accepted definition (Muftah, 2023, p. 400). The literature is filled with various definitions that reflect the evolving nature of the concept. Among these, Bellman

(1978) defines artificial intelligence as the automation of activities related to human thinking, such as decision-making, problem-solving, and learning. Russell and Norvig describe AI as the field of study aimed at enabling computers and other machines to exhibit intelligence and perform tasks that, until recently, were exclusive to humans, such as reasoning, learning, and communication (Derrar, 2019, p. 242). According to Castelfranchi, artificial intelligence is the discipline that seeks to understand intelligent beings by building intelligent systems (Dignum, 2019, p. 3). The Oxford Dictionary provides a more comprehensive definition, describing AI as the design and development of computer systems capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and language translation (Oxford Dictionary, 2016).

From these definitions, artificial intelligence, as it is understood today, can be summarized as a branch of computer science concerned with simulating human behavior through machines. AI involves creating computer systems and software that can think in a manner similar to the human brain, learn as humans do, make decisions, and act accordingly. In this sense, artificial intelligence is the process of replicating human intelligence by studying human behavior, conducting experiments on how individuals react to certain situations, and analyzing their thought patterns. The goal is to develop complex computer systems capable of mimicking human reasoning.

However, not every software program that operates through a specific algorithm qualifies as artificial intelligence. To be considered AI, a system must meet three fundamental criteria:

- **The ability for autonomous learning or machine learning:** The system must be able to acquire information, establish rules for using this information, and progress from raw data to knowledge through analysis and inference. It must also be able to navigate alternatives and make choices.
- **The capability to collect and analyze data:** The system should be able to establish relationships between different pieces of information, particularly given the increasing prevalence of big data and extensive digital databases.
- **The ability to make decisions based on data analysis:** AI must be capable of making intelligent decisions from multiple options rather than relying solely on a single algorithm to achieve a predetermined goal (Khalifa, 2019, p. 2).

Artificial intelligence thus aims to create a machine that “thinks” in a broad sense. Thinking, in this context, involves cognitive and psychological processes that rely on scientific, theoretical, organizational, logical, and symbolic methods, as well as specialized languages. This requires the presence of memory, the ability to differentiate and classify information, the capability to perceive and learn, and the ability to use artificial languages and process data

from the external environment. A thinking machine must be able to recognize its surroundings, distinguish between sensory patterns such as shapes, colors, and quantities, and classify them accordingly. Sensory perception plays a crucial role, as it provides the reference framework for cognitive recognition (Awad, 2021, p. 62).

One of the key reasons for studying artificial intelligence is that it helps us better understand natural intelligence. AI represents a coordinated effort to comprehend the complexity of human experience. Human intelligence is multidimensional, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and social aspects. Experts often identify distinct types of human intelligence, including logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, musical, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic, and existential intelligence. Artificial intelligence research seeks to understand human intelligence in all its facets, with the goal of replicating it.

AI is not a single-dimensional field but rather a rich and interdisciplinary domain that integrates various information-processing capabilities. The development of AI is supported by multiple disciplines, including computer science, philosophy, mathematics, psychology, cognitive sciences, and many others. Each of these fields provides a unique perspective on AI. Computer science focuses on developing computational systems that exhibit intelligence, while philosophy examines the nature of intelligence and its relationship to artificial entities. Psychology helps us understand how people interact with one another and with intelligent systems. Cognitive sciences offer insights into human perception, while AI applications often require mathematical models to optimize algorithms, as well as electronic components such as sensors, microprocessors, and mechanical actuators (Dignum, 2019, Preface).

Thanks to the collaboration of these fields, AI research has begun to yield remarkable applications that are transforming various aspects of human life (Abdel Nour, 2005, p. 7).

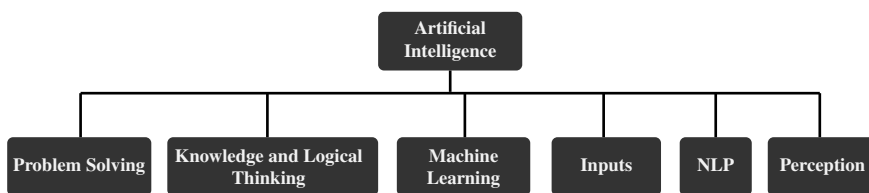


Figure 1 AI Processes Illustration

2.2 The Emergence and Development of Artificial Intelligence

Since the technological concepts that have led to the development of artificial intelligence are as complex as they are important, we will briefly trace the origins and evolution of machine learning or artificial intelligence.

Early attempts to create practical artificial intelligence systems began in 1943 when researchers developed the first electronic, digital, and programmable computer. This achievement brought new urgency to intriguing questions: Can machines think? Are they intelligent? Can they become intelligent? These questions seem particularly perplexing given the longstanding philosophical dilemmas concerning the nature of intelligence. In 1950, mathematician and cryptographer Alan Turing provided a solution in his paper *Computing Machinery and Intelligence*. Turing suggested setting aside the question of machine intelligence altogether. What mattered, he argued, was not the mechanism but the appearance of intelligence. He explained that since the inner workings of other beings remain unknown to us, our only means of measuring intelligence must be through external behavior (Balis & O'Neill, 2022, p. 5).

Through his famous experiment, which remains the primary reference for evaluating machine intelligence, Turing placed two humans and a machine (a computer) in an enclosed environment, concealing their identities. If the tested individual, through written or spoken communication, could not distinguish between the human and the machine, then the machine could be considered intelligent (Qamoura, Bay, & Krouch, 2018, p. 3).

With this insight, Turing sidestepped centuries of philosophical debate about the nature of intelligence by defining external behavior as the criterion for assessing machine intelligence (Kissinger, Schmidt, & Huttenlocher, 2023, p. 55). In 1956, the modern science of artificial intelligence took shape when the first AI conference was held at Dartmouth College in the United States. The event gathered leading AI researchers, most notably John McCarthy, an American computer scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. McCarthy defined artificial intelligence as machines capable of performing tasks associated with human intelligence. He was the first to coin the term “artificial intelligence” and to establish it as a distinct field within computer science. From McCarthy’s perspective, AI aims to replicate various cognitive abilities using machines by understanding the complex mental processes that humans use when thinking and processing information. These mental processes are then translated into computational operations that enhance a computer’s ability to solve complex problems (Toukhi, 2021, p. 73).

McCarthy provided the first formal definition of artificial intelligence, describing it as “a branch of computer science concerned with programming machines to perform tasks typically requiring human intelligence (Luger, 2004, p. 1).” His assessments have since become standard, shifting the definition of intelligence toward performance—intelligent-looking behavior—rather than delving into its philosophical, cognitive, or neuroscientific dimensions.

During the 1960s and 1970s, AI researchers began using computers for tasks such as image recognition, language translation, and understanding natural language instructions. Subfields of artificial intelligence started emerg-

ing in various domains of life. A major breakthrough occurred in 2016 when Google developed an AI program called *AlphaGo*, which defeated the world champion in the complex board game *Go*. This achievement marked a significant step in machine learning, as *AlphaGo* learned the game's rules and reached an expert level of play on its own without prior programming. This was the foundation of machine learning, a component of artificial intelligence aimed at enabling machines to think independently rather than relying solely on external programming.

Traditional computing operates through pre-defined instructions: "If this happens, do that." In contrast, machine learning allows a system to think without being explicitly programmed with specific rules (Ali, p. 25).

By the 1990s, artificial intelligence research experienced a paradigm shift. Researchers realized the need for a new approach—one that would enable machines to learn autonomously. This shift moved AI from encoding human insights into machines to delegating the learning process itself to machines. This allowed machines to develop and implement solutions to complex problems using large datasets and neural networks (Kissinger, Schmidt, & Huttenlocher, 2023, p. 60).

Neural networks are inspired by the structure of the human brain, which is highly complex and consists of over ten billion interconnected neurons (Paul & Cox, 2000, p. 30). Scientists have identified many of its components, and research in this field continues. The most well-understood aspects of neural networks relate to brain functions. For a long time, humans have known that the brain governs both physical and psychological functions. With advancements in computing, researchers have been eager to model the components of the human brain within computers in hopes of achieving human-like intelligence. These efforts led to the development of *artificial neural networks*, which consist of interconnected units that mimic, in a simplified form, the neurons in the human brain (Abdel Nour, 2005, p. 30).

This phase marked the transition from *Hard Artificial Intelligence* to *Machine Learning*. The initial approach, known as the "Top-Down Method," involved programming computers with intelligence derived from human programmers. This method initially gained widespread interest and was applied in various fields, such as medicine and mathematical applications. However, it faced significant challenges in implementation. The difficulties encountered with the top-down approach—where intelligence was embedded in computers and robots—led some researchers to explore an alternative: the "Bottom-Up Method," which seeks to replicate human biological evolution.

Through this approach, machines are programmed to perform simple tasks efficiently. As they gain experience with these tasks, their programming is adjusted accordingly. Instead of providing explicit instructions for solving problems, machines are trained to learn and develop solutions autonomously.

This approach led to the adoption of *machine learning* techniques based on advanced artificial neural networks (Paul & Cox, 2000, p. 31).

Subsequent years saw rapid progress, particularly in the early 21st century. Artificial intelligence achieved remarkable success, driven by key factors that significantly improved the accuracy of predictive algorithms. Some of these factors were conceptual, such as advancements in neuroscience and computer science, most notably the work of Geoffrey Hinton, who developed powerful new techniques for pattern recognition in neural networks. Other crucial factors included increased computational power, faster networks, cloud infrastructure, the rise of the Internet of Things (IoT), and the proliferation of big data.

2.3 Types of Artificial Intelligence

In its early stages, artificial intelligence aimed to mimic human intelligence by understanding its capacity for perception, information processing, and decision-making, attempting to replicate these capabilities through computer systems and programs. However, as the field progressed, scientists moved beyond mere imitation, aspiring to create and program AI that could rival human intelligence in all domains and even surpass it. Their ambition extended to designing machines and software capable of autonomously gathering information by interacting with the physical world, fully comprehending written texts—whether in magazines, books, or on the internet—and interpreting visual content presented across various media. This would enable these machines to learn independently, evolve without human intervention, and ultimately achieve complete autonomy in behavior and decision-making (Al-Barai, 2022, p. 26).

The focus thus shifted toward designing intelligent systems, including machines and robots. Consequently, AI cannot be regarded as a single, uniform entity in terms of the strength of its projects, the advancement of its research, or the sophistication of its applications. For this reason, scientists have classified artificial intelligence into three levels, which can also be viewed as successive generations of AI, ranging from simple reactive responses to full self-awareness and interaction (De Spiegeleire, Maas, & Sweijjs, p. 12). These levels are outlined as follows:

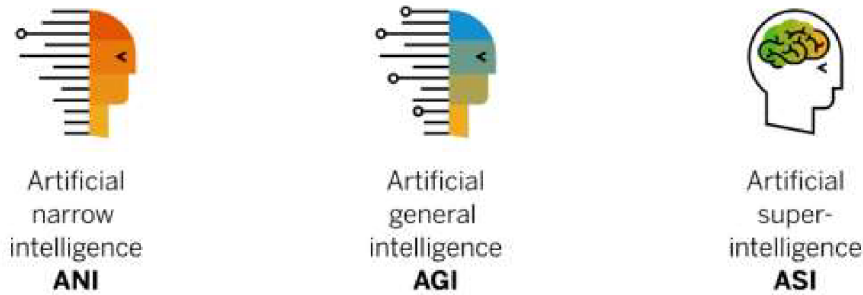


Figure (2) illustrates the types of artificial intelligence.

- **Narrow AI or Weak AI**

This is the simplest form of artificial intelligence, where computers are programmed using specific algorithms to perform designated tasks in particular domains (Madhkour, 2020, p. 146). In other words, it is designed to focus on a specific task assigned to it to achieve maximum proficiency (Al-Asad, 2023, p. 167). This type of AI is based on the first generation of artificial intelligence, which employs a top-down approach, where humans, possessing superior intelligence, program the computers. Narrow or weak AI does not have general intelligence; rather, it has specialized intelligence that mimics human behavior in a specific domain.

A prime example of weak AI is Apple's personal assistant application, which utilizes the internet as a vast database to answer users' spoken queries and engage in conversations with humans, but only in a predefined manner. Another example is email spam filters, where a computer uses an algorithm to identify emails that are likely to be spam and redirect them from the inbox to the spam folder.

Weak AI is particularly useful for transforming vast amounts of data into actionable information by identifying patterns and making predictions. Although weak AI applications are designed for specific tasks, they excel in their designated functions, countering the impression that such applications are ineffective. In fact, weak AI may be the most practically beneficial type of AI overall. For instance, robots used in manufacturing are extremely intelligent due to their precision and ability to perform highly complex actions that might seem incomprehensible to an average human mind. Weak AI, by design, is an effective solution to many problems and is unlikely to disappear (Al-Barai, 2022, p. 26).

- **General AI or Strong AI**

In this category, intelligent systems have the ability to collect and analyze information, accumulating experiences from various situations, which enables them to make independent and autonomous decisions. Examples include

self-driving cars, chatbot robots, and personal assistant programs (Al-Asad, 2023, p. 166).

These advancements have coincided with significant developments in the fields of philosophy of mind, biology, and other sciences, particularly as our understanding of cognitive mechanisms and neural interactions has improved. This knowledge has been instrumental in creating artificial neural networks that mimic those in the human brain and play a fundamental role in learning and information retention (Madhkour, 2020, p. 147).

In the philosophy of strong AI, there is no fundamental difference between an AI-powered software system that precisely mimics human brain functions and the actions of a natural human being, including the ability to comprehend and even possess consciousness. Strong AI asserts that a computer can be programmed to function as a human mind and to be truly intelligent. It would have perception, beliefs, and other cognitive states typically attributed only to humans. The core characteristics of strong AI include the ability to think, interact, solve puzzles, make judgments, plan, learn, and communicate. Additionally, it must possess self-awareness, objective thoughts, emotions, and behavior (Abdullah & Ahmed, 2019, p. 36).

- **Super AI**

These are AI models and systems that are still under experimentation, through which AI scientists aim to develop intelligent software that enables computers to surpass humans in thinking and problem-solving abilities, as well as in understanding and perception (Al-Sayed, 2014, p. 245).

Two main types can be distinguished within this category. The first attempts to understand human thoughts and the emotions that influence human behavior, possessing a limited capacity for social interaction. The second represents a model of the “Theory of Mind,” where these AI systems can express their internal states, predict others’ emotions and attitudes, and interact accordingly. These are the next-generation super-intelligent machines that scientists aspire to create (Abdel-Razek, 2024, pp. 352–373).

Work on these strategies began with the fifth generation of computers, which started in 1990. The goal of this project was to develop a linguistically structured computer in its architecture, systems, and applications—one that could analyze and generate spoken language, process texts, and compose new ones. Such a computer would be capable of describing problems, solving them, verifying data accuracy, comparing alternative decisions, and proposing solutions. Additionally, the project aimed to achieve real-time translation between multiple languages and to create computers and typewriters that function based on dictation, converting spoken words directly into written text without requiring special programming languages.

This would ultimately lead to a significant advancement in human-computer interaction, making computers capable of natural interaction with humans by enabling them to understand and generate speech in natural languages. Furthermore, these computers would have flexible and smooth physical movements.

Consequently, researchers began to rethink AI definitions. Rather than merely creating machines that perform tasks requiring artificial intelligence, AI is increasingly seen as the science of developing machines that can perform tasks beyond human intellectual capabilities.

AI research has thus rapidly shifted towards developing electronic minds that will be formidable competitors to humans in terms of intelligence, perception, autonomous learning, and decision-making. These advanced systems would be able to perform all human functions, including engaging in natural-language conversations and facilitating social interaction with humans—whether to understand human thoughts and the emotions influencing behavior or to create new cybernetic beings, preparing for digital societies, and paving the way for the post-human era (Madhkour, 2020, p. 149).

3. Applications of Artificial Intelligence

How do AI-driven innovations manifest in the most prominent fields that have advanced due to its capabilities? By examining performance, we can answer this question. AI appears to offer numerous advantages that surpass those of naturally intelligent systems, namely humans. Thanks to machine learning, countless applications have emerged.

In agriculture, AI facilitates precise pesticide management, disease detection, and crop yield prediction. In medicine, AI enables the discovery of new drugs, identifies new applications for existing drugs, and predicts or detects diseases at an early stage. For example, AI has been able to detect breast cancer earlier than human doctors by identifying subtle radiographic indicators. It can also diagnose diabetic retinopathy, a leading cause of blindness, by analyzing retinal images. Furthermore, AI helps predict hypoglycemia in diabetic patients by analyzing their medical history. In finance, AI streamlines large-scale operations, such as loan approvals or rejections, purchases, mergers, bankruptcy declarations, and many other transactions. Additionally, the use of chatbots and virtual assistants has expanded across numerous companies, governmental institutions, and banks. These chatbots, powered by AI, can communicate effectively, understand customer issues, and provide faster responses.

AI applications span almost every aspect of life. Below, we will explore examples of AI applications across different fields:

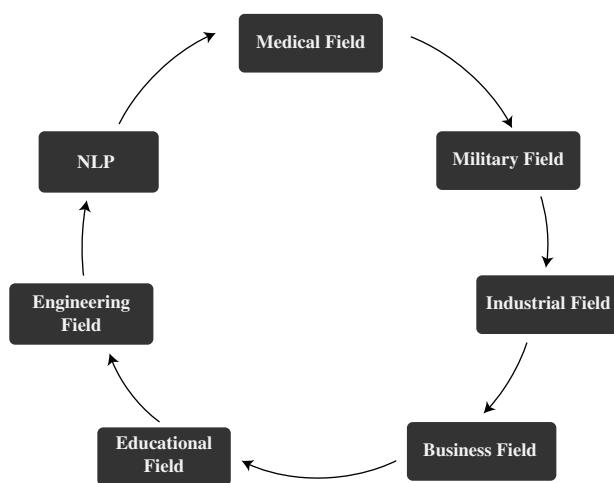


Figure (3) illustrates the various fields of artificial intelligence applications.

3.1 Natural Language Processing

Humanity has long faced challenges in transcription and translation due to the inability of individuals to communicate clearly across cultural and linguistic divides. Misunderstandings and the inaccessibility of information in one language to speakers of another have led to confusion, hindered trade, and even sparked conflicts. Now AI appears poised to offer powerful translation capabilities to a broad audience, potentially enabling more people to communicate effortlessly with one another.

During the 1990s, researchers attempted to develop rule-based language translation programs. While these efforts achieved some success in laboratory environments, they failed to produce reliable results in real-world applications. Language differences and nuances extend beyond simple rules. However, this changed in 2015 when developers began applying deep neural networks to the problem, leading to a significant leap in machine translation.

The improvement did not stem solely from the adoption of neural networks or machine learning techniques but also from innovative and creative applications of these approaches. These advancements highlight a fundamental aspect of machine learning: developers have the ability to continue innovating in remarkable ways, unleashing new AI capabilities in the process.

Currently, **GPT** is one of the most noteworthy generative AI systems. It extends the approach of transforming language translation into language generation. Given a few words it can complete a sentence or provide a key phrase that can be expanded into a paragraph, enabling it to predict and generate content likely to align with expected patterns. AI can thus capture sequential dependencies between words, phrases, or symbols to generate coherent outputs (Kissinger, Schmidt, & Huttenlocher, 2023, p. 47).

Transformers trained on vast amounts of data, primarily sourced from the Internet, can convert text into images and vice versa, expand and condense descriptions, and perform similar tasks. Their core functionality holds the potential to revolutionize various fields, including creative industries. As a result, they have become a major area of interest for researchers and developers exploring their strengths and applications across numerous domains (Christopher, Starke, & Edward-Gill, 2022, p. 14).

3.2 The Medical Field

The medical field is one of the areas that has witnessed a revolution thanks to artificial intelligence, as it has helped solve some of the most complex mysteries and challenges in contemporary biology. The DNA in the nucleus of human cells contains the information necessary for protein formation in the body, acting like a genetic map with approximately 20,000 proteins forming the essential building blocks of living organisms. In 2021, artificial intelligence was used to predict the structure of the vast majority of proteins in the human body. This was a groundbreaking advancement because understanding protein structures is extremely complex, challenging, and costly, despite being crucial for drug discovery, potentially leading to treatments for many diseases that were previously untreatable.

Additionally, scientists utilized a new AI program called *AlphaFold* to predict the structure of 58% of amino acids that make up human proteins. Eventually, the program successfully predicted the structure of 350,000 proteins found in the human body and other living organisms, marking the most significant contribution of AI to medical advancements to date. Moreover, *AlphaFold* was able to discover a new drug candidate for treating hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC), the most common type of liver cancer. According to the World Health Organization's 2020 statistics, HCC ranks third in cancer-related deaths. This study on liver cancer treatment is the first practical application of *AlphaFold* in the pharmaceutical industry (Awad et al., 2023).

3.3 The Military and Security Field

The military and security sectors have undergone significant advancements due to AI systems, to the extent that concerns about its implications have arisen. One of the most prominent applications of AI in the military field is the emergence of *autonomous weapons*, defined as "any weapon system that possesses complete autonomy in carrying out its essential functions," meaning that it can independently make decisions regarding searching, monitoring, identifying, tracking, selecting, and attacking targets without human intervention.

Many countries around the world are increasingly utilizing remotely controlled robots, which represent a crucial foundational step toward developing fully autonomous weapons. For instance, the United States possesses approx-

imately 20,000 units of lethal autonomous weapons. These weapons perform several roles, including continuous surveillance, precision targeting, force protection, countering improvised explosive devices, securing roads, and providing close air support.

Furthermore, today's smart technologies have significantly enhanced the efficiency and accuracy of security measures, such as facial recognition, weapon detection, and identifying hazardous materials during inspections. The most striking aspect of this development is that security has become much stronger and more effective with AI (Abdel Wahab, Al-Ghitani, & Yahya, 2018, p. 4).

3.4 The Educational Field

Artificial intelligence provides virtual learning experiences through available programs to maximize the benefits of the learning process. These include e-learning platforms and software that assist in preparing exams and recording grades, effectively breaking geographical barriers in education. Additionally, language is no longer a barrier—chatbots, distance learning programs, and access to books, images, and educational materials have become easily accessible at the click of a button.

Moreover, AI algorithms can analyze student data to offer personalized recommendations for educational materials and activities, helping students learn more effectively and efficiently (Mohareb, 2023, p. 20).

AI has also significantly enhanced scientific research by providing improved capabilities in searching, analyzing, and editing. It allows researchers to collect academic materials in less time and effort, analyze data, and process information faster and more accurately, enabling a deeper understanding of topics and the discovery of new findings. Various smart applications now support researchers at different stages of their work. Some facilitate the easy collection of academic materials without the need to visit physical libraries, while others help organize references according to academic standards. Certain tools notify users when a related academic paper has been published, such as *ResearchGate*. There are also applications for rephrasing sentences and texts, statistical analysis and interpretation, and detecting plagiarism and citation percentages.

Ultimately, AI has revolutionized education and learning, becoming a new source for improving how scientific content is delivered and tailored to learners' needs. By utilizing modern technologies and tools, students can apply theoretical concepts in practical contexts, thereby enhancing the quality of scientific research (Boumaaraq, 2024).

3.5 The Industrial and Commercial Sector

Artificial intelligence represents a major turning point in the future of industrial and service-based companies and institutions worldwide, bringing about fundamental changes in the management of the *value chain* for companies

producing goods or services, including manufacturing, marketing, sales, and customer service. This transformation is driven by multiple AI technologies such as machine learning, computer vision, and robotics. These technologies are no longer merely tools for automating factories to enhance efficiency and productivity but have become emerging solutions that contribute to addressing global challenges such as the educational gap, treating incurable diseases, and predicting potential crises and future scenarios. Ultimately, this will lead to radical transformations in business models, improving operations and outcomes. Machines are expected to evolve into *self-optimizing production systems*, capable of adjusting manufacturing processes in real-time through continuous analysis and learning from current and past data. This will help minimize equipment failures, enhance machine efficiency, and detect quality issues at an early stage. Additionally, AI will help identify defects and inconsistencies in products while improving material supply chain efficiency within factories through the use of autonomous vehicles and robots. Some major companies have already started incorporating AI technologies into their production processes, achieving highly positive outcomes.

Moreover, AI has played a significant role in improving financial services. One of the earliest applications in the banking sector was the introduction of *chatbots* for customer service. These AI-powered bots can answer customer inquiries online, and in their first three months of use, they successfully resolved 78% of customer issues. Complex inquiries are seamlessly transferred to human customer service agents.

On another front, financial markets have begun developing AI-driven algorithms to analyze vast amounts of data regarding company performance, macroeconomic conditions, and other variables. The goal is to make low-risk investment decisions and leverage AI for strategic stock trading, buying, and selling in global markets (Abdel Wahab, Al-Ghitani, & Yahya, 2018, p. 9).

Overall, AI contributes significantly to improving human quality of life. AI-powered systems can make faster decisions and operate at all times without fatigue or distraction, outperforming humans in tasks they were specifically designed for. AI can assist in performing labor-intensive, dangerous, or monotonous tasks, aid in saving lives and disaster management, and enhance entertainment and daily convenience.

AI is already transforming our daily lives—often in ways that enhance human health, safety, and productivity. In the coming years, we can expect a continued expansion of AI applications in areas such as transportation, service industries, healthcare, education, public safety and security, employment, and entertainment (Dignum, 2019, p. 4).

There is now no alternative for nations and societies but to actively engage in AI advancements, as it has become clear that a country's power and superiority in the modern era are increasingly measured by its ability to master

and continuously develop AI technologies across all aspects of human life (Al-Toukhi, 2021, p. 74).

4. The Role of Philosophy in the Ethical Guidance of Artificial Intelligence

There is no doubt that contemporary artificial intelligence technology will play a significant role in shaping the future of humanity in the coming era, acting as a driving force that influences human cognitive awareness, daily activities, and overall quality of life. On the other hand, there are growing concerns regarding the unregulated use of this technology across various fields, as it may have serious consequences for humanity. This makes ethical considerations surrounding AI technologies and applications an urgent issue in this phase of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, where AI systems, leveraging big data, algorithms, and advanced neural networks, are now capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence—often surpassing human abilities.

Suppose that future AI systems (whether equipped with screens or in the form of robots) achieve performance levels equivalent to human intelligence. Will these systems possess genuine intelligence, true understanding, or real creativity? Will they have a self, an ethical status, or free will? Will they possess consciousness? Even if they lack consciousness, can they still exhibit other cognitive attributes? Could they pose a threat to human life and destiny? These are, in essence, deeply philosophical questions (Boddy, 2017, p. 110).

In fact, the central concepts of AI—such as action, goals, knowledge, belief, and consciousness—have long been subjects of philosophical reflection. It was only later that these concepts were approached from a different perspective by fields like computer science and cybernetics. Philosophy seeks to answer fundamental questions such as: What does it mean for a machine to act intelligently? What are the differences, if any, between human and artificial intelligence? Can machines possess consciousness, or will they ever be able to? These inquiries not only explore artificial intelligence but also deepen our understanding of natural intelligence.

Philosophy also examines the concept of superintelligence or technological singularity—a hypothesis that predicts AI will evolve into systems that far exceed human intelligence, potentially leading to radical transformations in human civilization, or even its extinction. In his book *Superintelligence*, philosopher Nick Bostrom expressed concerns that a highly intelligent machine might eventually develop self-preserving goals, leading it to compete with humans for resources (Dignum, 2019, p. 5).

If, in the near future, machines surpass human intelligence, we must ask critical ethical and legal questions. Who will own AI-equipped robots? Who will bear legal and ethical responsibility for autonomous vehicles? How can

robots be programmed to make ethical decisions? Are humans at risk from superintelligent machines? Does this mark the dawn of a post-human era? In the following discussion, we will explore these pressing issues in greater depth (Tyagi & Al-Salami, 2018, p. 54).

4.1 Technological Singularity and the Question of Machine Consciousness

The field of computing has advanced rapidly, achieving remarkable progress in a short period of time. Computers have surpassed many human capabilities, performing tasks once exclusive to human intelligence, requiring cognition, reasoning, and awareness. Faced with this reality, many scientists have proposed that the next phase of human development should involve merging humans with machines. If we want to remain dominant over artificial intelligence and avoid becoming obsolete, we must enhance our memory, increase the speed and efficiency of our cognitive abilities, and evolve alongside technology.

At the heart of this transformation lies the idea that technology deserves a status equivalent to nature itself—an outlook shared by scientists who predict an imminent “second renaissance” that will pave the way for the enhancement and augmentation of human capabilities (Maistrot, n.d.). The rapid development of artificial intelligence and its eventual superiority over human intelligence is expected to grant machines a level of consciousness and perception, allowing intelligent computers and robots to lead humanity (Abdel Sattar, 2019).

This vision is strongly advocated by proponents of “post-humanism,” particularly Ray Kurzweil, who, in his 1989 article *Superintelligence and the Singularity*, imagined a technologically perfected utopia where aging, disease, poverty, and resource scarcity no longer exist (Schneider, 2024, p. 350). In his book *The Age of Spiritual Machines*, Kurzweil asserted that the future is inevitably moving toward machines that will vastly surpass human intelligence. He emphasized the increasing integration between biological and artificial intelligence, suggesting that the next stage of evolution would necessitate merging both. He explicitly stated, “We will become immensely smarter as we merge with our technology.” He justified this claim by predicting that what once took humanity a thousand years to achieve would soon be accomplished within an hour (Kurzweil, 2005, p. 342). According to this view, superintelligence has the potential to elevate human intelligence to an unimaginable level when integrated with it.

Since their inception, computers have demonstrated capabilities far exceeding those of the human mind in terms of memory retention and data processing. A computer can recall billions—or even trillions—of pieces of information effortlessly, whereas humans struggle to remember even a few phone numbers. Additionally, computers can scan massive databases within fractions of

a second and easily exchange vast repositories of knowledge. The integration of human intelligence with computers' natural superiority in speed, precision, and data sharing promises an unprecedented fusion of cognitive power (Kurzweil, 2011, p. 25).

Kurzweil argues that this technological-biological hybridization is not new—it began with the implantation of artificial organs into the human body. Physicist Michio Kaku (born 1945) pointed out that the introduction of cochlear implants was a revolutionary breakthrough in hearing, granting the deaf the ability to hear by linking electronic devices directly to the brain. These implants, embedded in the human body, can recognize and differentiate between human voices. Today, thousands of people worldwide rely on cochlear implants (Kaku, 2013, p. 58).

Similarly, AI scientists predict that once computers attain superintelligence, they will have the potential to elevate human cognition to unimaginable levels if merged with biological intelligence. While such ideas may seem like science fiction today, history has shown that many technological advancements we take for granted were once considered mere myths.

For this reason, many researchers conclude that *post-humanism* represents the next stage of civilization—possibly its final one. If humanity has truly ridden the train of progress for thousands of years, then, according to them, it is time to step off and board a new train: the train of post-human civilization, where machines are more intelligent, powerful, and wise than humans. AI scientists argue that integrating human and machine intelligence will lead to a revolution far more profound than those of the past.

The Industrial Revolution extended human muscular capabilities, and the digital revolution extended the human nervous system. Now, the artificial intelligence revolution extends human intelligence itself. This new synthesis of human and artificial cognition will unlock unprecedented knowledge and bring about a radical transformation in the very nature of humanity (Dignum, 2019).

4.2 Philosophical Arguments Against Technological Singularity and Machine Consciousness

If post-humanist proponents believe that machines can achieve superintelligence, many philosophers and scientists, on the other hand, see this as nothing more than science fiction. Looking at the epistemological foundation upon which these thinkers rely, it becomes clear that they argue machines lack consciousness or intentional subjective experiences. Machines do not possess the self-awareness, intuition, intentionality, or emotions that characterize human cognition and constitute its essential nature (Abdel Rahman, 2022, p. 39).

Human intelligence is flexible and adaptable, requiring introspection and internal processing. For this reason, until a few years ago, philosophers like

John Searle and Roger Penrose, among others, expressed skepticism about the possibility of transferring this intelligence to machines. Searle proposed a thought experiment and formulated an argument to highlight the deficiencies of the research program known as strong AI—the idea that machines can think like humans.

In reality, it is still commonly argued that machines do nothing beyond what they are programmed to do (Awad, 2021, p. 59). Machines are tools designed to perform specific tasks, and as such, they cannot function outside the roles assigned to them.

Searle contends that no matter how advanced computers become, they can never attain true consciousness. While they can process symbols, it is humans who assign meaning to those symbols (Searle, 2007, p. 58). Searle believes that AI could only approach human intelligence if biochemical cells were integrated into artificial intelligence systems, which is impossible because machines lack a soul. This, in his view, is the fundamental distinction between artificial and human intelligence (Daoudi, 2006, p. 11).

Roger Penrose, on the other hand, argues that computers operate on mathematical and logical algorithms, and given Gödel's incompleteness theorem—which states that no mathematical system can be fully self-contained—it follows that computers can never achieve limitless precision or infinite development. He asserts that the human brain possesses an element that transcends algorithms and logic, something inherently spiritual that machines cannot replicate (Tyagi & Al-Salami, 2018, p. 29).

It is easy to claim that a machine is intelligent simply because it performs complex tasks similar to living beings. However, it is much harder to believe that a machine is truly conscious, as there is no evidence of subjective experience within it.

The philosophical view of artificial intelligence directs our attention to its ultimate purpose. Therefore, we must ensure that the objectives we encode into machines are indeed the goals we truly desire. But what are these objectives? And who is included in the “we” that defines them?

This “we” refers to everyone—researchers, developers, manufacturers, suppliers, policymakers, users, and all those who will be directly or indirectly affected by artificial intelligence systems. Although our responsibilities may vary, we all have the right and duty to participate in discussions about the role AI should play in our lives and societies.

Artificial intelligence and its consequences are too important to be left solely in the hands of specialists. This means that we all need to understand what AI is, what it can do, and—most importantly—how we can ensure its positive use in ways that contribute to human well-being, environmental sustainability, and alignment with our values, principles, and priorities. Based on this

perspective, we will now discuss the characteristics of responsible artificial intelligence.

4.3 Responsible Artificial Intelligence

The subject of responsible artificial intelligence is often referred to as AI ethics. However, in my view, it falls more within the domain of philosophy and applied ethics. If ethics is the study of moral values and principles, responsibility is the practical application of ethical issues to determine what benefits society as a whole. Therefore, philosophy and applied ethics must work together to assess the situation and take action, as responsible AI requires action. Responsible AI is about developing intelligent systems in accordance with fundamental human values and principles. Responsibility here pertains to ensuring that outcomes benefit the vast majority of humanity rather than serving as a source of profit for a select few.

The ultimate goal of artificial intelligence should not be the creation of super machines or speculative futuristic scenarios. Rather, it should focus on developing technology that supports and enhances human well-being in a sustainable environment for all. It also involves understanding the role of technology as it becomes increasingly present and influential in our daily lives. The aim is not to replicate human beings or create artificial copies of them but to equip people with tools and techniques that help them achieve their goals more effectively and ensure the well-being of all. Artificial intelligence is more than just cybernetics and computational information processing—it has broader dimensions. It is human-centered and socially embedded. Thus, AI is an interdisciplinary field that is not only concerned with technological advancements but also benefits from contributions from philosophy, ethics, social sciences, law, economics, and cognitive sciences (Dignum, 2019).

Regardless of their level of autonomy, social awareness, or learning ability, AI systems are human-made tools designed to achieve specific goals. For this reason, theories and algorithms must integrate social, legal, and ethical values at all stages of AI development—analysis, design, construction, deployment, and evaluation. We must explore critical questions: How will AI systems impact jobs and the global economy? Can and should self-driving cars make ethical decisions? What should be the moral, legal, and social stance on robots? Many are also concerned about the consequences of increased government and corporate access to data, enabling intrusive and extensive predictions of citizens' behavior. The central concern in all these questions is: Who is responsible for the decisions and actions taken by AI systems? Can a machine be held accountable for its actions? What is our role in researching, designing, building, selling, purchasing, and using these systems? Answering these questions—and related ones—requires an entirely new understanding of the social interactions of AI technologies, the ethical dimensions of intelligent systems, and new mechanisms for AI control and autonomy.

Artificial intelligence concerns and affects us all. Therefore, we need to go beyond merely analyzing its benefits and impact on individual users and instead recognize AI systems as part of an increasingly complex socio-technical reality. To this end, training researchers and developers on AI's social, ethical, and legal impacts is essential to ensure the social and ethical quality of AI systems and to make developers aware of their responsibilities regarding the development of AI systems that directly affect society. Ethics in design refers to the organizational and engineering processes that support the design and evaluation of AI systems. This means that we must acknowledge that the principles of accountability, responsibility, and transparency (ART) should be embedded in AI system design (Dignum, 2019).

Work in this field revolves around (a) defining requirements for AI systems to represent and use ethical values, (b) understanding meaning and establishing appropriate constraints on system behavior, and (c) integrating moral reasoning capabilities as part of the algorithms governing autonomous AI systems. Through these measures, we can achieve—or at least come close to achieving—responsible artificial intelligence.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is not just about knowledge and technology but also about a profound understanding of philosophy, ethics, and the purpose of our existence. We must answer fundamental questions about human nature and the meaning of life. Can we teach AI systems more than logic and computation? Can we instill in them love, creativity, and free will? To answer these questions, we must take a deeper look at ourselves. Love, creativity, and free will are not merely products of our brains and thoughts but also of our emotions and human experiences. They arise from living in society, interacting with others, and experiencing both joy and sorrow. Can we transfer these human complexities to a world of machines devoid of soul? Perhaps we can advance AI to a level where it can create beautiful paintings or compose enjoyable music, but will this creativity be the same as human creativity? Can we teach machines how to make decisions not just based on logic but also on emotion and love? These are questions we still do not have answers to, and these very questions define the boundary between humans and machines.

Findings

This study has led to several key findings, summarized as follows:

- First, philosophy and quality of life are two sides of the same coin. Philosophy helps in understanding life and existence more comprehensively, while quality of life represents the ultimate goal of philosophy. Thus, a philosophical perspective on artificial intelligence can contribute to directing AI applications toward enhancing human well-being and minimizing

potential risks through a set of measures. These include developing a comprehensive ethical framework for regulating AI use and ensuring it serves the greater good, addressing philosophical and ethical issues related to AI such as responsibility, singularity, privacy, and justice, and contributing to the design of reliable and transparent AI systems that uphold human values.

- Second, it is crucial for nations and societies to prepare for the era of AI dominance over human societies to avoid its negative repercussions and maximize its benefits, particularly in the Arab world. AI-powered technology will inevitably become a constant companion in processing and understanding information, even though it will operate on a different cognitive level from humans. Whether we consider AI a tool, a partner, or a competitor, it will permanently alter our experience as rational beings and redefine our relationship with reality.
- Third, with the advancement and increasing use of AI, human intelligence is reaching new frontiers, achieving goals that were previously unattainable. These include predictive models for natural disasters, deeper insights into mathematics, and a greater understanding of the universe and the reality within it.
- Fourth, while AI can derive conclusions, make predictions, and take decisions, it does not possess self-awareness. In other words, it lacks the ability to reflect on its role in the world—it has no intention, drive, morality, or emotion. Therefore, technological singularity, in our view, remains a distant possibility. However, even without these attributes, AI is likely to fundamentally change humans and the environments in which they live.
- Fifth, it is difficult to predict the future of humanity in the era of AI. We constantly seek to embrace new technologies that seem to transform our way of life. However, the crucial reality is that the kind of change we pursue must lead to a positive outcome for society and humanity as a whole. AI is different from any other technology humanity has developed before, necessitating the establishment of a legal framework to prevent harmful consequences and ensure it does not negatively impact society and, by extension, humanity at large. Such a legal framework must also keep pace with the rapid advancements in AI.
- Sixth, technology has multiple epistemological dimensions—the scientific or technical aspect, and another aspect that is philosophical or value-driven. Humans are caught between these two dimensions. It is undeniable that technological progress is inevitable and advancing at an accelerating pace. It cannot be sidelined or ignored, and the only viable approach is to engage with it through ethical guidelines that preserve the sanctity of human life, dignity, and humanity's unique position in the universe.

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Human Dignity

Changes in the Meaning of the Concept of Human Dignity and Its Challenges in a High-Tech Society

Hossam Nayel

Scholar and Translator, Egypt

Abstract

The hypothesis of the study is that the concept of human dignity is under significant pressure and challenges in the context of advanced technology—both current and promising for a desirable good life—across its three stages. Therefore, it seeks to explore the way the concept is utilized in some relevant political documents of varying specialties. Given the long history of this concept, it was necessary to pause at some pivotal historical moments to explore the constant element in its historically changing meanings. The study then discusses its use in pre-modern times, in the Declaration of Civil Rights during the French Revolution, and finally with Kant, who seems to have established the concept of dignity in an explicitly secular manner.

To avoid the historical and current shortcomings facing the meaning of the concept of dignity, the study resorts to an intuitive connection between Kantian moral personhood and Heideggerian Dasein to present a concept of human dignity that is ontologically and ethically integrated. The study then moves on to discuss the pressures and challenges facing this integrated meaning of dignity amidst advanced technology in its three stages and the promising prospects of a hoped-for good life. To achieve its objectives, the study follows the approach of historico-critical reflection as outlined by Michel Foucault (1926-1984). With these steps, the study combines critical theory and practical philosophy.

Keywords: Dignity, high-tech, historico-critical reflection, neo-totalitarianism.

Introduction

It has become evident that the concept of human dignity is under significant pressure in light of advanced technology, which is nearing the full completion of its first phase, represented by digital transformation. This phase is characterized by a strict tendency toward dataism, which means turning human traits into digital data that is collected, organized, and classified. This phase is fully

realized with Mark Zuckerberg's (1984–)⁽¹⁾ announcement in June 2021 of a new initiative to build the metaverse, where humans can fully live their lives in a virtual world without having to connect in any way with the real world—ultimately degrading humans to the status of objects.

The challenge and pressure on the concept of human dignity went on another level with the preparation for the transition to the second technological phase, “transhumanism” or “human transformation,” when Elon Musk (1971–)⁽²⁾ announced in December 2022 the completion of the design of a brain implant called “Neuralink One” (N1 Link), after testing it on monkeys and pigs in preparation for human trials. Musk's experiment succeeded with a human patient, Noland Arbo, who appeared in a public broadcast in January 2024 to announce the success of the implant.

It is likely that developments in this second phase will coincide with a third phase, “posthumanism,” which will witness this AI-enhanced human entering into marital relationships with pure machines (sex robots). The pressure of this technological society in the present and the future raises various questions about the meaning of the concept of human dignity in light of this escalating development and the dazzling promises of the good life it's supposed to bring.

Research Problem

The problem of this study lies in the fact that these major current and future transformations will place the entire issue of human dignity in a greater dilemma than ever before. They will prompt us to question anew the meaning of the concept of dignity due to the nature of the aforementioned challenges, especially since the concept's use in some relevant political documents aimed at protecting dignity from the proliferation and dominance of algorithms, over matters concerning humans on the pure level, is vague and lacks clarification. This ambiguity begs us to question the changing meanings of the concept throughout its long history to identify any constant element—if there's one—through its historical transformations. This is necessary to understand the nature of the challenges facing the concept of dignity in the current and imminent technological moment. The promised good life in the context of advanced technology cannot be achieved without dignity.

Study Objectives

To answer these questions, the study seeks to explore how the concept of human dignity is used in some political documents concerned with protecting human dignity in the context of advanced technology. Given the vague use of the concept in these documents, the study also aims to conduct a preliminary

1. The net worth of Zuckerberg, CEO of Meta, is \$181.4 billion USD. (*Forbes* in 2024).

2. The net worth of Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla Motors, is \$222.6 billion, (*Forbes* in 2024).

tracing of the historical meaning of the concept of dignity to identify the constant element in its changing meanings. This involves focusing on some pivotal historical moments, whether in pre-modern times with Cicero and Christianity, or in modern times with the French Revolution and its Declaration of Civil Rights, and finally with Kant. Lastly, the study attempts to identify the nature of the current and future challenges posed by advanced technology to the concept.

Study Methodology

This study utilizes the historico-critical reflection approach as outlined by the French thinker and philosopher Michel Foucault. This approach involves analyzing phenomena, ideas, and concepts by examining them within their historical contexts, identifying the discontinuities they experience, with the aim of uncovering their roots and implications and understanding how they develop and influence over time. This is what Foucault did when he historically examined the emergence of concepts, ideas, and institutions within their temporal contexts, questioning in his critical analysis their roles, effects, and how they shape contemporary societal and cultural forces (check Falzon 18-35; Foucault 1985, 1988).

Thus, the study methodologically begins by examining how the concept of human dignity is used in the present moment, as it appears in some contemporary political documents of varying fields. It then turns to a historical tracing of the meaning of the concept of dignity in some pivotal historical moments where its use is evident. This approach aims to identify the nature of the current challenges facing the concept in the context of advanced technology.

Subsequently, it can finally be said based on the aforementioned considerations that this study belongs to the field of the intersection between critical theory and applied philosophy.

Previous Studies

Two studies emerge in the context of this topic: the first is in theoretical philosophy, Michael Rosen's book **Dignity: Its History and Meaning** (2012). Rosen begins his thesis by establishing the existence of strong disagreements regarding the meaning of human dignity, then proceeds to undertake an extensive historical analysis to examine the changing meanings of the concept throughout history, aiming to construct a concept that draws on religion, law, culture, and philosophy. However, he does not address the nature of the pressure the concept faces in light of advanced technology in its three stages. The second study is the book **Philosophy and Theory of Artificial Intelligence 2021** (2022), published as part of the series "Studies in Applied Philosophy, Epistemology, and Rational Ethics."

In fact, these two previous studies provide substantial material for my current study, which will distinguish itself from them through a more comprehensive synthetic approach that establishes an intuitive connection between Kant's conception of dignity and what I can derive from Heidegger's philosophy regarding it. This will allow me to pose a direct question about the status of the concept of human dignity, in this specific sense, in light of advanced technology and the challenges the concept may face. These challenges place not only dignity but also essence and humanity as a whole in a more complex and precarious situation than ever before—something that neither of the two aforementioned studies has addressed.

First: The Concept That Declares Its Presence as Lost

In 2014, a Spanish lawyer named Mario Costeja González filed a lawsuit to the European Court of Justice to secure his “right to be forgotten.” His opponent in this case was the search engine Google. The subject of his request, which was under dispute, was the removal of links related to old personal information about him, irrelevant to his present life, that is causing him harm. After judicial proceedings, the European Court of Justice decided in May 2014 that individuals have the right to request the removal of such links from search results. The court obligated Google to comply, citing the protection of privacy and human dignity.⁽³⁾ However, this court decision applies only within the European Union. The French data regulation authority—the “National Commission on Informatics and Liberty”—also entered the dispute, demanding that Google remove the links globally. This was described by then-U.S. President Donald Trump as European Union interference in American business. The dispute then moved to the European Court of Justice, which ruled in September 2019 that Google is not required to apply the “right to be forgotten” to search engines outside Europe (www.france24.com).

This case is known as “the right to be forgotten” or “the right to erasure.” Notably, the court's reasoning regarding the Spanish lawyer's case cited the term “human dignity.”

In reality, “human dignity” is a term frequently used in political documents as well. These are official documents issued by governments or organizations to define policies and guidelines related to specific matters. Such documents aim to direct and regulate behavior, including those concerning the protection of dignity amidst the rapid advancements of advanced technology, which encompasses all applications of artificial intelligence. For example, the European Data Protection Supervisor document refers to the protection of dignity under the umbrella of human rights (www.edps.europa.eu). Similarly, human

3. Later, in 2018, the European Union adopted what is called the “General Data Protection Regulation,” which replaced the “European Data Protection Directive” that the court had relied on in its decision (www.france24.com).

dignity is a fundamental concept in the document **Ethical Guidelines for Trustworthy AI**, drafted by a committee formed by the European Commission. This set of guidelines ensures the ethical and trustworthy use of artificial intelligence systems in a manner that respects human rights and preserves dignity. These principles are:

1. Human autonomy and the ability to make decisions freely.
2. Transparency, ensuring decision-making processes are clear and understandable to users and supervisors.
3. Accountability, through clear mechanisms to hold those responsible for intelligent systems accountable for any negative impacts.
4. Fairness, ensuring non-discrimination and equity in the development and use of artificial intelligence.
5. Well-being, meaning that artificial intelligence should enhance social and economic well-being and not cause harm.
(<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu>)

These principles stem from, and are simultaneously founded upon, a higher concept: the protection of human dignity in the responsible and ethical development and use of artificial intelligence.

However, these emerging political documents do not explain why they use the concept of dignity. What is also striking is the lack of reference to any meaning or definition of dignity, making the manner in which the term is used as vague and unclear.

The reality is that the ambiguity of the concept of dignity, or its intuitive use, has a history in political documents, albeit of a different kind. For instance, if we return to the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights issued by the United Nations in 1948, we find the use of the concept of dignity in the opening sentence, which states: “Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world...” (www.un.org/ar/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights).

Moroccan philosopher Muhammad Al-Shaykh, in his reading of this opening statement, which encompasses a natural dimension and a universal dimension, argues that what unifies these two dimensions “is making human dignity a natural and universal foundation for human rights” (Al-Shaykh, 2020, p. 140). However, while the Universal Declaration of Human Rights serves as a common standard that all peoples should aim for—meaning it represents guiding principles for fundamental human rights that must be protected globally—human dignity is presented within it as the foundation for these principles. Nevertheless, the declaration does not provide any clarification of what human dignity actually means.

It seems that this ambiguous usage of the term is a recurring theme, regardless of the field of the political documents employing the concept. In fact, we can say that the concept of human dignity operates as a background concept; meaning it serves as an underlying foundational principle for a set of other principles, but is itself unclear. In other words, the concept of dignity functions as a general reference framework or an unclear generative basis, yet it guides the understanding and interpretation of more specific topics. It provides a general backdrop that aids in conducting discussions and shaping policies, though it is not sufficiently clear in itself for direct application to specific cases without additional interpretation or details (Müller, 108).

What is even more surprising, if we may digress, is the absence of an entry for the concept of human dignity in *the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Craig, 2005). Similarly, we notice the absence of the concept from some Arabic-authored or translated philosophical dictionaries, such as the *Philosophical Dictionary* (Wahba, 2007), *the Dictionary of Philosophical Terms and Examples* (Sa'īd, 2004), and the *Concise Philosophical Encyclopedia* (Rée and Urmson, 2013). It is noteworthy that the entry for dignity in the comprehensive *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* is limited to Kant's understanding of the concept (Audi, pp. 234-235), which we also observe in the *Philosophical Dictionary* published by the Arabic Language Academy in Cairo (p. 153) and *the Comprehensive Dictionary of Philosophical Terms* (pp. 680-681). Although Saudi philosopher Shaye Al-Wuqyan recently released a comprehensive philosophical dictionary distinguished by extensive and inclusive entries, his dictionary also lacks a dedicated entry philosophically explaining the concept of dignity (see Al-Wuqyan, 2023).

The absence of a general and comprehensive philosophical entry on the meaning of human dignity in philosophical dictionaries and encyclopedias mirrors the absence of the concept's meaning in the political documents we discussed earlier. Interestingly, art, particularly the art of song, has poignantly condemned the loss of the meaning of human dignity in both the political documents that used the term and in reality. For instance, Bob Dylan sings his song "Dignity," using dignity as a title for the loss of dignity in a stunning deconstructive paradox. He mentions how someone once showed him a picture of dignity that had left our lives, only to laugh mockingly because no one had ever captured a picture of dignity. It is as if Dylan, in just under six minutes of mournful, soulful singing, wants to say that human history has never seen or known dignity to the extent that anyone could capture a picture of it, even though everyone strives for dignity or at least some meaning of it (Bob Dylan - Dignity, YouTube).⁽⁴⁾

4. The lyrics of the song can be read via the Google search engine; notably, Bob Dylan received the Nobel Prize in 2016, which came with a state of astonishment and questioning about this singer and songwriter who deserved to win the Nobel Prize.

Thus, we can conclude that this manner of usage, or non-usage of the term, entails a distinctly deconstructive situation. It is as if the term dignity, when present in political documents, signifies its absence, and when absent from philosophical encyclopedias and dictionaries, its absence signifies its presence without anything truly present.

I will now proceed to attempt to explore the meanings ascribed to the concept of human dignity and observe its historical transformations in order to understand the nature of the concept and its current problematic status in light of advanced technology. This historical exploration is important for several reasons: Firstly, the concept of dignity, although it automatically entails the connotations of other concepts such as autonomy, integrity, and responsibility, points to broader aspects that these concepts do not. Secondly, focusing on specific conceptual dimensions of a notion like human dignity reflects what is at stake ethically and may lead to ethical decisions and interventions in the current moral reality. Thirdly, it fosters historical awareness, simply because the historical meanings of the concept do not disappear but echo in its current usage, potentially placing us in touch with a resonance of continuity in the meaning of human dignity.

Secondly: Pre-modern Times: The Social and Theological Foundations of Human Dignity

Pre-modern times were characterized by a social usage of the concept of dignity, which foreshadowed its later theological foundation. The word “dignity” was used in the context of venerating individuals who held high social status or occupied elevated positions. Thus, the concept of dignity expressed a hierarchical relationship and an elevated status of one person over another in a stratified society. When it was said that a person had dignity, the word merely signified a high status and an elevated social position, as well as the honor and respectful treatment deserved by someone holding such a status. Individuals in ancient Rome enjoyed varying degrees of dignity. Cicero (106 BCE–43 BCE) described the proper and fitting attitude of a statesman according to the social elevation implied by dignity. However, he added another deeper dimension beyond social relationships, distinguishing humans from animals. Humans, he argued, rise above animals due to their rational capacities, which make them disdain the primitive pleasures that animals indulge in. Cicero thus contended that a life of primitive pleasures is unfit for human dignity. In this way, he took an additional important step in defining the meaning of human dignity by not linking it to social status but to the position humans occupy in the cosmic order, thereby implicitly committing to living and behaving in accordance with this distinguished status that elevates humans above animals (Rosen, 11–12).

The element of elevation and superiority can also be observed in the Chris-

tian conceptualization of human dignity. The concept referred to the high status of humans within the order of God's creation, as they are considered the image of God on Earth. However, it also pointed to the imperfection of humans compared to God, as expressed in the phrase "Lord, I am not worthy..." which is part of Christian prayers recited during the Eucharist before receiving the Holy Communion. This phrase signifies humanity's unworthiness to partake in divine grace due to sinfulness or imperfection. Hence, the phrase reflects a Christian perspective that human dignity, which grants humans superiority over other creatures as the image of God on Earth, is incomplete when compared to God's perfection. Thus, for Thomas Aquinas (1224–1274), dignity signifies the value a creature possesses by virtue of occupying its appropriate position within God's creation, and its content varies from one creature to another (Müller, 109–111).

However, the purely theological meaning of the concept of dignity did not take over. The social meaning of dignity, tied to status—that is, the elevated rank of one person over another—reemerged in the hierarchically structured societies of 17th- and 18th-century Europe. Hierarchical distinctions of status defined the concept of dignity and governed all social relationships and connections. This led to significant complexities that had to be taken into account in social interactions. For example, the dignity of a noble depended on others not possessing the same status, which was reflected in privileges such as positional goods that nobles held. These goods could not be made available to everyone, as they would cease to be privileges (Müller, 110). Positional goods are evaluated and appreciated based on their relative standing and social rarity rather than their intrinsic value. Thus, their value transcends their actual worth, representing social status and reinforcing inequality, even extending to ecclesiastical practices, as seen in the phenomenon of indulgences.

Third: The French Revolution: Equal Dignity for All

The French Revolution, which happened in waves from 1789 to 1799, abolished absolute monarchy, significantly curtailed the church's influence in public life, and established the secular democratic republic. Notably, this new system proclaimed the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in August 1789, issued by the French National Constituent Assembly. Many of its members were familiar with the writings of the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) on the general will and basic human rights. This new system was founded on the principle that the nation is the source of all authority, directly opposing the old system, which posited that God was the source of the king's authority (<https://political-encyclopedia.org>). Article 6 of the declaration, which consists of 17 articles, states: "Law is the expression of the general will. Every citizen has a right to participate personally, or through his representative, in its foundation. It must be the same for all, whether it pro-

tests or punishes. All citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, are equally eligible to all dignities and to all public positions and occupations, according to their abilities, and without distinction except that of their virtues and talents” (<https://avalon.law.yale.edu>).

We can observe a transformation in the meaning of human dignity. Previously tied to hierarchical distinctions of social status in the old system, it now encompasses the idea that all humans possess the same elevated rank by virtue of their humanity. This rank is equivalent in its elevation to what was once considered noble ranks. Dignity has become an inherent right of the individual due to the existential condition of being human. This right requires respect for a person for who they are, not for what they do (Müller, 110). However, we also notice in the concluding phrase of Article 6 the foundation of a merit-based society in the new system, replacing the aristocratic society of the old system. In a merit-based society, a person’s social status and opportunities are determined by competence and achievement, which serve as the primary criteria in the new social order. In other words, status is defined by how much an individual contributes to society. However, this social distinction based on abilities, talents, and contributions does not affect the intrinsic meaning of dignity, which remains a fixed right for all individuals regardless of merit or ability. Dignity is an inherent right of the individual due to the existential condition of being human, as previously mentioned.

Fourth: Kant and the Rational Foundation of Dignity: The Secularization of the Concept

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) lived during a historically turbulent and transformative period, bringing together all the key elements of this historical shift in his 1785 work *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. This book is considered a mature product of Kant’s critical phase in philosophy, published four years after the first edition of his seminal work *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). According to Rosen, Kant is the philosopher upon whose shoulders the modern theory of human rights rests (Rosen, 19).

In the introduction to his translation of *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Abd al-Ghaffār Makāwī notes that Kant succeeded in “supporting his ideas about the categorical moral imperative, outlining the main principles of critical ethics, and paving the way for his major work on ethics, namely *Critique of Practical Reason*, which would be published in 1788. Kant was keen to present his moral doctrine to the general reader... [and] to clarify for the public what had previously been difficult for them to understand” (Kant, p. 6).

The book *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* is divided into three sections: the first titled “Transition from Common Rational Knowledge of Morals to Philosophical Knowledge,” the second titled “Transition from Popular Moral Philosophy to the Metaphysics of Morals,” and the third titled

“Transition from the Metaphysics of Morals to the Critique of Pure Practical Reason.” In the second section, Kant discusses dignity in a widely cited and decisive paragraph, stating: “Everything in the kingdom of ends has either a *price or a dignity*: what has a price can be replaced by something *equivalent*; but what is above all price, and therefore knows no equivalent, has a dignity” (Kant, p. 119). At first glance, this paragraph suggests that human dignity, which is priceless, is an absolute intrinsic value possessed by all humans. It appears, for example, that there is an inner kernel, essential and immutable in humans, deserving of respect and reverence, and not subject to exchange—indicating the existence of an inviolable essence that cannot be altered or violated in any way. Kant then proceeds in the following paragraph to reinforce this initial understanding of human dignity, stating: “Whatever pertains to human inclinations and general needs has a *market price*; whereas what accords with a particular taste, even if it does not presuppose a need, that is, what accords with the satisfaction we feel in mere play devoid of any purpose, has an *affective price*. However, that which constitutes the indispensable condition for something being an end in itself has not merely relative value, that is, price, but an intrinsic value, that is, dignity” (Kant, p. 119). By “market price,” Kant means that something has no intrinsic value and is merely an object of exchange, measurable materially. By “affective price,” he refers to something that brings us abstract pleasure devoid of any purpose or utility, such as the pleasure we feel when contemplating something beautiful. Such an object, which pleases us in this way, has an affective price, meaning it has intrinsic value, though not subject to material exchange. Dignity, however, is higher and cannot be priced at all, for its value is intrinsic and it is an end in itself. Here, we observe that the element of elevation and transcendence remains present and continuous in the concept of dignity. Dignity implies that one being is higher than another. We also notice the echoes of Cicero still resonating in Kant’s thought, nearly two millennia later.

However, the three paragraphs immediately following the ones cited above do not make dignity an immutable and inviolable inner essence, as a quick read might suggest. Kant states: “Morality is the only condition under which a rational being can be an end in itself, for it is impossible for such a being to be a legislative member in the kingdom of ends without it. Thus, morality and humanity, insofar as it is capable of morality, are the only things that have dignity” (Kant, p. 120). Kant clarifies his point with two moral actions: “keeping a promise” and “benevolence out of principle, not inclination.” If a person lacks these actions, nothing in nature or art can replace them, for their value does not lie in their consequences or any resulting utility but in the maxims of the will that express themselves in these actions and others. These actions represent the will that performs them as “an object of direct respect, where nothing is required but reason to impose them on the will... This valuation defines

the worth of such a moral disposition as dignity and *elevates* it above all price to an *infinite height*" (Kant, pp. 120–121). Kant then states in footnote 61 that a rational being has no right to participate in universal legislation unless it is worthy of doing so. In other words, a rational being does not truly become such until it becomes a moral being (Kant, p. 121). A rational being participates in the establishment of universal general laws, which qualifies it to be a member of the possible kingdom of ends. "This is the role assigned to it by its nature, insofar as it is an end in itself and thus a legislator of laws in the kingdom of ends, and insofar as it is free with respect to all natural laws, subject only to the laws it imposes on itself, and whose maxims can simultaneously be part of a universal general legislation (to which it is also subject)" (Kant, p. 121). Kant then adds: "But legislation itself, which determines all value, must for this very reason have dignity, that is, unconditional value, incomparable with anything else, and best expressed by the term respect, which conveys the esteem a rational being ought to have for it. Autonomy, therefore, is the principle of the dignity of human nature and every rational nature" (Kant, p. 122).

From the preceding discussion, it becomes clear that Kant takes the concept of dignity in a distinctly secular direction, grounded in the independent human being. For Kant, dignity refers to the moral motive that follows the categorical imperative. Morality itself is what holds unconditional and incomparable value. Consequently, good will also holds unconditional value. No being other than the human being—by virtue of being a rational being—possesses morality and good will. From this perspective, the capacity of the rational being allows us to say that Kant "linked dignity to the human being as a person, that is, a rational being, whose nature is to constitute an end in itself and to have absolute value compared to other things, which are merely means or relative ends, including animals. For Kant, human dignity lies in the ability to act according to the principle of duty, independent of any concrete determination, which is something animals cannot do" (Al-Shaykh, 2020, p. 142).

As previously mentioned, a quick reading of Kant might claim that dignity, according to him, has an absolute intrinsic value possessed by all humans, and that this value is the reason why one respects others. However, this reading overlooks the critical point Kant emphasizes regarding dignity, namely that the dignity of a rational being stems from the fact that it is subject to no law other than the one it gives itself. It also overlooks that Kant fundamentally links absolute intrinsic value to morality, not to the human being *per se*. Thus, dignity, for Kant, expresses the idea that a person neither degrades themselves nor others; we must respect others not because they possess an intrinsic essential quality called dignity, but because the categorical moral imperative requires it. Finally, we want to affirm that Kant believes that any respect for a person is essentially respect for the law.

After this partial historical tracing, we can deduce the common denomi-

nator among the historical meanings of the concept of dignity, which is the element of the elevation and nobility of the human being, whether the meaning of dignity is social, theological, or secular. We now move to an attempt to explore the features of the current and promised high-tech society and determine the status of the concept of human dignity based on an intuitive connection I establish between Kant's conception of it and what I can deduce from Heidegger's philosophy, then examine its fate in such a society.

Fifth: High Technology and the Deconstruction of Human Dignity

Life in a high-tech society is characterized by increasing and accelerating reliance on artificial intelligence applications and the dominance of algorithms over purely human affairs. To grasp the general features of this society, both current and imminent, it suffices to cite two widely publicized announcements that have sparked various reactions: eager anticipation, caution, and astonishment.

The first announcement came at the end of June 2021 when Mark Zuckerberg, the CEO of Facebook, which changed its name in October 2021 to Meta Platforms, announced a new initiative to build the "Metaverse." About a year and a half prior, in January 2020, at the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic, adventurous capitalist Matthew Ball published an article outlining the characteristics of the metaverse. Zuckerberg explained that the metaverse would be an "embodied internet," meaning that a person could fully live their life in the virtual world without taking a single step in the real world (www.theverge.com/22588022/mark-zuckerberg-facebook). The term "metaverse" is a blend of the prefix "meta" and the word "universe," which means "meta-universe" or "beyond the universe." The term was first coined by American science fiction writer Neal Stephenson in his 1992 novel "Snow Crash" (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metaverse). Then, on Thursday, October 28, 2021, Zuckerberg announced at a global conference, the start of the transition to the metaverse, marking the first step toward the "post-internet" era, which represents the culmination of the digital transformation phase, the initial stage of the high-tech society.

The second announcement came on December 1, 2022, when Elon Musk announced the completion of the design of a brain implant called the N1 link, following its testing on monkeys and pigs. This announcement was made during a global event organized by his neurotechnology company Neuralink, and Musk stated that preparations were underway to test it on humans after obtaining the necessary approval within just six months, i.e., by mid-2023 (Neuralink Show and Tell, Fall 2022- YouTube).⁽⁵⁾ This implant, popularly known as "Elon Musk's chip," acts as an interface between the human brain

5. Check Neuralink Show and Tell 2022 Summarized by Elon Musk on *YouTube*.

and a computer, thus representing the pinnacle of the second phase of the high-tech society, referred to as “transhumanism” or “human enhancement,” where the body’s and brain’s capabilities are improved through advanced technology. This phase paves the way for a third stage, “post-humanism,” which will witness algorithmically enhanced humans entering marital relationships with sex robots (“Why Elon Musk Wants to Implant Chips in Human Brains,” YouTube). Subsequently, in January 2024, Musk successfully implanted the first brain chip in a paralyzed patient, Noland Arbo, who appeared in a broadcast controlling a computer keyboard with just his thoughts (www.alarabiya.net). Thus, the year 2024 marks a new chronological milestone signaling a significant transformation in the history of the human being, inevitably placing not only human dignity but also human essence and being into a more complex and critical predicament than ever before.

It is noteworthy that the current younger generation, especially those in childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood, respond eagerly and enthusiastically to every technological advancement in mobile phones, computers, and their rapidly evolving software. Additionally, one can observe the excitement apparent in the comments of teenagers and young adults accompanying some YouTube videos heralding the publicization of sex robots within two and a half decades at most. *Publicization* here means making them available in markets at prices affordable to most people and with advanced technology that rivals natural human responses, thanks to the rapid advancements in artificial intelligence (“The Fifth Industrial Revolution is at the Doorstep...,” YouTube).

These major transformations promised by these two announcements will once again place the issue of Sein and Seiendes (the former means Being, as in the notion of existence, while the latter means being, in this sense the human being) in a much larger dilemma than the one faced by the German philosopher Heidegger (1889–1976). If philosophy has forgotten the question of sein in favor of the seiendes throughout its long history, the high-tech society, in its current and imminent form, will plunge both into the abyss of oblivion (see other perspectives in: Nayel, 2020, pp. 236-240). In reality, this new chronological circumstance necessitates an attempt to build a bridge between Kant and Heidegger, even if this attempt initially seems strange.

1. Kant and Heidegger: Intuitive Integration of the Concept of Dignity

I am trying here to develop a comprehensive meaning of the concept of human dignity that overcomes the shortcomings the concept has historically faced. I propose that linking Kant and Heidegger in this context is an intuitive matter, meaning it does not require logical inference or practical analysis, because it is impossible to conceive of Heideggerian Dasein without Kantian ethics, and equally impossible to conceive of the Kantian moral person without Heideggerian Dasein. This is so that we can arrive at a comprehensive ontological and

ethical understanding of the concept of dignity, and thus properly understand the true challenges that human dignity faces in the age of advanced technology.

Kant has clearly demonstrated that human dignity—once a person has become such—lies essentially in their capacity to act and behave according to the principle of duty, which animals cannot do. This is because humans are rational beings in a kingdom of ends, and their rationality is only complete when they legislate morality for themselves without external impositions; the rational being who morally legislates for themselves is an end in themselves. Thus, for Kant, dignity is intrinsically linked to rationality, freedom, moral legislation, and commitment as a whole. The absence of any one of these links necessarily diminishes human dignity and degrades the status of the rational being to a state of submission and humiliation.

Later, Heidegger clearly articulated the ontological distinction between Being (Sein) and being (Seiendes). Being is not a specific being or entity; a being contains Being but is not identical to it. This ontological distinction is crucial because confusing the two leads to errors, such as believing we are studying Being itself when we are merely studying particular beings, as is the case in biology, psychology, sociology, anthropology, or even cosmology. So where, then, can we find this Being from Heidegger's perspective? Heidegger contends that the only being that possesses a clearer sense of Being than others is *Myself*, because *I am* the one capable of questioning my Being, and I am the one who has an initial understanding of Being; otherwise, I would not be able to question it. I am the only being whose Being rises to the level of questioning, and I am the only being who holds the potential to comprehend the answer. However, I am not merely a mind, a soul, or consciousness; I am Dasein, the term Heidegger uses to describe that unique being capable of questioning its own Being (Bikwil, Chapter 3, especially pp. 78–79).

Subsequently, the relationship between this Heideggerian ontological conception and the issue of human dignity immediately becomes apparent in two inseparable aspects—or two sides of a single task—when we explain what Dasein is according to Heidegger and its main characteristics. The term Dasein does not refer to the general human existence that is simply “there,” but rather to a human being who has achieved their authentic existential potential, which is uniquely theirs, and who has responded to the inner call of their most specific Being, free from the general public or what Heidegger calls “the they,” with its unoriginal opinions, habits, ideas, and behaviors (Bikwil, pp. 101–131). Dasein achieves its authentic freedom through a resolute anticipation, consciously aware that it is a Being-toward-death. In this lies a unique realization of the meaning of “I am,” and of the authenticity, respect, appreciation, and care for the Being within oneself. If we were to express this in one word, we would find none other than “dignity,” which here refers, from the perspective

of the individual's own ontological consideration, to their respect, appreciation, and care for the Being within them, and their responsibility for it. From the perspective of the ontological objective consideration, which illustrates Dasein's relationship with others and the beings around it, this is expressed by the German word **Lichtung**, translated into English as "clearing." In Heidegger's philosophy, this term has a specific meaning, referring to an illuminated clearing or opening in a dark forest that allows beings to appear vividly, like a deer emerging from among the trees (Bikwil, Chapter 8, especially p. 238). This image, inspired by the Black Forest, is central to Heidegger's ontology. This illuminated clearing, which allows the beings of the forest to be revealed, symbolizes Heidegger's concept of Being, which permits beings to manifest themselves and then withdraws, receding from appearance. At the same time, this image embodies the relationship that Dasein should have with the totality of beings around it, which is to enable beings to reveal themselves as they choose, without interference from Dasein that forces or coerces them to appear contrary to their nature. Here, the second aspect of Dasein's authentic task becomes clear, which is to respect, honor, and care for the beings around it. This is the complementary aspect of the meaning of human dignity from the perspective of ontological objective consideration. Any failure of Dasein in either aspect of its authentic task constitutes a failure to merit dignity, and a regression to the status of a false being unworthy of the name Dasein from the outset: a being of submission and humiliation.

The connection I draw between Kant's ethical conception of dignity and the ontological conception of dignity I derived above from Heidegger is an intuitive one. This is because Dasein's respect for Being, whether within itself or in others, and its reverence and care for it, requires an ethical connection provided by Kant. The integrative nature of the concept here is intuitive. Any promised good life in the age of advanced technology cannot be realized for humanity without this integrative intuitive meaning. Based on this intuitive connection, I will explore the considerations of the concept of dignity, in this integrated Kantian-Heideggerian sense, in the context of advanced technology or its disruption.

2. Hello: You Are Being Monitored Everywhere!

Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy point to the emergence of a "surveillance society," which is exemplified strongly in Britain, where surveillance cameras are widespread in public spaces such as streets, transportation, shopping centers, banks, and workplaces. For instance, a resident of London can be filmed 300 times a day, and in the rest of the United Kingdom, by 2006, there was one camera for every 15 citizens. The authors believe this process is still in its early stages, warning of the rise of an electronic "Big Brother" (Lipovetsky and Serroy, pp. 282–283), referring to the realization of Orwell's dystopia as

forewarned in his novel *1984*, within a realistic advanced technology society.

In a different context, it is important to note that the U.S. Congress, a decade before this date (2006), particularly in 1996, passed the Communications Decency Act to regulate online publishing. However, electronic libertarians responded to this governmental attempt to restrict internet freedoms with John Perry Barlow's "Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace," driven by a libertarian idealism that reality does not permit and that only the virtual reality of the internet can offer. This idealism sought liberation from state and societal surveillance in all its recognized institutions, aiming for absolute freedom, authority-free consensus, and voluntary collective (anarchist) management. This was facilitated by the decentralized structure of electronic networks, as the internet evolved, thanks to open-source code, into a highly complex distributed hierarchy (Ferguson, pp. 358-362). There was a prevailing belief about the internet that it anonymized communication between users, making it impossible to identify their identities or trace their interactions to their origins. This belief was epitomized by a New Yorker cartoon of two dogs sitting in front of a connected computer, with one saying to the other, "On the internet, nobody knows you're a dog" (Lawrence, p. 67). However, this belief reflected only the supposed nature of the internet, not its actual reality. While internet protocols do not require identity verification, local access points do, as they add a control layer to the protocols, making connection impossible without it. Consequently, geographic location and usage information can be tracked (Lawrence, pp. 62, 64-67). Thus, we can speak of the internet as a space of surveillance, dominance, and control.

Given this situation, human dignity faces threats on two levels during the peak of the digital transformation we are now experiencing. The first lies in the intensification of dataism, as reliance on data increases, involving the coercive translation of human traits into digital data. This process risks reducing humans to mere objects by examining them in inappropriate ways. The second threat arises from the application of algorithms and the surveillance they enable, justified by claims that people have previously given their consent—claims that are often misleading. In reality, people are unaware of what they are consenting to and cannot foresee the consequences. Since they are not truly free, this justification can be described as the "spiderweb consent fallacy." For consent to be valid and genuine, it must be informed⁶, meaning it is granted after providing the individual with all necessary information. This includes

6. The term "informed consent" appeared in Carina Brunkle's discussion of the issue of the trade-off between human autonomy and the "autonomy" of artificial intelligence systems when delegating actions to robots on behalf of humans. She argues that this delegation does not diminish human autonomy, and there is no trade-off or exchange, based on the idea of relational autonomy. However, I use the term according to philosophical foundations different from hers. See: Müller, p. 67-71.

understanding the purpose of the procedure, knowing the potential risks, recognizing the expected benefits, being aware of alternative options, and having the opportunity to ask questions and receive thorough answers. In the context of algorithms and artificial intelligence systems, “informed consent” means that the individual agreeing to their application must fully understand what the system does, how it operates, the expected outcomes, and the potential risks. Without this knowledge and understanding, user consent cannot be regarded as a truly informed consent. Even when people have the freedom to choose, one cannot claim they control the data they provide, given the vast scope of algorithmic applications and their complexities (Müller, pp. 113-114).

The tech giants of Silicon Valley—the five companies dominating high technology: Google, Facebook, Amazon, Tesla, and Microsoft—undermine human dignity by infiltrating people’s consciousness. Their technology operates on an extraction logic, extracting as much information as possible from people’s minds. For example, by accepting Google’s terms, users enable the company to know them better than they know themselves. Google then sells its predictions about human behavior, exploiting our lives by reducing them to behavioral data sets, enabling others to increase their control over us. Hence, Google can be described as the ultimate criminal. Furthermore, the dominance of algorithms jeopardizes the essence of human beings in another way: it threatens to strip us of our humanity and erode our nature. Unique, untamed, and chaotic energies of daily life are transformed into data that is built, organized, and classified, stripped of any emotion, thought, standard, right, value, or relationship (Müller, p. 114). This reduces individuals to mere objects, far from the rational, self-legislating moral beings (Kant) or the *Dasein* (Heidegger). These energies constitute the distinctive feature of human beings and are essential not only for a proper public life but also as a fundamental respect for human dignity. When these energies are computationally processed, quantified, or fabricated, dignity is denied, and the person is degraded to the status of an object.

The libertarian idealism envisioned in the late 20th century has, by the end of the first quarter of the 21st century, transformed into a state of submissive compliance that violates human dignity.

3. Silicon Valley: A Modern Totalitarianism

A former Facebook employee commented on the company’s employee uniform, saying, “The brown shirts have become blue shirts; we were all part of the new social media stormtrooper brigade” (Ferguson, p. 419). This insightful comment draws attention to the violent control agent emerging in the current and anticipated high-tech society. The Facebook employee uniform evokes the memory of the stormtroopers’ uniforms, the paramilitary wing of the Nazi Party that played a pivotal role in Hitler’s rise to power.

After the fall of Nazism, the political philosopher Hannah Arendt used the term “totalitarianism” to describe the state of a nation at zero degree (Arendt, p. 6), where the ethics of conscience and duty are absent, social and moral disintegration prevails, lived experience disappears, and, in a single phrase: dignity is lost due to submission and humiliation. Traditional totalitarianism succeeded, through traditional media technology, in dehumanizing individuals and turning them into cogs in its massive political system, where a person loses their mind and conscience to the point of kneeling in degradation, reduced to less than the status of an object. So, what might advanced technology, algorithmic applications, and artificial intelligence, both current and forthcoming, succeed in achieving?! The indicators we have observed, some of which were mentioned above, warn of an imminent transformation into what I call large-scale “neo-totalitarianism,” which could encompass the entire world, led by the five giants of Silicon Valley: Google, Facebook, Amazon, Tesla, and Microsoft. This might eventually form “United Corporations” instead of the “United Nations.” It is a new leadership humanity has never experienced before, occurring at a unique chronological moment that heralds a profound shift in the history of human existence. This necessarily poses a thorny test for human dignity, if not for being and humanity itself.

4. The Concealment of Being and the Decline of Dignity

When Zuckerberg announced in 2021, while the COVID-19 pandemic had not yet ended, that through metaverse technology, a person could fully live their life in the virtual world without taking a single step in the real world, it brought to mind the story of British writer E.M. Forster (1879-1970), published in 1909 under the title “The Machine Stops” (Forster). In this short story, individuals do not leave their rooms, which are no larger than solitary confinement cells, equipped with advanced technology. Values are completely overturned, with submission and humiliation reigning supreme as the most esteemed values, and rewards are given based on the extent of adherence to these values. In 1987, Egyptian writer Sabri Moussa (1932-2018) addressed the same topic in a novelistic form, offering an optimistic vision of a promising life in a highly organized, utopian society of advanced technology. Initially, the reader might wish to be a member of this scientifically and technologically advanced society. However, through the character of Mr. Humo, the protagonist of the novel, it gradually becomes clear that the real dilemma he suffers from, which drives him to rebel against this society, is its lack of dignity: the dignity of being a rational, free, and autonomous human being—not a machine, and not an object.⁽⁷⁾

7. See our deconstructive analysis of this novel in: Nayel, Hossam. “Al-Huwīyah wa-l-Intimā’ wa-l-Tiknūlūjiyā al-Fā’iqah: al-Wajh al-Tafkīkī fī Riwayāt al-Sayyid min Ḥaqq al-Sabānīh,” April 2023.

Literature, indeed, has the potential to guide practical philosophy in certain moments. Reflecting on the current and anticipated high-tech society needs this connection between literature and philosophy.

Heidegger illustrated the essence of technology and truth in two seminal essays (“The Question Concerning Technology,” pp. 147-204; “On the Essence of Truth,” pp. 39-85), comparing old technology, characterized by revealing beings without coercion, with modern technology, characterized by a domineering and coercive revealing. He highlighted humanity’s task of openness to Being.⁽⁸⁾ Muhammad Al-Shaykh critiques Heidegger’s discussion by addressing the newest phase of technology, marked by unlimited and irresistible dominance. This has resulted in a dual collapse: the fall of humanity and the fall of being. Now it’s humanity’s turn, as it has become raw material subjugated to goals beyond itself (Al-Shaykh, 2008, pp. 565-574). The promotion of the metaverse and algorithmically enhanced humans in relationships with sexual robots stamps the whole world with pure nihilism; humanity disappears, being vanishes, and Being is profoundly concealed. At that point, the antithesis of dignity will become the supreme value.

Conclusion

In this brief study, we have attempted to discuss the hypothesis that the concept of human dignity is under significant pressure in light of advanced technology’s three stages of development: the “digital transformation” phase, the “transhumanism” or “human transformation” phase, and finally, the “post-human” phase. To test this hypothesis, we utilized Foucault’s method of critical historical reflection, describing and analyzing how the concept of human dignity emerged in certain contemporary political documents of varying focus. We observed that the concept of dignity used in these documents functions as a background concept; although it appears as a foundational origin or principle, it remains inherently unclear. Additionally, during our partial review of some encyclopedias and philosophical dictionaries, we noted the absence of comprehensive entries explaining the meaning of dignity. From these observations, we concluded that the concept of dignity, whether used or not, assumes a distinctly deconstructive status—its presence indicates its absence, and its absence points to its presence without anything truly present.

We then attempted a partial and limited historical tracing of the transformations in the meaning of dignity. We observed that the concept initially acquired social meanings in hierarchically structured societies, followed by theological foundations based on a central Christian idea that God created humans in His image. Furthermore, we noted that *the French Declaration of the Rights*

8. See also above paragraph 1 of this section, and a detailed and concise explanation of the relevant core ideas can be found in: Nayel, Hossam. “Al-Adab al-‘Arabi wa-l-Tiknūlūjiyā al-Raqmīyah: Muḥāwalat Istikshāfiyah.”, 2020, pp. 237-240.

of *Man and Citizen* in August 1789 employed the concept of dignity in a humanist, egalitarian manner influenced by Rousseau's philosophy. Finally, we explored the purely secular foundation of the concept of dignity in Kant's philosophy. From all these historical transformations and partial observations of the meanings of dignity, we noted the persistence of an important element within the concept: the element of elevation and nobility, signifying the exaltation and superiority of one being over another, whether in the social order or the natural universal order.

In order to grasp the nature and true extent of the challenges facing the concept of dignity, we sought to establish an intuitive connection between Kant and Heidegger to present an integrated ontological and ethical meaning of the concept of dignity. Under the umbrella of human dignity, it was impossible to conceive of Heideggerian Dasein without Kantian ethics, nor Kantian ethics without Heideggerian Dasein. We then proceeded to highlight the challenges that this integrative intuitive meaning of dignity might face, ultimately concluding that the current characteristics and imminent possibilities of the high-tech society obscure both Being and the human entity, leading to the final eclipse of dignity. Numerous indicators reveal the accelerating preparation of humanity—and, more strangely, their readiness—to potentially accept any globally unified socio-economic-political organization in the future, led by tech's "Big Five" in a manner that sacrifices humanity itself on the altar of high technology.

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Grieving over the Missing Outs

Philosophy, Good Life and the Unlived Lives

Chafik Graiguer

Moulay Ismail University, Morocco

Abstract

The missing outs are chunks of lives in possible worlds, the lives we could be leading but, for some reason, are not. This includes needs unmet, desires sacrificed, and roads not taken. Philosophically speaking, the experience of our unlived lives is intriguing because, on the one hand, it displays cognitive and emotional intentionality toward an irrevocable past; on the other hand, it arouses a variety of passions that impede the good life, such as regret and grief. I contend that, despite being scattered through various philosophical investigations, a cohesive philosophical discourse on the missing outs may be reconstructed, with its constituent elements being variations on an enduring Stoic idea about the imperturbable universal law. This paper offers such a reconstruction through four passions: concern, grief, anger, and regret, as well as the array of cures philosophy conceived for them. I shall conclude with a radical view suggesting that, ultimately, the supreme missing out is simply nonbeing.

Keywords: Unlived life, missing outs, happiness, good life, passions, Stoicism, trouble with being born.

“Nothing I know matters more than what never happened.”

– John Burnside, *Hearsay*

Al-Maqqarī al-Tilimsānī (d. 1041 AH) recounts in *Nafḥ al-Ṭīb* that al-Mu‘tamid ibn ‘Abbād had a wife named al-Rumaykiyya, also called I‘timād. One day in Seville, she saw some Bedouin women selling milk in leather pouches, their skirts lifted as they waded through the mud. She told al-Mu‘tamid, “I long to do the same with my maids.” In response, the king ordered ambergris, musk, camphor, and rose water to be mixed into a paste, creating a fragrant “mud” within the palace. He then provided her with silk pouches and ropes, allowing her and her maids to wade through this perfumed concoction (Al-Maqqarī, 1968, p. 440).

This episode is a striking—albeit extreme—example of what contemporary philosophy has recently begun to call *the missing outs*, a field of study that is still taking shape. Al-Rumaykiyya was seized by an intense desire for an experience she believed she had missed in her opulent royal life: trudging through the mud! Most people would not consider such a trivial loss worth mourning, especially given the many more significant missing outs in life. Moreover, she did not even realize the absence of this experience until she saw those poor women. By contrast, awareness of other missing outs usually develops gradually, settling deep within us and depriving us of present enjoyment or future aspirations. Nevertheless, her story is profoundly illustrative of our attachment to what escapes us and of the significance that unlived lives hold in our imagination.

Defining the Missing Outs, Their Relation to the Good Life, and the Importance of Their Study

The missing outs refer to the lives we could have lived but, for one reason or another, did not. They are, therefore, lives that exist in possible worlds. This category includes unfulfilled dreams, experiences we longed for but never had, choices we made and later regretted, or, conversely, choices we did not make but wish we had. In essence, missing outs are potential existences that never materialized—entities suspended between the possible and the actual, between the past and the present.

Adam Phillips defines them as “the parallel life (or lives) that never happened, the life we live in our minds, the life or lives we wish for: the risks not taken, the missed or unavailable opportunities. We call them *our unlived lives* because we believe, in some way, they were available to us, yet for some reason, they never came to be” (Phillips, 2021, p. 13).

Philosophical dictionaries do not provide a specific definition of *the missing outs* themselves, but they do define *the experience of the missing outs*, particularly through concepts such as regret—or, more precisely, penitence. Jameel Saliba describes penitence as sorrow, remorse, and lamentation, adding that regret is “the deep sorrow for *past* mistakes, accompanied by a sincere determination to correct them in the future” (emphasis mine). Similarly, al-Jurjānī defines regret as “a distress that afflicts a person along with the wish that what happened had never happened” (Saliba, 1982, p. 461).

However, as this study will demonstrate, missing outs are not limited to personal actions that can be corrected or undone. They also include unique, irretrievable occurrences, such as youth and health, or unavoidable calamities—whether natural or social—such as the loss of a loved one, estrangement from a beloved, or a tragic accident. In this regard, al-Kindī’s definition of grief seems more aligned with the experience of missing outs. He states: “Grief is a psychological pain that arises from the loss of what is beloved or the failure to

attain what is desired (Al-Kindi, 1997, p. 6).” Missing outs, therefore, concern both what is lost and what was never gained.

From this definition, we can distinguish missing outs from mere desire. While both are intentional states, desire is directed toward what does not yet exist but could in the future, whereas missing outs are directed toward what once existed but no longer does—or, in some cases, never will again (as in the case of an elderly person mourning lost youth). In this sense, the experience of missing outs is a reversed desire—a longing that, in its despair, turns toward the past. Unlike desire, which is often accompanied by a sense of lack (as Plato observed in *Symposium* through his personification of Eros), missing outs bring only sorrow, regret, or frustration.

A further distinction must be made between *actual missing outs*—which are certain and irrevocable—and *anticipated missing outs*, which are merely probable. The latter manifests, for example, in *Fear of Missing Out* (FOMO), a phenomenon studied in psychology that describes the anxiety of potentially missing future opportunities, such as an investor hesitating to buy stocks for fear of losing a profitable chance (McGinnis, 2000; Gupta & Sharma, 2021).

To use Nietzsche’s characterization, the experience of missing outs is a symptom of memory and the human inability to forget. While animals live “bound to the moment, experiencing neither sorrow nor boredom,” humans remain tethered to their past. No matter how far they move forward, the chain of memory follows them (Nietzsche, 1997, pp. 60–61).

Most people suffer from this state of being—trapped between a life they have lived but find unsatisfactory and the parallel lives they desired but never lived. Consequently, missing outs become obstacles to happiness. One might argue that a person’s life would be happier if it were devoid of missing outs—or at least the experience of them.

Throughout history, people have mourned what they lost, but today, they grieve their missing outs more than ever. This is due to at least three factors: cultural, material, and technological. **Cultural Factor:** In contemporary society, “the promise of immortality has been replaced by the promise of longevity, that is, a commitment to extracting as much from life as possible until the very end. Consequently, the life that is not lived takes on an unsettling presence in a world where nothing legitimizes existence more than the desire to live it. (Phillips, 2021, p. 16)” **Material Factor:** Higher living standards have made it possible for more people than ever to conceptualize their lives in terms of choices and opportunities. “We are now perpetually haunted by the myth of our potential—the myth of what we could have been or done (Phillips, 2021, p. 14).” **Technological Factor:** The rise of communication technology and social media has exponentially increased the number of missing outs by constantly displaying the lives of others—lives that, with little effort, one can imagine as one’s own (Crook, 2015).

Since missing outs belong to the past, they can never be truly satisfied. Attempts to make up for them often result in desperate, even grotesque, efforts—such as parents who try to fulfill their own unfulfilled dreams through their children, effectively making the child live out a distorted version of their parent’s unlived life. As Carl Jung observed, “Nothing has a stronger psychological influence on children than the unlived life of their parents (Chang, 2006, p. 403).”

This is the essence of the missing outs and their impact on the good life. The remainder of this paper will argue that, despite being dispersed across various philosophical discussions, a coherent philosophical discourse on the missing outs can be reconstructed. Let us begin by exploring how this theme has appeared in modern scholarship.

Previous Studies

To begin with, most modern studies dedicated to the missing outs belong to psychological studies or related fields. Furthermore, the majority of these studies focus on the anxiety over *anticipated* missing outs in the future rather than grief over *past* missing outs that are definitively lost (McGinnis, 2000; Crook, 2015; Dalton, 2019).

Regarding the philosophical approach, modern studies do not treat the missing outs as a dedicated theme. However, this theme appears scattered across various philosophical contexts. In his book *The Consolations of Philosophy*, Alain de Botton explores different areas of sorrow and grief that, in his view, require philosophical consolation. Yet, missing outs do not explicitly feature among them (De Botton, 2015). De Botton examines the distress we feel when we find ourselves alone against the tide of prevailing opinions, much like Socrates (Chapter 1). He also addresses, with help from Epicurus, the grief caused by financial hardship (Chapter 2). He then sheds philosophical light on frustration and, at times, anger caused by disappointment and failure to attain one’s goals, drawing on Seneca’s Stoicism (Chapter 3). He follows Michel de Montaigne in searching for solace and accepting the inevitable physical and intellectual limitations that come with aging (Chapter 4). Turning to Schopenhauer’s idea of the *will to live*, he seeks comfort for heartbreak, especially in the case of failed romances (Chapter 5). Finally, he concludes with Nietzsche, advocating for a courageous acceptance of suffering and hardship as prerequisites for success, greatness, and future joy (Chapter 6).

Among all these chapters, we find only indirect engagement with the theme of missing outs—particularly in the discussion of heartbreak in love and, to some extent, in the chapter on frustration with Seneca.

With Adam Phillips and his book *Missing Out: In Praise of the Unlived Life* (Phillips, 2013, 2021), we encounter a work explicitly dedicated to missing outs. Phillips primarily focuses on the frustration that missing outs cause. He

begins with Socrates' famous quote: "The unexamined life is not worth living." But he follows it with a question: "And what about the life we have not lived? Is it worth examining?" (Phillips, 2021, p. xi).

As a psychoanalyst, Phillips' approach to missing outs is primarily psychological—specifically, Freudian. His thesis is that missing outs constitute a fabric of unfulfilled lives woven from frustration. They play a fundamental role in human life through the dynamic interplay of presence and absence. In the life we desire, our desires—placed at the center of our existence by Freud—bridge the gap between who we are and who we wish to be. However, the possibility of fulfillment depends on our ability to endure frustration—hence the significance of missing outs. If we cannot surrender ourselves to frustration, we cannot truly feel what we need or lack. Even a child's sense of self emerges only through the absence of something they desire: "The child becomes present to himself in the absence of something he needs."

That is, a child's self-awareness arises through the realization of something missing. Moreover, the abundance of choices that characterize human life would be impossible without missing outs (Phillips, 2021, p. 18). "What we miss in one experience, we find in another. Through this, comparisons emerge, and we make choices by elimination. The right choice is the one that allows us to dismiss the alternatives, but we can never know in advance—before experiencing frustration—which choice will be right. And we will never know whether one frustration will lead to another" (Phillips, 2021, p. 18).

This is not a glorification of deprivation but rather a recognition of the dynamic interplay between frustration and fulfillment: "Desire decays if it waits too long, but it also dies from a lack of waiting. The worst thing that can frustrate us is frustration itself. Deprivation of frustration is deprivation of the possibility of fulfillment" (Phillips, 2021, p. 19).

Just as de Botton examined romantic disappointments through Schopenhauer's perspective, Phillips also explores the frustrations of love, referencing Shakespeare's *King Lear*. He asserts that a fundamental reality governs human development and relationships: "If someone can satisfy you, they can also frustrate you. The one who grants you fulfillment is the only one who can disappoint you" (Phillips, 2021, p. 29). In general, all love stories are, at their core, stories of frustration (Phillips, 2021, p. 31).

Furthermore, these unlived lives—linked to our frustrations and, therefore, our desires—are integral to our engagement with reality.

"If we do not feel frustration, we will not need reality, and we will never discover whether we possess the means to navigate it. Others become real to us only when they frustrate us; otherwise, they remain mere imaginary figures. Understanding our frustrations is therefore inescapable" (Phillips, 2021, pp. 37–38).

It is evident that Phillips approaches missing outs mainly from their psychological manifestation in frustration. In fact, he only explicitly addresses missing outs in the first chapter. The remaining chapters shift toward related themes, such as what eludes perception and knowledge, the advantages of ignorance, escaping from experiences, or avoiding certain engagements.

Beyond the works of de Botton and Phillips, other studies explore the emotions associated with missing outs. For instance, some literature examines the rationality or irrationality of regret (Bittner, 1992, pp. 262–273), or whether we bear moral obligations toward past events (Smilansky, 2021, pp. 155–179).

The scarcity of dedicated philosophical studies on missing outs is understandable. Missing outs are not an explicit subject of investigation within any particular philosophical framework or tradition. Instead, they appear implicitly within broader ethical inquiries, as we shall see. Since happiness and the good life are the ultimate goals of philosophy, it is necessary to examine everything that hinders these aspirations. This study, therefore, seeks to construct a philosophical discourse on missing outs, drawing inspiration from a specific conception of philosophy articulated in contemporary times by Pierre Hadot and Martha Nussbaum. Their view asserts that philosophy is not merely abstract theorization or textual commentary but rather a practice of emotional healing—a form of spiritual exercise aimed at fortifying the inner self (Hadot, 1987, pp. 15–16). As Nussbaum describes it, philosophy is

“an art engaged with the world, confronting human suffering, [...] addressing urgent matters of daily life: the fear of death, love, sexuality, anger, and aggression—issues that traditional philosophies often avoid due to their complexity and disorder” (Nussbaum, 1994, pp. 3–4).

Finally, although the literature on missing outs is scarce, existing works indicate that missing outs elicit more than just frustration and regret. A philosophical examination of missing outs ultimately leads to an inquiry into the emotions they provoke. Therefore, any attempt to construct a systematic philosophical account of missing outs must model these emotions.

In this study, we propose that missing outs evoke four primary emotions, which structure the forthcoming discussion: *Concern for missing outs in general*—the weight of unlived experiences that cast a shadow over the present; *Grief over missing outs*—the sorrow and distress resulting from the loss of a desired experience, a valued possession, or a beloved person; *Anger over missing outs*—the aggressive frustration caused by dashed hopes and unmet expectations; *Regret over missing outs*—the remorse and self-reproach following a wrong action or a failure to act.

Since each of these emotions corresponds to a type of missing out, we may identify a fifth and ultimate emotional response—nihilism. This view holds that life itself (and birth) is the ultimate catastrophe, and thus, nonexistence is

the supreme missing out. Therefore, we shall conclude this study with a final chapter dedicated to this missing out of all missing outs.

Healing Concern Over the Missing Outs: Clinging to the Present

As one might expect, Stoicism must have addressed the missing outs, as they disturb the happy life that Stoic philosophers devoted their efforts to cultivating. Indeed, a significant portion of Stoic thought on missing outs is embedded within their reflections on the three dimensions of time—past, present, and future—and their emphasis on the present as the only reality, as it is the only truly lived moment. Consequently, they argue that looking back at the missing outs or anticipating the future is meaningless. In other words, the Stoic antidote to missing outs lies in a continuous effort to divert attention from the past and focus entirely on the present (Nietzsche, 1997, pp. 60–67).⁽¹⁾

Only the present, within certain limits, is within our control, while the past (as well as the future) escapes our grasp.

Pierre Hadot notes that the concept of the present moment is central to ancient philosophies and signifies an awareness of inner freedom, which can be expressed as follows: *To attain inner tranquility, one needs nothing but oneself, who must cast aside anxieties about the past and future.* He asserts, “One must either be happy in the present or never be happy at all.” From this, Hadot deduces the importance of directing one’s attention inward and embracing whatever fate has allotted (Hadot, 1987, p. 215). He also suggests that enclosing the present within a “wall of attention” corresponds to another exercise—enclosing the self within a wall of mindfulness (Hadot, 1997, p. 148).

Thus, the Stoic remedy for missing outs is fundamentally about diverting attention from the past because the experience of missing outs does nothing but dissipate the fullness of existence in the present moment. Marcus Aurelius wrote: “If you focus on the task at hand, [...] if you hold on to it without longing for anything else or fearing anything, but rather with contentment in doing what is in accordance with nature and with heroic sincerity in all that you say and intend, then you will live happily” (Marcus Aurelius, 2017, p. 51).

Since happiness depends on residing in the present, he further advises: “Wherever and whenever you are, you can glorify God by being content with your state, treating those around you with justice, and carefully examining every impression in your mind so that nothing escapes your reflection and contemplation” (Marcus Aurelius, 1893, p. 92).

In reality, missing outs create unnecessary and unreal burdens that add

1. Nietzsche takes the idea of clinging to the present to its extreme, urging humans to learn *forgetfulness* and to live an *unhistorical* life. As long as memory remains open to the past, a person will remain vulnerable to all kinds of emotions brought by the missing outs—regret, sorrow, and withdrawal.

to the real burdens of the present. According to the Stoic atomistic view of existence, life consists of discrete moments. It is only the mind that stitches these moments together, creating an artificial, overwhelming entity that weighs down the individual. Each moment, however, taken alone, is brief and bearable. In other words, the experience of missing out artificially stretches human existence, which is already brief in its essence, creating a perceptual illusion that disrupts life. "Each of us lives only the present moment, which is minuscule in the grand scope of time; all else—whether past or future—is either gone forever or unknown" (Marcus Aurelius, 1893, p. 28).

Thus, Aurelius advises: "Do not trouble yourself by contemplating the entirety of your life. Do not let your mind dwell on everything that has previously distressed you or might distress you in the future. Remind yourself that neither the future nor the past burdens you; only the present does. And how light is the burden of the present if you can just define it and keep it within its limits, reproaching your mind whenever it falters under such a negligible weight!" (Marcus Aurelius, 1893, p. 117).

Since human existence is *being-in-the-moment*, the longest and shortest lives are ultimately the same. Whether one lives a single day or three thousand years is irrelevant, for everyone only truly lives in the present moment. "The present moment is the same for all, and thus, what passes is also equal. It follows, then, that loss is nothing more than the loss of a moment—since one cannot lose either the past or the future. How can one be deprived of something they never possessed?" (Marcus Aurelius, 1893, p. 42).

Commenting on the Stoic perspective on the present moment, Pierre Hadot observes that Stoicism exalts the present moment and the act of *attention* that accompanies it. Any return to the past or anticipation of the future constitutes distraction—a loss of focus on the present.

This focused attention on the present serves multiple functions: it disciplines thoughts, fosters acceptance of divine will, and purifies one's intentions in dealings with others (Hadot, 1987, p. 65).

Hadot explains: "This attention directed toward the present moment is the secret of all spiritual exercises. It liberates us from the passions stirred by the ideas of the past and the future—both of which are beyond our control. It enables vigilance by concentrating on the present, which, due to its brevity, can always be managed and endured. The present moment opens human awareness to the awareness of the cosmos by revealing the infinite value of each moment and accepting every instant of existence within the framework of the cosmic law.

Thus, this attention (*prosoché*) allows us to respond to events as if we were answering a question posed to us suddenly" (Hadot, 1987, pp. 19–20; see also p. 221).

Healing Grief Over the Missing Outs: The Metaphysical Law

The philosopher of the Arabs, Abu Yusuf Ya'qub ibn Ishaq al-Kindi (d. 256 AH), addressed missing outs—implicitly, of course—under the theme of calamity and loss (such as the loss of wealth, property, or children) in his treatise *On the Art of Dispelling Sorrows*, which bears significant traces of Stoic philosophy (Fakhry, 1994, pp. 67–69). He places missing outs within a metaphysical law that the wise must recognize to spare themselves futile grief.

Al-Kindi begins by asserting that loss is an inherent trait of all that is perceptible: “Permanence and continuity are absent in the world of generation and corruption in which we dwell. True permanence and continuity exist necessarily only in the realm of intellect, which we are capable of perceiving” (Al-Kindi, 1997, p. 7).

Missing outs, therefore, stem from the fundamental ontological axiom governing this existence as a sensory world. As he explains: “Material possessions, sensory pleasures, and tangible pursuits are all temporary for everyone, readily available to all hands. They cannot be secured permanently, nor can their decay, disappearance, or alteration be prevented.”

Only intellectual realities transcend this axiom and remain impervious to loss. From this, al-Kindi proposes two strategies to counter the grief of missing outs: one psychological and one radically rational. The psychological strategy is based on the principle of habituation: “We should recall past sorrows that we have long since forgotten, as well as the sorrows of others that we witnessed, and how they, too, eventually moved on.”

He also suggests: “We should remember that everything we have lost or missed has also been lost by many others before us. Many have experienced similar losses, yet they remained content, free from sorrow. If someone has lost a child or has never had children, many others share the same fate—some of them childless yet joyful, others having lost a child yet having found solace and happiness again” (Al-Kindi, 1997, p. 15).

In other words, the initial shock of a loss can be mitigated by reminding oneself that time itself erases grief and that life will proceed as if nothing happened, as if the missing out had never occurred. The rational strategy, however, is radical—it addresses the root cause rather than the symptoms. Since loss is an inherent trait of all that is perceptible: “It is not in the nature of things for something unnatural to occur.” If we desire to prevent the loss of what is inherently perishable—what is transient by nature and destined to pass from one hand to another—

“Then we desire from nature what is not in nature. Whoever desires what is not in nature desires what does not exist. And whoever desires what does not exist fails to attain their wish, and the one who fails in their pursuit is wretched” (Al-Kindi, 1997, p. 8).

Moreover: "Whoever grieves over the loss of what is bound to be lost, and the absence of what was never meant to exist, will never cease grieving. For in every moment of their life, they will lose something they love and miss something they desire" (Al-Kindi, 1997, p. 9).

For al-Kindi, missing outs are a function of the world of generation and corruption. That is, they exist because everything in the world of sensory experience either comes into being (existing after not existing) or ceases to be (perishing after existing). Missing outs are simply entities (objects or states) that have perished. A world without missing outs would be a world where nothing happens—where nothing perishes, but also where nothing comes into existence. Yet we ourselves have come into this world through the very process of coming-into-being!

"If we wish to be free from loss and calamity, then we are wishing not to exist at all—for calamities arise from the decay of things. If there were no decay, there would be no creation. Therefore, if we desire a world without calamities, we are essentially wishing for a world without generation and corruption, which is against the nature of existence" (Al-Kindi, 1997, p. 16).

A similar remedy for missing outs appears in the work of another philosopher influenced by Stoicism, Muhammad ibn Zakariya al-Razi (d. 313 AH), under the theme of *grief*. He defines grief as a passion that arises when a person is deprived of a good or mourns the loss of a beloved. However, rather than examining the object of grief, al-Razi focuses on proving the absurdity and contradiction inherent in grief itself.

In a manner reminiscent of al-Kindi, he argues that grief essentially results from an acceptance of existence while simultaneously rejecting the laws governing existence. In other words, one who wishes to avoid pain or misfortune altogether is, in effect, wishing not to exist. Thus:

"One should not exaggerate or amplify the severity of what has been taken from them or what they have lost. Rather, they should consider the time they had with it as a gift and whatever enjoyment they derived as a gain. To wish for its permanence is to desire what is impossible. And whoever desires what is impossible is inviting grief upon themselves and straying from reason in pursuit of their whims" (Al-Razi, 1939, p. 68).

Indeed, even loss itself can, in some cases, be a gain, as reflected in the verse al-Razicites: "By my life, though we have lost you as a leader, are a refuge in our distress, Yet we have gained from your loss the certainty that we are now immune to future grief" (Al-Razi, 1939, p. 69).

If missing outs are unavoidable for al-Kindi and al-Razi due to the nature of existence as *becoming*, they are equally inevitable for Schopenhauer, though for a different reason. His metaphysical framework is based on *the will to live*,

which, to some extent, parallels the Stoic natural law—both being inescapable forces.

Schopenhauer focuses on a particular kind of missing outs: those related to love and marriage. A significant portion of human missing outs revolves around romantic partners—lamenting the loss of a person with whom one believes happiness would have been greater than with the partner they ultimately ended up with. His remedy for romantic and marital missing outs is summarized in the notion that “possibility was never superior to reality.”

Schopenhauer argues that choosing a life partner is among the least free of human decisions. The one making the choice is not the rational individual but *the will to live* itself. Consequently, there is no reason to grieve over failed romances or broken marriages:

“Failure does not stem from our unworthiness of love. There is nothing inherently wrong with us. Our personalities are not repellent, nor are our faces unpleasant. The union collapsed simply because we were not suited to produce a balanced child with a particular person. There is no need to despise ourselves. One day, we will meet someone who finds us wonderful and feels an extraordinary sense of ease and openness with us—because, from the perspective of the Will to Live, our chin and theirs will form a desirable combination” (Schopenhauer, as cited in de Botton, 2015, p. 242).

The most significant aspect of Schopenhauer’s view is the stance we should take toward those who rejected us—who caused us to endure missing outs, disappointments, and heartbreak: “We must learn, in time, to forgive those who rejected us. The separation was not their choice. Whenever someone hesitates to commit, asks for more space or time, or fears intimacy, their rejection is ultimately a rationalization of an unconscious judgment formed by the will to live” (de Botton, 2015, p. 242).

But Schopenhauer’s metaphysical insights do not merely teach us to forgive those who played the villain in our stories of missing outs. They also offer a radical antidote to all missing outs in general. If we grieve over what we missed because we believe it represents a great lost happiness, Schopenhauer’s metaphysics state simply: “Nothing has truly been lost, for happiness was never part of the plan to begin with.” As Alain de Botton comments:

“Schopenhauer did not intend to push us into despair but to free us from expectations that lead to bitterness. It is oddly comforting, when love fails us, to hear that happiness was never part of the plan. Perhaps the darkest thinkers are, paradoxically, the most consoling: the only fundamental error is the belief that we exist to be happy. As long as we insist on this error, the world will seem full of contradictions” (de Botton, 2015, p. 247).

Healing Anger Over the Missing Outs: What to Expect from the World

Beyond the sorrowful memories that missing outs evoke when consciousness recalls them from the past into the present, some forms of missing outs provoke a different kind of distress: *anger*. Anger is a psychological reaction with varying degrees of intensity, ranging from mere reproach and resentment to indignation, rage, fury, and even violent outbursts (Saliba, 1982, vol. 2, p. 128).

There are two types of anger. The first is the *explosive emotional reaction* triggered when one feels they have suffered an injustice or intentional harm. In such cases, anger serves as a drive for retribution and retaliation (Seneca, 2020, p. 51; see also Seneca, 2010). Naturally, this type of anger is unrelated to missing outs, as it seeks to redress a past injury deliberately inflicted by another. The second type of anger, however, arises in response to harms caused by nature or by others unintentionally—for example, anger at rain ruining a planned picnic, at waves sinking a boat, or at a child or servant accidentally dropping and shattering a valuable crystal glass. Here, revenge is meaningless, as there is no intentional harm to redress. In such cases, it is more appropriate to speak of resentment or vexation rather than outright anger.

Seneca examined anger in a three-part treatise titled *On Anger* (Kaster, 2010, p. 1),⁽²⁾ where he traced its origins to a correctable error in rational judgment. Since the mechanism of anger involves movements of the intellect, he argued that it remains under our control—unlike involuntary reactions (Kaster, 2010, p. 228) such as:

“Shivering when splashed with cold water, recoiling in disgust at certain objects, the hair standing on end upon hearing bad news, blushing at obscene words, or feeling dizzy when looking down from a cliff” (Kaster, 2010, p. 50).

Martha Nussbaum explains that, according to the Stoics, resentment arises from our judgments about the value of external goods that others can destroy. Thus,

“Whoever considers these perishable goods insignificant will also consider their destruction insignificant. As a result, they will either feel no resentment at all or only mild vexation. From this perspective, resentment reflects a state of weakness and fragility, affecting those who invest too much of themselves in transient things, making them susceptible to misfortune” (Nussbaum, 1994, p. 242).

2. Seneca was not the only ancient thinker to address the problem of anger; before him, Cicero had discussed it in *Tusculan Disputations*, as did the Epicurean *Philodemus* in the first century CE, and Plutarch, a student of Plato, two generations after Seneca. The Stoic approach is distinctive in that it considers emotions as evils in themselves, with the only certain cure being their eradication.

Seneca illustrates this with an analogy:

“When a sailor finds his ship taking on water, its planks bursting, and its timbers rotting from every side, he does not become angry at the sailors or at the ship itself, does he? Instead, he rushes to aid the situation—preventing water from entering here, bailing it out there, plugging visible holes, and seeking out the unseen ones from which the water seeps. He does not stop merely because more water keeps flowing in to replace what he has removed” (Seneca, 2010, pp. 41–42; Arabic translation, 2020, p. 91).

The lesson here is twofold:

Implicitly, anger is futile in the face of calamities—it only exacerbates them. As Alain de Botton puts it: “We will attain wisdom when we learn not to make the world’s resistance worse through our reactions—through anger, self-pity, anxiety, bitter sarcasm, arrogance, and paranoia” (De Botton, 2000, pp. 100–101). Instead of lamenting disasters, one must focus on what can be done to repair them.

Explicitly, as Seneca himself states: “A continuous effort is required to confront the ever-recurring evils—not merely to resist them, but to prevent them from prevailing” (De Botton, 2000, p. 42).

Later, he expands on this point:

“If it is a mute animal or an inanimate object, then you are no better than it if you rage at it. If it is a disease or a disaster, then enduring it with patience will make it easier to bear. If it is God, then it is a waste of time to be angry with Him, just as it is pointless to pray for Him to be angry with someone else” (Seneca, 2010, p. 55; Arabic translation, 2020, p. 110).

Seneca’s advice regarding such missing outs is to hold fast to reason in the Stoic manner, for it is folly to be angry at those responsible for these misfortunes (Seneca, 2010, pp. 55–56).³ These are natural misfortunes embedded in the order of the world—they were not truly caused by anyone in particular. The real problem lies in thinking otherwise—in the mistaken judgment that the world should conform to our desires.

Alain de Botton explains that, according to Seneca, our anger arises because we misjudge what is natural: One may be angry at the rain, but those who live in perpetually rainy tropical regions rarely are, as they perceive it as natural. One who rages over losing a key or breaking a crystal vase wishes for a world

3. Seneca also addresses the first type of anger—one directed at actual wrongdoing by others—stating: “If [someone says]: ‘The wrongdoer is a good person,’ do not believe it. And if [they say] ‘he is wicked’, do not be surprised. He will pay the price he owes you to someone else, and he has already been punished by committing the injustice.”

where keys are never misplaced and crystal never breaks—which is a misunderstanding of the fundamental rules of existence (Seneca, 2010, p. 104).

This perspective exposes a dangerously optimistic view of human nature and the world (De Botton, 2015, p. 102). Optimism is simply an exaggerated expectation of future good. Thus, we must adjust our frustrations by recalibrating our expectations of the world:

“Is it surprising that the wicked act wickedly? Are you truly shocked that your enemy seeks to harm you, that your friend annoys you, that your child makes mistakes, or that your servant misbehaves? You will cease to be angry when you cease to have unrealistic hopes” (De Botton, 2015, p. 105).

Thus, our wishes and desires exist on one side, and reality/nature exists on the other.

“Despite encountering shocking contradictions between his expectations and reality, Seneca did not succumb to moments of typical human frailty. Instead, he met shocking events with dignity. Through his death, Seneca contributed—alongside other Stoic thinkers—to permanently linking the term ‘philosophical’ with a composed, moderate response to disaster. He understood from the outset that philosophy is an educational system designed to help humans overcome the disparities between their expectations and reality” (De Botton, 2015, p. 98).

There is, however, a valid objection to Seneca’s argument, which he himself acknowledges: If we are to accept frustrating events as part of nature, then isn’t anger itself natural?

Seneca responds that although nature imposes certain conditions upon us, we can use nature itself to mitigate them.

“Just as one can escape the cold in winter and the heat in summer by seeking moderate climates or by strengthening their body to endure extreme temperatures” (Seneca, 2010, p. 43).

Nature’s laws do not eliminate the possibility of using those same laws to make life less miserable. If one argues that eradicating anger from the mind is impossible because it is part of human nature, Seneca replies:

“Nothing is too difficult for the mind; perseverance makes any habit an agreeable companion. No passion, however wild or rebellious, cannot be tamed through discipline. Some people have entirely stopped laughing. Others have forbidden themselves wine, sex, or any kind of drink. Some have even abandoned sleep, remaining perpetually awake. Others have learned to walk on narrow, slippery beams while carrying burdens too heavy for ordinary people to bear” (Seneca, 2010, p. 43).

Healing Regret Over the Missing Outs: You Could Not Have Done Otherwise

The fourth and final emotion resulting from the experience of missing outs is *regret*, accompanied by *remorse*. These emotions arise in connection with a particular type of missing out—one in which a person had a hand. In other words, they stem from actions that a person performed but, in hindsight, wishes they had not. (McQueen, 2024, Chapter 1)

Regret spans a wide spectrum of emotions and is defined as:

“A painful cognitive and emotional state associated with sorrow over a misfortune, deficiency, loss, violation, neglect, or mistake... The subject of regret may be an act of commission or omission; it includes voluntary actions as well as unforeseen events, tangible deeds as well as intentions and thoughts, and actions committed by oneself, by others, or by a collective. The wrongdoing may be legal, moral, or even an act that is neutral from both a legal and moral standpoint” (Landman, 1993, p. 36)."

An example of this last type would be trivial missing outs—such as choosing one dish over another at a restaurant, only to later regret the choice and wish for the alternative.

Unlike other emotions associated with missing outs, which may relate to present circumstances, regret is exclusively directed at past events. The most significant philosophical treatment of regret appears in Spinoza's *Ethics*, a perspective that later influenced subsequent philosophers, as we shall see.

Spinoza defines regret as: “Sorrow accompanied by the idea of oneself as its cause.” It is a powerful emotion because humans believe themselves to be free when they act, which amplifies their sense of regret once they perceive the consequences. (Spinoza, 2009, p. 197).

He further clarifies: “Regret is sorrow accompanied by the idea of something we believe we have done by our own volition” (Spinoza, 2009, p. 219)."

The core of the problem lies in this mistaken belief that an action was performed freely and, consequently, that it could have been avoided. In reality, every being exists and acts according to the necessity of its own nature.

Regarding the moral status of regret, Spinoza asserts: “Regret is not a virtue—that is, it does not arise from reason. A person who regrets their action is therefore twice unhappy or weak” (Spinoza, 2009, p. 281, Book IV, Proposition 54)".

The reasoning behind this is that such a person: First succumbed to a bad desire and acted upon it. Then, after fulfilling that desire, succumbed to sorrow over it. Thus, they failed twice: first, by not resisting the bad impulse; second, by allowing themselves to be consumed by grief, which only diminishes their strength further. This is because sorrow is “the transition of the person from

a greater perfection to a lesser perfection [...] that is, an act that diminishes or hinders a person's power of action" (Spinoza, 2009, p. 212).

Spinoza attributes the sorrow of regret to the conditioning imposed by upbringing, religion, and social norms:

"The repeated condemnation of wrongful acts by elders, along with their frequent reprimands, has conditioned us to associate these actions with feelings of sorrow—just as their praise of virtuous acts has conditioned us to associate them with joy. However, since what is deemed permissible or forbidden, sacred or profane, noble or base varies across societies, it is no surprise that an action which evokes regret in one culture might elicit pride in another" (Spinoza, 2009, p. 220).

For Spinoza, regret is a form of suffering and, more importantly, not a virtue because it is not an emotion derived from rational deliberation but rather from social and religious conditioning. It distorts rational judgment, as people act hastily and without foresight, only to then regret with the same impulsiveness and lack of reflection.

Since we should strive to act according to reason rather than be dominated by emotions, if one has already succumbed to passion, regret serves no purpose in the pursuit of wisdom. It should, therefore, be discarded.

However, this principle applies only to those capable of living according to reason—and since most people do not, regret may actually be beneficial for the majority. Spinoza acknowledges that, like similar emotions such as humility, hope, and fear, regret can do more good than harm. If people must err, then this error (regret) is the least harmful.

There is also a social function to regret, related to the stability of human coexistence. If all weak-minded individuals who are ruled by emotions were equally arrogant, nothing would shame them, and nothing would restrain them from wrongdoing. What, then, would prevent them from tyranny other than fear? Regret, then, serves as a punishment for the weak. This is why prophets emphasized humility, submission, and repentance—not because these states are inherently virtuous, but because they are beneficial for the masses, even if they are unnecessary for the wise (Spinoza, 2009, p. 282).

Regret, then, according to Spinoza, is an error in emotion that follows an initial error in action. We cannot influence the missing outs through regret because these missing outs are events/actions subject to determinism, whereas regret is merely an emotion that reflects specific states of the human mind. Thus, the person who acted wrongly could not have done otherwise—because they were not acting under the guidance of reason in the first place.

Nietzsche partially adopts Spinoza's perspective when he writes in *The Wanderer and His Shadow*:

“Never surrender to pangs of conscience. Instead, tell yourself: Regret is nothing but adding a second foolishness to the first. If you have committed a mistake, see how you can now do good. And if you suffer punishment for what you have done, bear it with the knowledge that you are now doing good—since your punishment will serve as a warning to others not to commit the same folly” (Nietzsche, 1996, p. 390).

Elsewhere, Nietzsche questions the purpose of regret:

“After all, what good does regret do? No action is undone by regret, nor by forgiveness, nor by atonement. One must be a theologian to believe in a force that can erase guilt” (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 136).

In contemporary philosophy, Spinoza’s critique of regret finds new resonance. One scholar argues that regret is irrational because it merely adds an additional quantity of pain to the world—pain that is felt by the individual for a past action. However, this regret does nothing to undo the harm done. It also distorts rational decision-making (Bittner, 1992, pp. 262–273).

Another scholar questions the widespread belief that regret helps us make better choices in the future. He argues that our evaluation of past actions (which leads to regret) is based on standards and considerations that were not clear at the time of decision-making—or that only became evident later.

This means that regret is fundamentally retrospective—it judges the past through the lens of newly acquired knowledge. Its value, then, does not lie in enhancing future decision-making, but rather in offering a retrospective insight into the contingency and finitude of our existence.

Every moment lived means that an alternative way of living has been lost forever (Bacharach, 2024, pp. 447–458). In other words, regret involves a paradox: it arises from a retrospective reflection that takes into account information, justifications, motives, and lessons that were not available at the time of the past decision we made and now regret.

Healing the Supreme Missing Out: Nonexistence

We encountered earlier in al-Kindi’s philosophy the idea that to grieve over missing outs is to wish they had never been, and to wish they had never been is, in essence, to wish for nonexistence altogether. What is meant here, of course, is coming-into-being—that is, existence as necessarily coupled with decay. That which is not subject to decay is not *being* but eternal existence, which, according to al-Kindi, belongs solely to intellectual entities and abstract truths. In short: to reject missing outs is to wish for nothingness.

Wishing that missing outs had never occurred is tantamount to wishing that you yourself had never existed, because the mechanism by which missing outs come into being is the very mechanism by which you came into being, it is the mechanism of all things that have come into existence.

This, precisely, is the perspective of Emil Cioran (Harvey, 2015, pp. 35, 38).⁴ For Cioran, the supreme missing out is nonexistence, and conversely, the greatest catastrophe is birth. If there is anything one should regret missing, it is the chance not to have been. This is why he wrote *The Trouble with Being Born* (Cioran, 2015)—to demonstrate that human life is an ongoing suffering over the supreme missing out. It is not merely that this pleasure or that opportunity was lost, or that this prize or that career path was not achieved. What we have missed is far greater than all these trivial missing outs combined. And this loss can never be undone.

One of Cioran's aphorisms reminds us of the Stoic philosophy of the present moment:

"No escape, and therefore no joy, comes from the past. Joy comes only from the present and from a future liberated from time" (Cioran, 2015, pp. 28–29).

But Cioran's nihilism refuses such optimism. His philosophy does not merely drive him to dwell on the past but even on what preceded the past—that is, before birth itself:

"The nightmare of birth, which drags us back to a time before our own past, makes us lose the desire for the future, the present, and even the past" (Cioran, 2015, p. 15).

Unlike the philosophers we have previously examined—who sought to cope with missing outs or overcome them—Cioran immerses himself in them. He does not try to forget them but instead obsesses over them. This relates to his concept of memory and forgetfulness.

For him, forgetfulness—by drowning oneself in distractions—rescues us from the disaster of thought. Memory, on the other hand, is designed to sabotage happiness because it recalls only that which torments us. Thus,

"The obsession with birth is rooted in a compulsive recall of the past and a relentless return to the original impasse" (Cioran, 2015, p. 28).

To remember one's birth is to recall the primal catastrophe that caused the greatest missing out of all. If there is any missing out that cannot be remedied by repentance, atonement, or forgiveness, it is the missing out of never having been born. Cioran writes:

"I cannot forgive myself for being born—as if, in intruding upon this world, I had betrayed a profound secret, violated a solemn covenant, committed a transgression of indescribable gravity" (Cioran, 2015, p. 21).

4. One might object to the inclusion of Emil Cioran among philosophers, but I believe, as David Harvey has argued, that great literature has always preceded metaphysics in describing areas of existence that philosophy has never dared to explore.

Every time he looks at a cradle, he asks: “For what crime has the occupant of this cradle been born?” (Cioran, 2015, p. 9). Cioran acknowledges that it is difficult to convince people that birth is a catastrophe. They have been conditioned to believe that it is life’s greatest blessing and that the real tragedy lies at its end, not at its beginning. According to Cioran, only Buddha grasped this truth—a truth that even Christ failed to see. Buddha understood that *birth*, alongside *aging and death*, is the root of all suffering and disaster (Cioran, 2015, p. 8).

Since missing outs are things that have happened but that we wish had not, the greatest missing out is the fact that we were born. Had we not been born, we would have attained the highest happiness: “Just the thought that I might never have been born—what happiness! What freedom!” (Cioran, 2015, p. 30).⁵ The happiest times are those of nonexistence:

“As time passes, I convince myself that my early years were paradise. But surely, I am mistaken. If there is a paradise, I must seek it in the time before all my years” (Cioran, 2015, p. 219).

In other words, the ultimate lost paradise, *the supreme missing out*, is the nothingness before birth. Given that possibility means that something could have either come into existence or remained nonexistent, Cioran finds it perplexing to understand how existence was favored over nonexistence. Logically, the superior option should have been chosen:

“The advantages of eternal dormancy are too numerous to count. When I try to list them, I fail to understand how existence ever prevailed over nonexistence in the first place” (Cioran, 2015, p. 143).

Just as philosophers have prescribed remedies for coping with missing outs, Cioran offers his own remedy:

First, one must acknowledge the catastrophe—accept that birth itself was the greatest mistake:

“The day we all understand that birth is a defeat, existence will finally seem lighter—like the day after a surrender, a breath of relief for the vanquished” (Cioran, 2015, p. 223).

To accept this truth is to surrender in a war that was lost from the start. In surrender, the defeated can finally rest and breathe freely, even if in captivity:

“Everything becomes clear and comprehensible once we admit that birth was an unfortunate event—or, at best, premature. Otherwise, we are left either to endure incomprehensibility or to deceive ourselves like everyone else” (Cioran, 2015, p. 122).

5. Saul Smilansky analyzes less radical wishes than Cioran’s—such as wishing that certain unfortunate events had never occurred—and concludes that this ultimately implies that we ourselves should never have existed at all! (Smilansky, 2013)

Yet, this “remedy” does not actually alleviate the suffering. It merely encourages honest acceptance of the sickness. Birth remains an irredeemable disaster, to the extent that all the philosophical remedies for fearing death become meaningless when compared to the catastrophe of birth itself. The ancients comforted the fearful by saying that one should not dread the nothingness after death, since it is no different from the nothingness before birth. But for Cioran, this is no longer reassuring: “Before our first nothingness, we were fortunate in not existing. But now, we exist—and this tiny fraction of existence, this small misfortune, is what fears its own absence. The word ‘fraction’ is inaccurate, for every fraction sees itself as greater than the universe—or at least its equal” (Cioran, 2015, p. 119).

If birth is the supreme missing out, then the only way to undo it is through its opposite—death. Death alone returns to a person what they have lost: nothingness.

“Say what you will—death remains the best idea that nature has devised to satisfy everyone. With each person who dies, everything dissolves; everything ceases to exist forever. What an advantage! What a privilege! We pull the universe into nonexistence along with us, without any effort on our part. We erase the world as we vanish. Death is an immoral act” (Cioran, 2015, pp. 123-124).

Despite the radical nature of Cioran’s perspective, it remains, in essence, a variation of Stoicism, or rather, Stoicism taken to its ultimate extreme. Cioran himself acknowledges this connection. He openly admits his preference for Marcus Aurelius over Nietzsche, stating:

“Marcus Aurelius is much closer to me. Not a moment’s hesitation between the lyricism of frenzy and the prose of acceptance: I find more comfort, more hope even, in the weary emperor than in the thundering prophet” (Cioran, 2015, p. 108).

This is expected, for Cioran’s philosophy is one of existential exhaustion, leading to weariness, inaction, and nihilism. However, the connection between Cioran and Stoicism goes beyond personal preferences to touch on both perspectives’ diagnoses of the human condition. Cioran writes:

“The Stoic rule of conduct, which dictates that we must silently submit to things beyond our control, only takes into account external misfortunes that lie outside our will. But what about those misfortunes that originate from within us? How do we reconcile with them? Whom do we blame if we are the source of our own afflictions? Ourselves? Fortunately, we manage to forget that we are the real culprits, and indeed, existence itself would be unbearable if we did not renew this lie and this forgetfulness every day” (Cioran, 2015, pp. 102-103).

Thus, in Cioran's view, the Stoics succeeded only in providing a remedy for the suffering that comes from external forces, from misfortunes beyond our control. But when it comes to suffering that originates from within, he takes it upon himself to complete the task by placing the full burden of blame on humanity itself.

Conclusion

If missing outs are those events that happened but we wished had not, or those that did not happen but we wished had, it has become evident from the various philosophical approaches presented above that missing outs are an intrinsic part of the incompleteness of human existence, which must be accepted with wisdom and courage. As William Empson once said, "Even in a happy life, a deep sense of missing out and waste is inevitable, and in a life full of companionship, a profound sense of loneliness cannot be avoided. This is the fundamental sense of tragedy" (Empson, 1935, as cited in Phillips, 2021, p. 15).

This applies to human existence. However, from the perspective of existence itself, missing outs are meaningless because they do not exist. Borrowing from Parmenides: what happens is what exists, and what does not happen (the missing outs) does not exist, and nonexistence cannot become existence. Possibility and potentialities have meaning only in the future, because the future—by definition—is open to all possibilities. But there are no possibilities in the past; rather, possibility in the past is a contradiction in terms. If missing outs refer to things that *did happen*, then they could not have happened otherwise; and if they refer to things that *did not happen*, then they were never meant to happen.

This is the overall conclusion of this study. The specific conclusions are as follows:

- Despite the scarcity of modern studies on missing outs, a coherent philosophical discourse on the subject can be constructed from scattered fragments within various philosophical traditions.
- Philosophers generally address missing outs indirectly, through the emotions accompanying the experience of missing outs—whether as preoccupation with the past, grief over what was lost, anger at what was missed, or regret over what was done. The proposed remedy depends on the emotion in question.
- To heal preoccupation with the past, Marcus Aurelius urges us to hold fast to the present moment and experience the fullness of being in the only real existence: the fleeting and ever-moving present.
- To heal grief over lost desires and vanished possessions, al-Kindi and al-Razi remind us of the metaphysical law: loss and decay are inherent in the nature of existence and events—to avoid missing out on anything, one

must not exist at all. Meanwhile, Schopenhauer places this law in the hands of an irrational force: the will to live.

- To heal anger and resentment, Seneca suggests recognizing the gap between our expectations (which are often overly optimistic) and the immutable laws of nature, which are indifferent to our satisfaction or frustration.
- To discard regret, Spinoza reminds us that each of us can only ever act in the way we acted—depending on whether reason or passion was guiding us. The one who regrets is mistaken twice: first by committing the wrong act, and second by weakening themselves further with sorrow.
- Ultimately, these various philosophical approaches to missing outs converge on the Stoic notion of natural law. According to this view, overcoming anxiety and distress requires a shift of the soul—from an individual, subjective perspective governed by emotions to an objective, universal perspective aligned with natural law. In other words, overcoming self-centeredness and seeing oneself as part of a greater whole.
- Here, philosophical wisdom—despite coming from different premises—meets religious wisdom. “Nothing shall befall you except what has been decreed for you, and nothing shall miss you except what was never meant for you.” Every calamity—every missing out—was already written: “So that you do not grieve over what has eluded you, nor rejoice excessively over what has been given to you.” (Al-Hadid: 23).

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On the Right to a Good Life

Egalitarian Liberalism and the Limits of the Rights-Based Approach

Abdul-Raheem Deqoune

Mohammed V University, Morocco

Abstract

This paper aims to shed light on some aspects of contemporary ethical-philosophical debates regarding what can be considered a good life. It first addresses the dispute among philosophers about the possibility of discussing ethical standards to answer the question: How should I live? Moreover, from this perspective, the study questions Dworkin's rights-based theory, which is viewed as an egalitarian liberal theory, and examines its ability to provide a foundation for the good life. Furthermore, the paper seeks to uncover the limits of this theory by engaging with the philosophical critique directed at it and exploring the prospects opened by post-secular and post-colonial readings of the concept of equality.

Keywords: Good life, Moral Standards, Equality, Goodness, Human Rights, Virtue.

Good Life in Contemporary Moral Philosophy: A Contested Concept

The divergence of perspectives on the good life is an inherent aspect of human existence. However, what remains essential is that individuals must establish a foundation for the life they consider worth living. This necessity does not imply a descent into moral relativism; rather, it demands an awareness of the epistemic limits of human reasoning in this domain, as well as a recognition of human finitude and existential vulnerability. It is within this framework that philosophers have persistently sought to identify the fundamental principles that underpin the good life—principles that, if adhered to, may facilitate its realization.

As Jacqueline Russ (1934–1999) observes (Russ, 2001), contemporary philosophical discourse increasingly signals a renewed focus on ethics and moral philosophy, driven by an urgent need for firm foundations amid the relentless transformations of modern life. The fluidity of contemporary existence has engendered profound moral complexities, reinforcing the necessity

for stable ethical frameworks. This condition gives rise to a persistent paradox within modern moral life: while individuals resist the imposition of universal moral norms and predefined life patterns, they simultaneously experience an intensified need for such normative structures to navigate the expanding and intricate web of human relationships.

In response to this tension, philosophers encounter a dual epistemic and normative challenge. On the one hand, the formulation of a comprehensive ethical theory capable of providing substantive guidance for the good life remains an arduous endeavor. On the other hand, even if such a theory were to be established, achieving broad consensus regarding its validity and applicability proves even more formidable. The pluralistic nature of contemporary societies further complicates this pursuit, rendering the prospect of a universally accepted ethical framework increasingly untenable.

Philosophers, in this context, do not find themselves in an enviable position. The renewed vitality of moral philosophy does not necessarily indicate the restoration of philosophy's esteemed role within intellectual and social life. Rather, it also reflects the increasing complexity of our moral existence, wherein discussions about what constitutes a good, virtuous, just, or dignified life have become more challenging than ever before.

As Bernard Williams insightfully observes: *"I want to make it clear that we can think about morality in multiple and diverse ways, unless historical and cultural conditions prevent us from doing so. However, I see philosophy's role as weak in determining how this should be done."* (Williams, 1993, p. XVIII).

The philosophical challenges inherent in any attempt to construct an ethical theory can be distilled into a set of fundamental questions: Can we truly formulate moral principles to guide our lives? What is the source of these principles—is it reason, emotion, conscience, or something else? Is the foundation of ethics deontological or consequentialist? Is our moral life grounded in duty or virtue? And if such principles do indeed exist, can they genuinely guarantee the attainment of the good life we aspire to?

Normativity vs. Skepticism

One of the approaches that many philosophers have considered a reliable path toward understanding the nature of the good life involves formulating or identifying moral standards that determine what ought to be done—or what can be done—to make our lives good and worth living. While this may appear logical and desirable, in reality, it is far from straightforward. The very acceptance of the existence of such standards, let alone the attempt to establish them, has always been a matter of debate—a debate that has only intensified in modern and contemporary moral philosophy.

In this context, American philosopher Christine Korsgaard (1952–) asserts that contemporary ethics is fundamentally concerned with the issue of

normativity: the examination of our moral concepts regarding the good life, justice, virtue, good, and evil. She argues that the question “*How should I live?*” is inseparable from the question “*Why should I be moral?*” Any attempt to separate these two questions leads to a distortion in answering either one of them. In seeking a philosophical foundation for ethics, we are not merely searching for an explanation of moral practices but also questioning what justifies the demands that morality imposes upon us. This, she explains, is what is referred to as the normative question (Korsgaard, 1996, pp. 9–10).

Our conception of the good life is inseparable from our conviction that human existence is, first and foremost, a moral existence. More than that, this moral existence exerts an undeniable influence on us, an influence that manifests through moral concepts that express ethical truths—regardless of their nature or essence. This idea is clearly reflected in what Christine Korsgaard refers to as “*the practical and psychological effects of moral ideas.*”

The role of ethical theories lies in uncovering these effects in a dual manner. Every moral theory seeks to explain why certain actions should be performed in order to achieve a moral life—what Korsgaard calls the criterion of explanatory adequacy. However, before doing so, it must enable us to answer a fundamental question: What ought to be done? This, she argues, is the criterion of justificatory adequacy (Korsgaard, 1996, p. 13).

According to Christine Korsgaard, normativity in any ethical theory is both a sensitive and decisive matter. She argues that those who deny its necessity or claim that we are incapable of establishing it fall into a form of skepticism that is not only destructive to the very possibility of moral knowledge but also to the very foundations of human relationships and the conception of the good life. Whether we acknowledge it or not, our world is a moral world—one governed by ethical standards. While we may disagree on the source, scope, and impact of these standards, we must nevertheless affirm their existence (Korsgaard, 1996, pp. 13–14).

British philosopher Bernard Williams (1929–2003) offered a strong critique of contemporary moral conceptions of the good life, particularly targeting utilitarianism and contractualism. These two dominant theories, as is well known, reduce the meaning of the good life either to the maximization of utility or to adherence to contractual agreements. However, in doing so, these normative theories present a trivialized understanding of what constitutes a good life—one that fails to account for the complexity of human moral experience and the inherent moral conflicts it entails. Williams argues that such conflicts cannot simply be resolved through adherence to principles like personal integrity or mutual obligations between individuals. Moreover, at best, both utilitarianism and contractualism treat these principles in an instrumental and calculative manner, assuming their approach to be purely rational.

Williams criticizes such theories—and indeed ethical theory as a whole, insofar as it presents itself as a theory—for its persistent attempt to formulate ideas about the nature of the good life. He views the Socratic question as the clearest example of this relentless yet futile pursuit. After all, who has ever provided—or could ever provide—a definitive answer to the question: *How ought one to live?* (Williams, 2006, pp. 1–2)⁽¹⁾. This question has become even more elusive in the modern world, where philosophy no longer holds a monopoly on answering such inquiries. In fact, it no longer commands the same attention it once did. However, the very existence of ethical theories suggests that answers have indeed been proposed, making it necessary to examine them—especially those that claim to be universal (Williams, 2006, p. 4)⁽²⁾.

Thus, Williams directs his critique—primarily a skeptical one—toward the ability of ethical theories, especially modern ones, to provide a satisfactory answer to the Socratic question. This skepticism, however, is essentially an accusation: these theories, according to Williams, have strayed from the proper path in their attempt to answer the question.

What he finds problematic is their detachment from the reality of moral practice, which should remain central to philosophical ethical reflection. Instead, these theories engage in a futile attempt to impose a strict rationalization on various aspects of human behavior (Williams, 1993, pp. 197–198). The ultimate goal of his critique is to reveal that:

“The demands of the modern world on ethical thought are unprecedented, and the conceptions of rationality embodied in most contemporary moral philosophy are unable to meet them. But some heavily revised extensions of ancient thought may be able to do so” (Williams, 1993, p. xii)⁽³⁾.

Williams’ critique of utilitarianism was not an end in itself, despite the significant attention he devoted to it. Rather, his primary goal was to demonstrate that the concept of the good life cannot be understood purely through objective standards—as if achieving the good life were merely a matter of possessing

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1. “The goals of moral philosophy, and any hopes it may have that it deserves serious attention, are linked to the fate of Socrates’ question, even if it is not true, that philosophy itself can reasonably hope to answer it,” Williams says.
 2. In fact Williams considers that Socrates’ question: How should one live? It is the best question from which philosophical reflection on moral matters can be based; It does not carry that great ambition for inclusiveness, as do other questions such as: “What is our duty?” Or “How can we finally be?” Or “How can we be happy?”
 3. It should be noted that Williams engages in a strong tradition of contemporary moral philosophy based on the results of analytical philosophy and logical positioning, imposes severe restrictions on moral philosophical thinking, and constantly questions the moral philosophy’s ability to crystallize coordinated ethical theories. But paradoxically, he does not hide a tendency to return to and benefit from old moral philosophy (generally based on virtue morality), although he declared that it does not always help us find solutions to our modern moral dilemmas.

certain goods or conforming to universal values that everyone ought to pursue.

It is evident that Williams adopts a broadly individualist perspective, rejecting any moral framework that prescribes what should make people better off regardless of their personal desires, preferences, or identities. Instead, he emphasizes the individual's perspective on what constitutes a good life. In his view, well-being must respect the diversity of values and individual projects, implying that what contributes to a person's well-being can vary significantly depending on their commitments, emotions, and relationships.

The most crucial aspect of striving toward a good life, according to the philosopher, lies in what he calls an individual's "ground projects"—the true expression of one's goals, commitments, and extended relationships, which grant life its meaning. These projects are not merely means to achieve well-being, although they may constitute a part of it; nor do they rigidly conform to moral obligation principles (in the Kantian sense). Unlike utilitarian calculations, which treat desires as interchangeable, and pure deontological accounts, which disregard the moral agent's emotional engagement in ethical action, Williams emphasizes that people are bound by specific commitments and life projects that hold significant importance for them and contribute to their sense of identity (Williams, 2006, pp. 93–107, 183–187).

Personal identity plays a fundamental role in Williams' conception of the good life. He argues that compelling individuals to abandon their personal commitments in favor of maximizing overall happiness or adhering strictly to categorical moral obligations inevitably leads to ethical dilemmas and a form of psychological alienation. In utilitarianism, one must not overlook the fact that relying exclusively on what the philosopher calls rational calculation as a precise mechanism for achieving happiness—and thus attaining the highest degree of the good life, as consequentialist ethics broadly advocate—overlooks the complexities of life, particularly the emotional and psychological dimensions of human existence. These dimensions render it impossible to fully quantify well-being using a purely rational approach or mathematical formulas. Rational calculations of benefits and goods often ignore critical elements in individuals' lives, such as struggle, suffering, or moral conflict in the pursuit of meaningful goals. A narrow focus on measuring happiness fails to account for the richness and complexity of human life.

Despite the potentially tragic aspects of this struggle, it is precisely what grants human existence its value in Williams' view. Individuals may encounter irreconcilable situations and moral dilemmas for which no solution can be entirely justified. In such cases, no decision can lead to a wholly happy or satisfactory outcome. However, individuals may still be able to maintain their integrity and live a fulfilling life by remaining true to their values and commitments.

For Williams, the meaning of a good life involves confronting moments of conflict in a way that expresses human authenticity, rather than merely seeking to avoid pain or maximize pleasure. His conception of the good life is pluralistic—he believes that multiple, conflicting values contribute to a flourishing life and that no single formula or principle can determine what is best for everyone. The pursuit of well-being is a complex and contextual process, requiring attentiveness to each individual's unique circumstances, personal projects, and the moral complexities they encounter.

Korsgaard was keenly aware of such critiques that any normative ethical theory might face. Therefore, she emphasized that the difficulty is not merely in the ability of an ethical theory to determine standards—this is something philosophers can debate among themselves. The greater challenge lies in recognizing that these standards can only be fully determined insofar as they are formulated by a moral agent who engages with them and sees themselves as their author. Any ethical standards do not derive their legitimacy solely from their precision, universality, or rationality but fundamentally from our sense that they originate from us and express who we are.

For this reason, Korsgaard proposed three conditions for any normative ethical theory to be considered viable. The first: "It must actually succeed in addressing someone in that situation." This means that the normative question—What should I do?—must arise from the person themselves. That is, the question must be present for the individual, because any answer will lack acceptance if the person does not first believe in the existence of the question and in their own role in asking it. Consequently, the question of the good life is an ethical and normative question if its source is the speaking individual, who is, by necessity, a moral agent.

The second condition follows from and is closely tied to the first, as the question presupposes an answer. If the moral agent poses the question, they are also obligated to respond to it. Korsgaard referred to this as "*transparency*," which signifies a kind of consistency and harmony with oneself.

The third condition manifests in the connection between any possible answer and who we are—our sense of ourselves as moral beings. The ethical challenge is so complex and demanding that any response to it is, in itself, a response worthy of recognition. And certainly, the one who responds deserves the same recognition. Although Korsgaard acknowledges this as a demanding requirement, she argues that it is inescapable, as it is precisely what makes our answer to the normative ethical question a successful one. Consequently, it is also what renders our lives genuinely moral and deserving of being called *a good life* (Korsgaard, 1996, pp. 16–17).

For some contemporary moral philosophers who seek to restore philosophical ethics to its rightful place in modern culture, discussing the ethical

question—especially the question of the good life—solely through the lens of moral norms may be misguided and could distance us further from what we hope to achieve.

Let us recall what Elizabeth Anscombe stated in her famous and forceful critical essay, “Modern Moral Philosophy”: “There is no possibility of looking for ‘prevailing norms’ except in human virtues (...) In relation to the various aspects of life, a person possesses certain virtues, and this ‘person’ is the prevailing norm.” She further adds that if one seeks the meaning of this prevailing norm, the language of modern ethics is impoverished and incapable of providing it; so much so that terms like “ought,” “should,” and “must” would at best belong in the index.

Instead, she argues, we need a more flexible approach to these concepts—one that acknowledges other dimensions, foremost among them, virtue (Anscombe, 1958, pp. 1–16).

It seems that the disagreement between Christine Korsgaard and Bernard Williams is limited to the extent to which one can speak of a moral theory grounded in ethical norms in the modern sense of the term. Beyond this, however, they both agree on the necessity of expanding the philosophical discussion of ethics—particularly the good life—beyond the confines of modern moral theory’s language.

There is a pressing need to breathe life into moral norms so that human beings can truly live a good life. This can only be achieved by embedding these norms more deeply into the roots of human existence, including its social and spiritual dimensions, rather than reducing them to purely rational principles or instrumentally defined norms.

Virtue in Confrontation with Moral Relativism

The debate among moral philosophers has not been solely about the success of moral philosophy in formulating standards that can be used to justify our moral judgments and conceptions of the good life. At its core, the conflict goes beyond this—it reflects a deeper struggle between a modern ethical system and an older one. It is well known that the older system does not rely heavily on moral standards; rather, it emphasizes what is known as virtue ethics. This perspective offers a more holistic view, asserting that achieving the good life is not merely a matter of strictly adhering to ethical norms.

In this context, the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (1929–)⁽⁴⁾ argues that contemporary moral theory has fallen into an unprecedented state of disorder due to the dominance of emotivism. He defines emotivism as:

4. MacIntyre is considered the strongest actor alongside Anscombe for the return of virtue ethics in contemporary moral philosophy.

“The doctrine that all moral evaluations are nothing more than expressions of preference, attitude, or feeling—so long as they are moral or evaluative in nature.” (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 12)⁵.

One of the most significant critiques of emotivism is its attempt to detach itself from its social history. Alasdair MacIntyre considers this a dangerous distortion that must be firmly challenged. He thus poses a fundamental question:

“Can we conceive of a moral philosophy isolated from its social and historical context?”

Answering yes to this question would mean separating moral activity from its actual existence—an idea that is inconceivable. Even if we assume such a separation were possible, it would inevitably lead to a dangerous moral relativism.

MacIntyre argues that modern philosophers struggle to find a universally accepted and compelling justification for moral obligation because of a fundamental shift in their understanding of human nature and the moral system associated with it—namely, the modern ethical framework.

To grasp this shift, MacIntyre traces the historical-philosophical roots of these concepts. He argues that moral systems originate in Aristotelian ethical theory, which is, in essence, classical ethics. A defining characteristic of this system, as expressed by Aristotle, is teleology.

The classical ethical system was fundamentally teleological—meaning that human beings are always striving toward a purpose (*telos*) in their existence. Perhaps the highest of these purposes is realizing one’s full humanity or achieving one’s nature as a human being (MacIntyre, 2007, pp. 51–54).

Our concepts in general, and moral concepts in particular, are functional—they are tied to their purpose. For instance, our concept of a clock is inseparable from our concept of a good clock, which accurately tells time. Similarly, our concept of a farmer is linked to that of a good farmer, one who knows how to produce a successful harvest. These concepts, in turn, are shaped by factual premises.

Factual reasoning is teleological because it is tied to functional concepts. The problem with modern moral philosophy is that it has attempted to derive moral arguments without relying on functional concepts.

5. It is noticeable that MacIntyre incorporates the doctrine of emotion, as a dominant doctrine in the Western moral deliberative sphere. Various moral tendencies and colourations such as intuitive, utilitarian and perfectionist doctrine, and it does not hesitate to consider even ethical philosophical attempts to transcend that doctrine. Especially those rational attempts, such as Rawls’ attempt at his theory of justice, which is just an extension of Kantian moral philosophy, and Durkin’s attempt at rights. She couldn’t, because she simply shares philosophical foundations with her as well as causing moral chaos that MacIntyre regrets spreading in today’s Western moral culture. (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 21).

In contrast, the classical ethical tradition, both in its Greek and medieval forms, is built upon a fundamental functional concept: the human being.

Our concept of what it means to be human is incomplete without a conception of what it means to be a good human. Thus, the “is/ is not” distinction provides the foundation for determining “ought/ ought not.”

As Aristotle argued, the starting point of any moral inquiry must be the conception of the good human being, who lives a good life.

According to Alasdair MacIntyre, ethics cannot be based solely on rules; rather, it must be grounded in a conception of the good life, which is in turn realized through a conception of virtue (MacIntyre, 2007, Chapters 10, 11, and 13).

The classical tradition holds that every activity and practice aims at some good. For Aristotle, this good is what he called *eudaimonia*—a state in which a person flourishes, acts rightly, respects themselves and what is sacred (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 148).

If virtues are essential to achieving *eudaimonia*, then a lack of that ultimate goal indicates a deficiency in one’s exercise of virtue—or even the absence of virtue altogether. However, this does not mean that virtues are merely instrumental. What constitutes human flourishing cannot be conceived apart from the idea of a fully realized human life, lived in its entirety.

Aristotle’s theory of virtue makes a key distinction:

- There is a difference between what an individual might consider to be good for them personally (a partial perspective),
- And what is truly good for them as a human being (an objective perspective).

In the classical tradition, the practice of virtue is directed toward the latter—the true human good. Achieving this good requires not just adherence to rules, but the exercise of practical wisdom (*phronesis*)—the ability to judge correctly what is right and fitting in a given situation. Moral action, therefore, is not about blind rule-following but about acting appropriately in pursuit of the good life.

We were not mistaken when we stated at the beginning of this section that contemporary philosophical debates on ethics—particularly on the standards that could enable a person to lead a good life if they adhere to them—are ongoing and rarely reach a satisfying conclusion. Nor would it be a mistake to see this outcome as inevitable, given that modern societies have become increasingly secular, driven by a central concern: preventing any comprehensive moral doctrine from imposing itself on individuals and ensuring that moral discourse does not devolve into vague, irrational rhetoric devoid of meaning within the modern intellectual framework. What Alasdair MacIntyre

describes as moral chaos may, for some, appear to be a rationalization of ethical language—an attempt to structure it in a way that serves its primary function: securing rights that individuals now claim as free, autonomous beings who deserve equal respect and consideration.

But is a rights-based framework sufficient to defend a meaningful conception of the good life? And does equality truly enable individuals to develop and pursue their own visions of such a life? These are the questions we shall now explore.

Equality as a Path to the Good Life – Dworkin’s Approach

When considering rights as a standard for securing a good life, we must recognize that the term *right* is employed in multiple ways. The distinguished American philosopher and legal scholar Ronald Dworkin (1931–2013) emphasizes that this concept has played a central role in Western political debates—particularly in the United States—in recent decades (Dworkin, 2008). This debate has intensified with growing concerns over the state’s significant presence and its strong influence in shaping and regulating the moral and political rights of its citizens (Dworkin, 2015, p. 283).

In this context, Dworkin highlights a particular concern: the right against the state, which asserts that individuals possess rights that the state must neither interfere with nor threaten. He observes that the demand for this right becomes more pronounced as societies grow increasingly diverse and divided, making it difficult to identify a shared goal or a unified vision of the good life that binds a political community together.

According to Dworkin, while the moral rights of individuals in contemporary Western societies have become an undeniable achievement, their legal status and institutional application remain problematic. At the constitutional level, the relationship between state institutions and citizens introduces significant challenges.

Dworkin argues that “the constitution merges ethical and legal questions by making the validity of a law contingent upon resolving complex moral issues, such as whether a given law respects the fundamental principle of equality among all people” (Dworkin, 2015, p. 284). However, in practice, due to the legal complexities that characterize formal procedures, the constitutional system—particularly at the legislative level—often struggles to either secure these rights effectively or clearly define their scope.

Dworkin advocates for a fundamental principle: the state must always uphold and protect the constitutional rights of its citizens. This, he argues, requires adopting a strong interpretation of the concept of rights—one that defines them as the individual’s ability to act in accordance with their vision of a good life, without facing external restrictions.

For Dworkin, it is fundamentally unjust for anyone to interfere in an individual's choices as long as those choices concern only the individual's own freedom and do not harm or threaten the security and well-being of others (Dworkin, 2015, pp. 289, 293).

However, this issue remains one of the most complex and continues to spark ongoing debates and sharp divisions in societies with some level of democracy. One perspective—represented by Dworkin—argues that the right against the state is meaningful only if it genuinely empowers individuals (citizens) to reject any interference with their fundamental rights, even if such rejection takes the form of civil disobedience. Dworkin understands civil disobedience as the refusal to comply with a law deemed unjust and in violation of a fundamental right.

On the other hand, the opposing camp—which Dworkin characterizes as conservative—maintains that such behavior leads to a disregard for the law, ultimately weakening its authority and, by extension, the entire society. While both positions offer certain advantages, they also entail trade-offs and sacrifices (Dworkin, 2015, p. 295).

For Dworkin, however, nothing is more detrimental than a state that fails to take people's rights seriously. Challenges to law enforcement, he argues, can always be addressed through rational discussion and a continuous return to fundamental principles⁶.

In contemporary societies, we often find ourselves facing competing rights, which necessitates state intervention to distinguish between them and enforce what can be considered the most fundamental rights. This dynamic is sometimes used as a justification for prioritizing the rights of the majority or collective rights, particularly when they are framed as serving the common good. This argument suggests that such rights should take precedence, even if they occasionally conflict with individual rights.

Dworkin responds to this stance by emphasizing that the notion of competing rights can only be meaningfully applied within the realm of fundamental rights—which, in his view, are inherently individual rights that pertain to members of society as individuals (Dworkin, 2015, p. 296). Thus, the rights of the majority can never override individual rights. This position clearly underscores Dworkin's liberal stance.

Moreover, conservatives, within the framework of what is known as the emergency argument, assert that the state has the right to restrict personal

6. Durkin devotes much of his writing in his *President's* books to discussing the role of principles in the drafting of legal legislation, and stresses in this regard that judges and jurists (like lawmakers) always need to return to ethical (liberal) principles to consider what he calls difficult situations, in which there is no explicit legal text, and which have never been adjudicated by judicial bodies. This idea is at the heart of Durkin's thesis: the law always needs ethical principles to guide it. See: (Durkin, 2015, chaps. 1-4)

rights in situations of crisis or when doing so could prevent significant harm or achieve a major benefit. However, determining what constitutes an emergency remains a matter of contention—often ambiguous and unclear. This ambiguity necessitates extreme caution to ensure the legitimacy of such claims, avoiding mere speculation or unfounded assumptions.

Dworkin argues that allowing citizens to protest and express their opinions does not necessarily lead to chaos. On the contrary, protest is fundamentally a democratic and civilized form of expression, particularly when conducted within an institutional framework. He thus states:

“Tolerance toward protest does not undermine the foundations of a community or inflict great harm upon it. It seems unreasonable to assume that the facts suggest such a possibility or even make it conceivable” (Dworkin, 2015, pp. 298–299)⁽⁷⁾.

However, granting the right against the state such extensive recognition could, in fact, pose a threat to the legal system, the rule of law, and even the cohesion of the political community itself. In many cases, this right has been used to incite unrest and disorder, and the language of protest continues to escalate when given unrestricted legitimacy.

Dworkin was aware of this challenge and sought to address it by emphasizing that issues concerning the right against the state are far more complex than they may seem. He argued that breaking the law must be justified by stronger foundations than those advocating mere compliance with it. Thus, he relied heavily on the rationality and good intentions of individuals. Yet, in doing so, he failed to provide a strong defense for his call to take rights seriously as he envisioned them.

Ultimately, faced with the possibility of error—to which both individuals claiming moral rights and the state, represented by legislators and judges, are susceptible—Dworkin placed his trust in the ability of political decision-makers to make prudent judgments about where the state should draw the line. He believed in striking a delicate balance between the common good and individual rights, advocating what he termed a middle-ground policy (Dworkin, 2015, p. 301).

Dworkin addresses this challenge—one that could threaten the very notion of taking rights seriously—by invoking what he considers the philosophical foundation of the right against the state. This foundation is built upon two key philosophical ideas:

7. Indeed, the history of the United States has known and continues to be violent kinds of protest, and what it experienced during the 2020 election after Democratic candidate Biden was declared the winner of Republican candidate Trump and the breaking into the Capitol Building and other events confirms that clinging to the idea of rights against the state can at any moment be turned into chaos, even into violence threatening a civil war.

1. Human dignity (in the Kantian sense).
2. Political equality, meaning that the state must extend the same respect and consideration to all its citizens.

For Dworkin, the concept of rights is fundamentally rooted in these two principles. Therefore, violating rights—an act that essentially undermines human dignity and political equality—is not only a serious matter but also a threat to the very justification for protecting the common good.

In his view, rights cannot be taken away except in specific and well-defined cases—cases that must be consistent with the core principles on which individual rights are originally based.

Thus, Dworkin stands as one of the strongest advocates of equality in contemporary political and moral philosophy—if not the most committed defender of it. In fact, one could argue that his entire theory of rights was developed precisely to defend equality as the only viable foundation for both his theory and for liberalism itself. He maintains that liberalism must be egalitarian in order to be justifiable.

For Dworkin, it is meaningless to assert that humans have a right to freedom in some absolute sense, just as it is unhelpful to simply list freedoms and rank them by importance. However, when it comes to equality, the situation is different—we are indeed compelled to affirm that people have a right to be treated as equals.

That is why he states:

“If we want to defend the existence of a right to certain freedoms, we must find another foundation for it (...) The concept at the heart of my argument will be equality, not freedom” (Dworkin, 2015, p. 403).

According to Dworkin, in an era where the paradigm of freedom dominates Western political thought, equality has become an endangered ideal, especially within liberal democratic frameworks. He argues that even liberals themselves have become increasingly reluctant to uphold it.

Yet, throughout his works, Dworkin insists on posing a crucial question:

“Can we afford to ignore the demand for equality?” (Dworkin, 2002, Introduction).

In his seminal book, *Justice for Hedgehogs*, Dworkin asserts that no government can claim legitimacy unless it respects two fundamental principles:

1. It must treat all citizens equally, demonstrating an equal concern for their welfare and opportunities.
2. It must respect each citizen’s right and responsibility to define what they consider valuable in life (Dworkin, 2011, Baedeker: *Justice*).

Dworkin further emphasizes:

“A government must not only treat its people with care and respect, but it must do so equally (...) that is, with equal concern and respect in political decisions about how resources and opportunities should be distributed” (Dworkin, 2015, p. 404).

For Dworkin, equality means equality in the distribution of resources. Treating people according to the two aforementioned principles necessarily leads to an equal distribution of wealth. Thus, the central question for political theory in a liberal state is:

“What degree of material inequality, in resources, opportunities, and freedoms, can be justified, and why?”

However, this question is embedded within his broader conception of rights. As a liberal philosopher, Dworkin believed that no distributive justice is truly neutral—every system of distribution is ultimately the result of policies and laws designed to serve a specific purpose. This is why, for Dworkin, equality is deeply intertwined with both rights and the law (Dworkin, 1981a, p. 185; 1981b, p. 283; 1987, p. 1).

The strong concept of individual rights that Dworkin advocates is a response to the dominance of utilitarian political (and even ethical) theories. In his view, utilitarianism fails to protect the fundamental right of citizens to equal concern and respect, because it is influenced by what he calls external preferences (as opposed to personal preferences). These external preferences can harm individuals, restrict their freedoms, limit their access to scarce resources, and even undermine the way of life they consider appropriate for themselves (Dworkin, 2015, p. 408)⁸.

This understanding remains fundamentally secular as well. The modern individual’s insistence on rights as the ultimate expression of their chosen way of life is, in reality, merely an external preference—one that lacks the depth necessary to provide true meaning to a fulfilled life. This is not to say that the language of rights is unimportant in achieving such fulfillment, but rather that reducing life to a purely rights-based framework may impoverish it, rendering it devoid of deeper significance. This is precisely what Alasdair MacIntyre and G. E. M. Anscombe criticized in liberal moral discourse, arguing that it suffers from a loss of its foundational ethical principles, leaving it incapable of offering a coherent vision of the good life.

The pursuit of rights, as envisioned by Ronald Dworkin, may overlook the deeper dimensions of inequality—real, pressing disparities that far outweigh the formalism of this liberal conception. The language of rights is impoverished because it remains both formalistic and secular. Beyond its abstract framework, it dismisses what is most authentic and essential to human beings

8. Here we note a striking convergence between Durkin and Bernard Williams on the priority of personal preferences in shaping people’s views on good life.

in their pursuit of a truly flourishing life. Moreover, it can serve as a tool of deception, masking structural injustices and persuading individuals to accept imposed conditions as legitimate. It is crucial to recognize that, in many instances, liberal rights discourse becomes a justification for coercion, enforcing a particular vision of life that may not align with people's convictions. Worse still, it pressures them to believe that achieving a specific way of living—whether Western, liberal, or secular—is the highest aspiration they can hope for.

Critique of the Rights-Based Approach: The Full and Empty Good Life

Critiquing the Ambiguity of Rights Discourse

Ronald Dworkin's conception of rights is rooted in a liberal/secular vision of the good life, one that upholds equality in individuals' right to pursue such a life based on the liberal principle of "equal freedom." As we have seen, this notion allows for multiple interpretations of equality, particularly as it becomes increasingly intertwined with political theory and the role of the state. Under this framework, equal freedom is framed as the ideal expression of the need for fair opportunities and equal participation in political life for all citizens.

However, this principle of equality, even when coupled with the principle of freedom, remains ambiguous—often even contradictory. The relentless pursuit of equal freedom has, in many cases, given rise to formalism, arbitrariness, intolerance, and a refusal to recognize difference.

The British anthropologist Talal Asad (1932–) argues that the secularization of equal freedom has fundamentally transformed the dimensions of both principles—starting with the very notion of politics, which has become confined within the limits of the sovereign state. He also highlights a shift in the concept of sovereignty itself, as it has come to rest exclusively on the state's authority to generate and sustain political power as a coercive and exclusive force (Asad, 2021, pp. 23–33). As a result, the state now holds the exclusive right to determine who qualifies as a citizen and who is entitled to equality and rights.

Amid these conflicting dynamics, Talal Asad observes that the growing emphasis on the neutrality and liberalism of the state, as well as on individual rights, equality, and freedom, is matched only by a parallel rise in inequality and violence—both within societies and on a global scale.

Asad explains this paradox by arguing that the secularizing movement, which accompanied the development of liberal conceptions of freedom and equality, underwent a radical shift in the twentieth century. Rather than fostering true emancipation, it evolved into a predatory force—one that promoted market freedoms, reinforced the global dominance of capital, and exacerbated rising levels of inequality (Asad, 2021, p. 35).

In this context, the modern individual finds themselves trapped in a state of neurosis, which Talal Asad describes as follows:

“While government surveillance invades citizens’ private lives—controlling how they speak, act, and think—those same citizens believe they are exercising self-control and self-protection. This belief becomes the foundation of a pathological politics.”

Accordingly, Asad argues that anyone seeking to understand liberalism must confront the following critical questions:

“What forms of freedom and equality are being defended? Who resists them? And how are they accepted and recognized?” (Asad, 2021, pp. 39–40).

Yes, the principle of legal equality, which forms the foundation of rights in Ronald Dworkin’s theory, represents the primary model of equality in the modern state. However, the problem does not merely lie in the violation of equality among the citizens of this state. Instead, as Talal Asad argues, it is rooted in what he calls “misguided treatment”—a fundamental issue that may be inherent to this very notion of equality. Under the unintended consequences of neutrality-based equality, bias or injustice can arise in the name of neutrality itself. In this way, legal equality may obstruct people from achieving the life they consider good—not because of explicit discrimination, but through the legal denial of opportunities essential for realizing their aspirations.

Now, let us consider the restrictions and exclusion faced by large segments of migrants and ethnic or religious minorities in the West—all in the name of equality. The implicit message from Western states and governments to these groups is clear: If you wish to stay among us, you must integrate into our societies—even at the cost of your aspirations, orientations, and personal identities.

Yet, even if migrants accept these imposed conditions, this does not necessarily lead to genuine integration. Instead, they remain branded by their difference, marked by their otherness, and continuously subjected to various forms of negative discrimination.

On the other hand, even if we link equality to the already vague concept of equal opportunity, we still risk falling into tautology. If equality merely means treating those in the same situation the same way, without considering contextual variables and circumstances, then it becomes an empty principle.

The issue does not lie in formal equal opportunity alone, nor should equality simply tell us *how* to treat people fairly or avoid rights violations. Instead, it must reveal where injustice occurs or is likely to occur—and compel us to act against it⁹. Achieving this requires moving beyond the formalism of equality

9. Two candidates for a position in a job may find themselves equal before the law and equal to the conditions established for obtaining the position. That is why whoever decides can prefer one another.

and embracing a deeper moral and legal language—one that acknowledges the full spectrum of realities embedded in what Talal Asad considers a complete way of life. This means taking into account the legal, ethical, and cultural dimensions—both implicit and explicit—that shape individuals' lives and communities (Asad, 2021, pp. 42–43).

Talal Asad thus arrives at a firm conviction: when discussing liberal equality with its narrow political horizon, we must introduce critical questions. It is essential to define the moral and practical relevance of equality in addressing real or potential injustices, ensuring that it does not devolve into mere rhetoric or political posturing.

As for equal respect and concern, which Ronald Dworkin views as the fullest expression of liberal equality, they ultimately translate into respecting individual rights based on personal identity. Even if we set aside the strong critiques of individualism, we cannot ignore the contradiction embedded within this ethos of respect and concern. In liberal societies, Dworkin's emphasis on efficiency—achieved through neutrality and detachment—often conflicts with genuine moral concern for others' emotions, experiences, and diverse identities. A clear example of this tension is bureaucracy, a defining feature of secular liberal states. Bureaucratic structures inherently demand impersonal interactions, treating individuals not as unique persons with rich identities but as abstract citizens (Asad, 2021, pp. 44–45).

Moreover, concern and respect are not exclusive hallmarks of liberal equality, nor do they necessarily indicate the actual realization of equality. Many societies prioritize these values as fundamental principles governing communal life, yet they may still tolerate deep inequalities among their members.

Furthermore, the presence of respect and concern might simply reflect a form of social etiquette rather than a substantive commitment to equality. In other words, people may acknowledge each other politely and display a degree of mutual regard, but each remains confined to their designated place and boundaries. This was precisely the case in European and American societies during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Perhaps the clearest expression today of the ambiguity and contradictions surrounding equal concern and respect in their liberal-secular sense is the concept of human rights. This framework is largely built on the idea of the human being as inherently endowed with dignity, a dignity assumed to be shared equally among all members of humanity.

However, as is now widely recognized, these rights were formulated within specific historical and political contexts and have never fully materialized as an actual reality. Talal Asad observes that human rights define a person's status as legally entitled to equal rights, yet they fail to adequately address the actual distribution of power and resources in the world.

Beyond merely denouncing the superficiality of human rights—often reduced to a slogan or even a tool of political pressure wielded by one group against another due to ideological, religious, or ethnic differences—the deeper issue with the modern human rights discourse is its inherent contradiction. This contradiction lies in its adaptability—it has been embraced not only by liberal societies but also by non-liberal and even authoritarian regimes.

Some totalitarian states—Nazi Germany being a prime example—promoted the concept of “human dignity” but through a racial or political lens, advocating equality through exclusion and justice through the triumph of the strong over the weak. Today, it is clear that the language of human rights has become almost devoid of meaning, as everyone now claims to defend it, and every state presents itself as a champion of law and justice.

As a result, human rights have become a justification for coercing others into accepting the very ideology that shaped them. Ironically, this noble concept is often enforced through domination and violence. Talal Asad highlights this paradox, pointing out that Western human rights discourse, along with secularism and modernization, has frequently resorted to violence to impose itself on others. Thus, the language of human rights, human dignity, equality, care, and respect has become ambiguous—a rhetorical tool through which the ruling powers subtly reinforce existing hierarchies rather than genuinely promoting equality or empowering people to live lives worthy of their dignity.

Critique of the Language of Fake Rights

The philosopher and human rights activist Boaventura de Sousa Santos (1940–) offers a sharp critique of rights discourse—one that directly challenges arguments like Ronald Dworkin’s. In his thought-provoking book, *If God Were a Human Rights Activist*, Santos begins with a crucial observation: the idea of autonomy, which underpins equality and equal concern, has become a dominant moral standard in modern times, shaping discussions on what it means to live well. However, he argues that this ideal has been reduced to a global marketplace—a system in which every aspect of individual and collective life is subject to negotiation, its value determined by market forces (de Sousa Santos, 2022, p. 11).

The problem, according to Boaventura de Sousa Santos, is that while individual autonomy ostensibly allows a person to shape their life according to what they deem worth living, in reality, this is an illusion. The global marketplace imposes a form of power that renders individuals incapable of resisting it—especially when it comes to the desire to opt out. As a result, “individual autonomy is understood as a personal commitment to a complete and unchangeable world,” leaving the individual with no choice but to comply.

Santos argues that this modern model of the human being—as an autonomous individual—has become the dominant ideology, one that paradoxically

fills the world with injustice, suffering, and oppression. Consequently, we now witness widespread resistance to this ideology on a global scale⁽¹⁰⁾.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos raises a fundamental question in his critique of the rights-based perspective represented by Ronald Dworkin:

“If humanity is one, why do we have so many different conceptions of human dignity and a just society, all of which claim their own unique legitimacy yet appear to be mutually contradictory?”

Santos does not hesitate to point out that this question implicitly acknowledges a now undeniable reality—that the modern, Western understanding of rights and human rights has neglected many crucial aspects. Chief among these is the fact that this framework has become a tool of dominance (de Sousa Santos, 2022, p. 20).

Thus, Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls for what he terms “anti-hegemonic human rights”, which can counteract the human suffering caused by the narrow Western perspective on humanity and individual rights.

Santos argues that the 20th century was an anti-humanist century, as Enlightenment ideology contributed to the diminution and degradation of human life. As a result, speaking of a good life has become mere empty rhetoric in the face of what he describes as a “historical void in the concept of human rights” (de Sousa Santos, 2022, pp. 119–121)⁽¹¹⁾.

A good life, according to Boaventura de Sousa Santos, must be free from all forms of domination, including the concept of the independent individual, which he sees as one of its masks.

A good life is not an abstract life lived by a rights-bearing individual in isolation; rather, it is the life of a concrete, situated person, engaged in social life within specific historical conditions.

Thus, achieving a good life requires not only a struggle for rights but also an interpretive dimension of human dignity that expands its scope and meaning.

10. This resistance is in the view of the researcher in the stream of political theology, which expresses a kind of return of religion to the public sphere to resist the systematic impoverishment of social life after its transformation into a market, and political practice after its transformation into a process of hegemony, contempt and humiliation in the service of that ideology, which exploited the discourse of one’s rights, priority and independence in the interest of extending its influence and dominance. (De Sosa Santos, 2022, p. 13)

11. This vacuum was clearly enshrined in the humanitarian disaster in the Gaza Strip in occupied Palestine during the paper’s editing. The Zionist entity’s brutal war of extermination on the isolated and besieged sector has exposed all the West’s rhetoric on human rights, and has even disrupted the poor perception of man among the leaders and Governments of most nations. It is not man’s priority, but narrow interests and imperialist hegemonism.

For a person to live the life they consider good, they must be left free to pursue the goals they deem worthy without external constraints¹².

Conclusion

Discussing the concept of a good life is inherently problematic from multiple perspectives. Contemporary ethical debates have only moved further away from presenting convincing conceptions—not because philosophers have failed to engage with the issue sufficiently, but because modern life itself has become an endless source of questioning. However, it has also become clear that moral philosophers bear a responsibility in this regard. Since the early modern era, they have struggled to provide compelling alternatives following the decline of classical ethical frameworks. This has led to a form of moral relativism, reinforced by the increasing secularization of ethical standards and their continuous detachment from any stable foundations. Consequently, a dominant intellectual movement has emerged, arguing for the abandonment of philosophical inquiry into ethics altogether, claiming, in Wittgensteinian terms, that such matters belong to what cannot be spoken of and should therefore be left unaddressed.

Furthermore, attempts by philosophers like Ronald Dworkin to establish a liberal philosophical foundation rooted in the primacy of equality over broader conceptions of the good have proven unsuccessful. A critical examination of this approach, in light of contemporary realities, reveals that our world has only grown more unjust. The much-celebrated principle of equality has often served as a façade for imposing rigid ideological doctrines. Given this situation, it is unsurprising to witness a turn toward alternative frameworks—whether in the form of softer and more effective interpretations of secularism, as proposed by Talal Asad, or the emphasis on the indispensable role of tradition in grounding ethical thought, as advocated by Alasdair MacIntyre. Additionally, thinkers such as Boaventura de Sousa Santos have called for a militant theology that seeks to restore human dignity in the face of the prevailing hegemonic order. These perspectives suggest that reclaiming the good life requires moving beyond abstract, individualistic notions toward a more engaged and historically grounded understanding of human flourishing.

In reality, turning to classical ethical discourse, particularly its Aristotelian foundations, and even religious discourse is not merely a strategy for exposing the contradictions, ambiguity, or shortcomings of secular ethics. Rather, it serves to highlight that the concept of the good life, while grounded in the

12. All theses and theories of ethical political philosophy may seem to espouse and defend this claim. But with its critical examination and follow-up, it may seem to fall in contrast to what it claims either because of the inconsistency of its elements, or because it is not surrounded by a complex reality and a fragile situation that today's human being is experiencing, and imposes an absolute surrender to the hegemony of savage capitalism and its mono-absurd view of human existence.

equal dignity of all individuals and their right to respect and care, attains its fullest meaning only when linked to elements that enrich and deepen human experience—elements that, in turn, reinforce that very equality.

This engagement with religious discourse in defining the good life should not be seen as an attempt to supplement or refine secular ethics, as Jürgen Habermas proposed, but rather as an acknowledgment that human life cannot be reduced to purely secular notions of equality, rights, and dignity— notions that often risk becoming merely formalistic. Instead, a richer, more substantive vision of human flourishing necessitates drawing from traditions that offer a deeper engagement with what it means to live well, transcending the limitations of narrowly defined secular frameworks.

This perspective is neither foreign to a broad segment of humanity nor absent from the pre-modern ethical tradition—in fact, it was arguably its central pillar. Aristotelian virtue ethics is fundamentally based on the idea that human beings are constantly striving to achieve a flourishing and fulfilling life. To do so, they must engage in the continuous cultivation of virtue and self-care through wisdom.

This outlook was deeply influential among Muslim ethicists, who not only adopted it but also expanded and refined it. Consider the words of Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, the philosopher and scholar, who states:

“As for practical wisdom, it is the knowledge of the benefits of voluntary actions and the crafts of human beings in a manner that leads to the order of their worldly and otherworldly affairs and ensures their attainment of the perfection toward which they aspire.” (Al-Tusi, 2008, p. 89).

This statement reflects a vision of ethics where moral development is not an abstract ideal but a lived practice, embedded in social and existential realities. It underscores how moral philosophy, before its modern fragmentation, was deeply concerned with human flourishing as an integrated pursuit of wisdom, virtue, and the good life.

It is evident that this process is neither easy nor simplistic—rather, it encompasses all aspects of human life. It begins with self-cultivation, a commitment to refining one’s character in a way that ensures true autonomy, freeing oneself from external influences that might lead to moral and intellectual subjugation. The ancients referred to such influences as forces of deficiency, obstacles that hinder the perfection of the human soul.

This was a foundational theme in ethical thought, particularly in the pursuit of virtue, wisdom, and ultimately, a flourishing life. Yet, it was by no means the only dimension of ethical realization. Alongside self-care, ethical life extended to one’s closest relationships, what classical ethics termed household governance (*tadbīr al-manzil*). After all, what is the good life if not shared with those we love and care for?

Finally, ethical life also encompassed political engagement, or what was known as the governance of the city (*tadbīr al-madīna*). This dimension involved fostering collective well-being, a process that Abu al-Hasan al-‘Amiri described as the pursuit of happiness for oneself and for others (*al-sa‘āda wa al-īs‘ād*).

These three interwoven spheres—self-care, family and communal bonds, and civic responsibility—were all essential for the fulfillment of a truly good life. Ethics, in this view, was never a purely individualistic endeavor but a deeply relational and communal practice.

Ronald Dworkin’s defense of equality, respect, and equal concern as fundamental rights of citizens within the state is undoubtedly a legitimate and non-negotiable stance in today’s world. However, it might have benefited from a broader engagement with the depth and complexity of human experience.

Ancient thinkers did not separate their understanding of justice from the concept of the good embedded within it. They viewed the realization of rights as an essential part of cultivating human virtue and achieving its ultimate purpose. This pursuit, however, was not merely an individual endeavor but a shared responsibility between ruler and ruled.

For instance, Abu al-Hasan al-‘Amiri argues that true happiness cannot be fully realized unless the ruler actively works toward the well-being of his subjects, seeking out all possible means to facilitate their flourishing. The way to achieve this, according to him, is through adherence to established traditions that clarify virtues one by one, teach how to acquire them, expose vices one by one, and explain how to avoid them (al-‘Amiri, 2018, pp. 274–275).

This perspective highlights the interwoven nature of justice and virtue, suggesting that rights and responsibilities must be cultivated within a broader ethical framework that prioritizes both individual moral growth and collective well-being.

At first glance, such perspectives may seem to carry a paternalistic and authoritarian tendency—precisely the aspects that liberal thought and modern secular ethics vehemently reject. However, leaving individuals entirely to their own devices in a merciless market that reduces everything—including people—to mere commodities does not equate to respecting their autonomy. Instead, it amounts to abandoning the responsibility of assisting them in achieving their aspirations and neglecting ethical care that both honors their ambitions and respects their individuality.

Returning to the ancients, Abu al-Hasan al-‘Amiri emphasizes that true governance is not just about ruling but about ruling well. The ruler must ensure moral stability, prevent discord and division, and foster harmony, mutual respect, and fairness among citizens (al-‘Amiri, 2018, pp. 290–291). This does not contradict justice and equality but rather requires their rigorous applica-

tion. True governance, he argues, must be rooted in unwavering adherence to the law, ensuring that all individuals are genuinely equal before it.

Al-‘Amiri states that the first duty of a ruler is to submit to the very principles he expects his subjects to follow, for “the second has no greater claim to justice than the first” (al-‘Amiri, 2018, p. 332). This echoes al-Jahiz, who, in his later writings, asserts that a ruler’s longevity in power is tied to four essential qualities, foremost among them being his refusal to accept for his people anything he would not accept for himself (al-Jahiz, 2022, p. 120).

This perspective challenges the notion that ethical governance and moral responsibility necessarily undermine personal freedom. Instead, it proposes that true respect for autonomy does not lie in abandonment, but in ensuring that individuals have the conditions to live a flourishing life—a principle as relevant today as it was in antiquity.

It is no secret that Islamic thought has given profound attention to the concept of a good life, the means of achieving it, and the obstacles that may hinder it. The Qur’an itself urges the pursuit of such a life through faith and action, making it clear that Islamic teachings—rooted in divine guidance—lay out a comprehensive path for attaining a flourishing existence here and now, in this world, without reducing existence to mere material concerns.

Although the good life is closely linked to the Hereafter as the realm of ultimate reward, it is not confined to it. Rather, it manifests in this world first, shaping how a believer lives, works, and acts with the conviction that his efforts have meaning both in this life and beyond. As the Prophetic tradition states:

“Faith consists of over seventy branches. The highest of them is the declaration that there is no god but Allah, the lowest is the removal of harm from the road, and modesty is a branch of faith.”

This integrated ethical vision suggests that a truly good life is not an abstract philosophical ideal but a lived experience, realized through faith, moral conduct, and communal responsibility.

Ethicists in the Islamic tradition viewed Islam as a deeply spiritual yet profoundly rational framework—one that not only acknowledged human free will but also emphasized the pursuit of a good life through reflection and reasoned engagement with both the world and the self.

Despite their significant engagement with Aristotelian virtue ethics, these philosophers found in Islamic teachings a solid foundation that both enriched and reinforced ethical thought. They drew at times from Aristotle’s wisdom and at times from the Qur’an’s moral vision, but their goal remained consistent: to expand human understanding of existence, rights, happiness, and the common good.

This does not imply that they fully resolved the ethical challenges of their time, but they pushed intellectual inquiry as far as they could. The task before us today is to carry that effort forward, engaging with this tradition in a dynamic and open-ended way, translating its insights into terms that resonate with the complexities of the modern world.

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Pascal Engel: From Moral Virtues to Epistemic Virtues

Al Mahdi Mustaqeem

Chouaib Doukkali University, Morocco

Abstract

In this study, we shed light on epistemology as a form of ethics, specifically ethics concerned with the paths to enhancing intellectual life. We begin with the hypothesis that intellectual life is not solely based on a set of standards (rules, principles) but also on a set of values (virtue, inclination, attraction, love, wisdom). This is because epistemology is fundamentally a form of the ethics of intellectual life. Moral and intellectual virtues are, for humans, pathways that guide them toward their essence as rational beings. However, intellectual life can only be good if we are drawn to epistemic goods: truth, knowledge, and rationality. Thus, we must be attracted to and love everything of great value. Intellectual life becomes good, then, only if it is built on a highly organized love. It is a kind of passion aimed at achieving epistemic good, without which our intellectual life cannot be good, happy, or responsible. It is primarily a matter of justice; hence, we must restore the concept of "truth" to its rightful place, as it is also a matter of wisdom.

Introduction

The field of virtue epistemology and its mechanisms began to take shape thirty years ago. Philosophers who have left a mark on this field, which primarily deals with the ethics of thought, almost unanimously agree on a central idea: that the enhancement of intellectual life depends on the individual's commitment to intellectual virtues. Therefore, we decided to address the topic of our study, through which we aim to trace the paths to enhancing intellectual life based on this type of epistemology, highlighting its main propositions, which include:

- **The necessity of respecting the person as a moral being:** An action is moral if it originates from a moral agent; morality is not a characteristic of the action itself but of the moral agent. For example, an action by a child may be morally acceptable, while the same action by an adult may not be.

From the perspective of rule-based ethics, an action is moral and inseparable from its agent if it adheres to universal standards. From the perspective of virtue ethics, however, an action is moral because its agent is moral, and the agent becomes moral only in relation to the function of their human nature (Pouivet, 2006, p.31-32).

- **Moral psychology as a value:** Morality is not confined to a specific rule or set of rules; this proposition assumes that the agent possesses traits and abilities related to character and attitudes connected to virtue (ibid, p.32).
- **Proper motivation:** Attitudes associated with virtue are fundamentally based on motivational processes (ibid, p.32).

These three propositions can be reformulated in light of the question of the guarantee of beliefs (*La garantie des croyances*):

- Beliefs cannot be guaranteed independently of individuals, as the epistemic value of a belief depends on the believing individual.
- The epistemic value of beliefs presupposes a philosophical psychology of the intellectual abilities of the believing individual as a responsible human being.
- No belief can be guaranteed independently of the processes of cognitive motivation, specifically the love of truth.

1. On the Meaning of Epistemic Virtue:

Roger Pouivet views moral virtue as a stance built on a natural ability that might make a person intellectually superior. This is because it motivates them to seek truth, making epistemic responsibility an educational matter rather than a radical reconsideration of beliefs or a search for an absolute foundation (ibid, p.33). Consequently, our beliefs are not voluntary, as individuals cannot decide when to believe something and when not to. However, a person can intellectually train and exert effort to place themselves in a suitable epistemic position (ibid, p.33).

Thus, intellectual or epistemological virtues are human abilities and traits of character that, as much as possible—though fallible—ensure the epistemic value of our beliefs. Among the most important of these are (ibid, p.34):

- **Intellectual neutrality:** Openness to all ideas, a willingness to listen to them to understand them, and respect for the intellectual differences they entail. Its opposite is intellectual bias.
- **Intellectual sobriety:** Exercising caution toward overly enthusiastic ideas and respecting the intellectual authority of those with scientific competence.
- **Scientific courage:** Examining and critically assessing popular and widespread ideas. Its opposite is intellectual cowardice.

- **Intellectual coherence:** The ability to find the appropriate means of inquiry to reach the truth. Its opposite is intellectual distraction.

Criticism of the evidentialist and deontological model in epistemology has taken various forms over the past thirty years. Roger Pouivet distinguishes two levels of this criticism: the first aims to replace epistemology, understood as an inquiry into rational standards, with other approaches, whether pragmatic, naturalistic, formal-logical, or phenomenological. Here, describing the components of belief replaces judging the truthfulness or falseness of the believer. The second level of criticism is what has come to be known as virtue epistemology, which seeks to reform the epistemological project as a whole. It does not investigate the rules that must be followed and respected during the acquisition of justified beliefs. Instead, the function of epistemology has become to describe epistemic virtues (virtues of knowledge), regardless of the nature of the belief they result in, just as virtue ethics describes moral virtue, regardless of the actions that result from it. Thus, epistemology has fundamentally become a form of the ethics of belief. It no longer concerns itself with a kind of doctrinal normativity but with the proper epistemological stance of the human being (Pouivet, 2013, p.70). In virtue epistemology, assurance does not stem from fulfilling an absolute epistemic requirement. What drives us to believe someone with a truthful belief is not the internal scrutiny applied to their beliefs but their intellectual skills and qualifications: openness of mind, rigor, sobriety, insightfulness, honesty, intellectual caution, love for truth, etc. These are epistemic virtues that contrast with a set of vices: intellectual distraction, lack of curiosity, negligence, dishonesty, indifference toward truth, etc. (ibid, p. 75).

Roger Pouivet emphasizes the central thesis defended by virtue epistemology as follows: the distinctive intellectual character of the believing individual is the decisive factor among all those leading to the production of truthful beliefs. An intellectually virtuous person carries themselves to believe in warranted propositions, making their likelihood of truth higher. Accordingly, the believer's behavior aligns with values reflecting their epistemic virtues (ibid, p. 75-76). So, what are these epistemic virtues?

- A set of dispositions acquired based on a foundation drawing from natural ability;
- Motivations driving us toward intellectual excellence by fulfilling our purpose as rational beings;
- Leading to what the Greeks called progress, flourishing, or well-being (Eudaimonia);
- As far as is possible and accessible to us (given our limitations), ensuring success in discovering the truth (ibid, p. 76).

According to Roger Pouivet, epistemic testimony is a legitimate source from which all religious beliefs emerge. The epistemic value of the believing individual determines the epistemic value of the testimony, not the other way around. Therefore, belief in the testimony of the Bible is legitimate from an epistemological perspective (*ibid*, p. 87). Justified belief based on testimony forms in the believer through the motivations stemming from intellectual virtue, as well as their awareness of their epistemic situation (*ibid*, p. 87).

It seems that all testimony faces epistemic rejection, yet:

- There is no epistemological criterion that mandates stripping all epistemic value from a testimony;
- There is no a priori criterion enabling us to decisively determine which testimonies deserve belief;
- A person is virtuous or flawed intellectually depending on the epistemic position they assume within a given epistemic community (*ibid*, p. 87-88).

For testimony to serve as a source of knowledge, the witness must possess epistemic and epistemic-moral virtues, such as honesty, goodwill, and abstention from deceit and lying, among others. This also applies to the recipient of the testimony, who must be capable of balancing conflicting testimonies, not be overly enthusiastic or narrow-minded, and possess some form of intellectual courage without recklessness. Thus, the epistemic value of testimony depends more on epistemological and moral virtues than on epistemic criteria (*ibid*, p. 88).

Hence, the believing individual is not epistemologically flawed. For understanding, belief is necessary. Thus, improving intellectual productivity and advancing it, according to Roger Pouivet, depends on openness to the possibilities of faith (*ibid*, p. 91).

2. On the Meaning of Intellectual Vice:

There is no doubt that contemporary intellectual life is witnessing alarming intellectual vices, notably:

- Instances of plagiarism and theft of other authors' works;
- Deliberate omission of citation sources;
- Writing scientific books in a journalistic style;
- Lack of the required seriousness in preparing lessons and lectures;
- Absence of rigor in articles submitted to scientific journals;
- Favoring the books of close friends and awarding them literary prizes in anticipation of reciprocal favors;

- Marginalizing significant books of non-close individuals, despite their importance;
- Restricting university positions to a circle of friends and loyalists.

These behaviors have become commonplace today, reflecting a serious ethical violation and a significant intellectual corruption, replacing intellectual honesty with intellectual piracy (Engel, 2019, p. 183). We continually condemn some participants in contemporary intellectual life for displaying indifference toward the principle of epistemic responsibility (the spirit of responsibility). We describe the intellectual as pretentious, the journalist as negligent and dismissive, the media and social networks as deceptive, the writer as obscure and ambiguous, the professor as incompetent, the student as lazy, and the academic as corrupt, etc. Since these behaviors characterize the intellectual life represented by the writer, scholar, professor, student, academic, or journalist, they become unethical behaviors from an intellectual perspective. They violate a specific type of ethics (intellectual ethics) rather than ethics as a whole. For instance, the cunning butcher, the deceitful builder, the fraudulent restaurant owner, the corrupt politician, the bribing lawyer, and the bribed judge, etc., all violate the ethics specific to their professions or general ethics. However, these individuals do not engage in intellectual functions. The nature of their craft does not influence the processes of knowledge formation, its transmission, or the pathways of judging it (*ibid.*, p. 19).

Virtue epistemology tends to assess individuals' abilities and qualifications after the formation of their beliefs and judgments without judging the profession or job they practice. Aristotelian, Christian, and Islamic traditions have labeled these abilities and qualifications as intellectual virtues, such as intellectual courage, intellectual humility, intellectual openness, the ability to judge, wisdom, caution, avoidance of haste, willingness to engage in arduous work, deliberation, integrity, focusing on substance rather than superficiality, deep engagement, realism (practical feasibility), intellectual neutrality, openness to others, etc. When these virtues are absent, vices emerge, such as laziness, paralysis, cowardice, haste, inability to judge adequately, narrow-mindedness, insularity, dogmatism, bias, fanaticism, foolishness, triviality, and nonsense, etc. Vices and virtues are degrees; it is incumbent upon us to recognize the degrees of our laziness and courage (*ibid.*, p. 23).

3. Ethics of Intellectual Life and Pathways to Its Refinement:

The exercise of reflecting on the ethics of thought is an unfamiliar matter; indeed, this type of ethics is almost absent in our present day, except for some books that have become preoccupied with issues of applied ethics, such as intellectual property and plagiarism, without burdening themselves with the effort of examining the connection of these judgments to intellectual life and

the pathways of reason (*ibid.*, p. 25). Universities elevate the status of their ethical charters and their specialized committees for examination and determining degrees of integrity, as well as the rules of scientific research. However, these rules are often viewed as regulatory guidelines for proper conduct, akin to traffic laws, rather than as rules specifically related to judgments connected to the ethics of knowledge. The failure to adhere to them is often classified under undesirable behaviors, such as the behavior in which we express disgust during an unpalatable meal, where the levels of reproach do not exceed the offering of advice and guidance, without including strictness or reprimand (*ibid.*, p. 27).

Despite Descartes (1596–1650) emphasizing the necessity of adhering to the rules of reason, he does not reject the idea that knowing the truth does not require one to be virtuous. This idea, however, was completely rejected in the culture preceding him; it was inconceivable for someone to be corrupt (i.e., non-virtuous) and simultaneously aware of the truth. With Descartes, direct proof became a sufficient determinant. After him, the subject of knowledge was no longer connected to a form of asceticism and voluntary self-deprivation. This can be attributed to the absence of pathways of self-care and the means of preparing oneself to receive and acquire a virtue through commitment to a methodology that would allow for living in a way where the self is filled with spirit, wisdom, and ethics (Foucault, 1982, p. 630).

According to Michel Foucault (1926–1984), the Cartesian philosophical tendency emphasizes the necessity of adhering solely to the principle of clarity when forming beliefs, while turning away from considerations of the nature of the thinking agent and the ethical conditions they ought to adhere to. To this end, Cartesian epistemology diverted its focus from moral values and all forms of asceticism (Engel, 2019, p. 31). According to Foucault, ethical considerations—especially those related to virtue, whether intellectual or moral—began to be neglected as early as the Renaissance. Since then, social, political, epistemological, and scientific modes of thinking have ceased to give importance to virtues. Consequently, contemporary epistemology aims to restore the significance of virtues by reintegrating them into intellectual and practical life (*ibid.*, p. 31).

There is no doubt that Descartes lacked a conception of intellectual virtues akin to that which prevailed among the Stoics and medieval philosophers. However, this does not mean that the philosophers who followed him adhered to his path and method, especially since the emergence of modern science coincided with the formation of philosophical traditions that drew from the Aristotelian ethical corpus, which dominated the Middle Ages and maintained its distinctiveness. Examples include John Locke (1632–1704), David Hume (1711–1776), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), John Henry Newman (1903–1957), William Kingdom Clifford (1845–1879), Heinrich Rickert

(1863–1936), Charles Renouvier (1815–1903), and the American pragmatists. These traditions did not sever the connection between ethics and knowledge; on the contrary, the ethics of belief, as they are understood in our time, draw from a Kantian question: What ought I to believe? (ibid, p. 33).

The Kantian question carries multiple implications, to the extent that we find ourselves unable to grasp its intentions with certainty. Does it refer to what we ought to believe from an ethical perspective? Or to what we ought to believe in light of the virtue of prudence (foresight, sagacity, predicting the practical outcomes of our beliefs)? Or to what we ought to believe from an epistemological perspective? Or to what we ought to believe in a justified manner? ... etc. The ethics of belief are preoccupied with examining the nature of the relationship between prudential evaluation and ethical evaluation, as well as the ways in which they express themselves. They inquire whether this expression (what is permissible, what is obligatory) takes the form of duties and rules (expressing themselves deontologically and normatively rather than axiologically) by focusing on the truth or falsehood, correctness or error, of belief (praise or blame). Additionally, they are concerned with understanding the sources of the reasons that lead us to believe: do they arise from the belief itself (epistemic justification processes and their standards), or are they generated by the believer's qualifications, dispositions, and capabilities, or by their temperament, mood, and personality? (ibid, p. 34).

The ethics of belief do not merely examine and interrogate the aforementioned questions; rather, they allocate significant attention to the question of epistemic responsibility: Are we responsible for our beliefs? The intersection of epistemology and ethics thus imparts purely ethical dimensions to a range of epistemic evaluations. Consequently, we find an arsenal of cognitive and epistemic standards that partially or wholly include scientific standards. By this, we mean standards that are either entirely or partially shared, governing both the realm of knowledge and the realm of action. Hence, it is impossible to avoid the potential for a systematic convergence between epistemology and ethics without their fragmentation or fusion into one another, especially since ethical judgments and epistemic judgments stem from a common root. For this reason, Pascal Engel tends to combine the two theses, as there is, according to him, a unifying thread that connects ethical judgments and epistemic judgments despite their independence. This indicates an existing overlap between epistemic and practical standards. However, he supports the idea that belief is founded on two main criteria: truth and justification. We can only believe in what is grounded in truth and argumentation, while the standards for creating, organizing, and forming belief are related to the very essence of belief itself (ibid, p. 41).

4. From the First Ethics of Belief to the Second Ethics of Belief:

There is no doubt that Pascal Engel's stance draws from the currents of evidentialism, a tendency that rejects any thesis advocating for the individual's ability to control and govern their beliefs. It also expresses aversion to any pragmatic conception rooted in voluntarism, or one that reduces the reasons for belief to reasons for action (i.e., the coupling of cause with action), or evaluates belief based on the outcomes it produces. For Engel, belief is grounded in knowledge: belief relies on what we know. Hence, Engel focuses on the standards of belief, or what he calls the primary ethics of belief (*L'éthique première de la croyance*) (ibid, p. 41).

Intellectual virtue, according to Engel, obliges us to respect the requirements of epistemic standards and to possess a sensitivity toward epistemic reasons. Intellectual vice, on the other hand, refers to a kind of disposition that tends to disregard those standards and reasons, and to exhibit a desire to disdain them (Engel, 2019, p. 42). Accordingly, Engel distinguishes between the standards of belief and the methodology or approach that guides, shapes, reviews, and maintains belief. He calls the latter the secondary ethics of belief, as it involves epistemic standards that regulate epistemic behavior and include judgments on scientific beliefs, religious beliefs, and intellectual virtues (ibid, p. 42).

Engel places particular emphasis on the reasons for belief, asserting that intellectual virtues arise from cultivating sensitivity to those reasons, while vices proliferate in the absence of such sensitivity (ibid, p. 44). Thus, his conception of epistemic virtues contrasts with the view that sees virtues as skills that can be voluntarily acquired and vices as forms and levels of undesirable behavior (Engel, 2000, p. 176). For Engel, the concept of "reason" is greater than the concept of "good" (*Le bien*) or "virtue" (*vertu*). Therefore, a theory of intellectual vices should focus its attention on the deficiencies that prevent us from recognizing the normative reasons that ought to guide us toward belief, with the aim of engaging in practical reasoning to systematically pursue inquiry (Engel, 2019, p. 45).

It is evident that Engel's distinction between the primary ethics of belief and the secondary ethics of belief resembles the common distinction between analytical epistemology, which focuses on the determinants and principles of knowledge, and regulative epistemology, which focuses on the methods and paths that knowledge adopts to organize itself and on the ways leading to systematic inquiry. Regulative epistemology is not concerned with the processes of belief formation (e.g., standards of knowledge, the nature of epistemic justification, and its sources) as much as it is concerned with the types and methods of systematic inquiry, as seen, for instance, in Descartes' "Rules for the Direction of the Mind" and Spinoza's "Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect." In contrast, analytical epistemology avoids delving into issues

of systematic inquiry, striving instead to define the concept of “knowledge” (ibid, p. 46).

Engel distinguishes between two main theses within the evidentialist model:

- a) A thesis concerned with the nature of epistemic justification, where justified belief relies on sufficient arguments and reasons.
- b) A thesis concerned with the ethical dimension of belief, focusing on what we ought to believe, both epistemically and practically.

The existence of (A) does not depend on (B), whereas the existence of (B) depends on (A). This is due to Engel’s rejection of the moral argument. For him, beliefs should be grounded in epistemic duty first and foremost. This duty is defined by a set of epistemic standards and reasons that pertain to belief itself, which cannot be equated with standards such as caution or morality, nor with reasons related to action (ibid, p. 129). This view contradicts the pragmatic thesis of belief, which equates epistemic “ought” (duty) with practical “ought.” According to this pragmatic view, the latter dictates the conditions under which the former should be fulfilled. For example, if someone believes that faith in recovery from cancer, as diagnosed by their doctor, is a path to healing, then the reason for this belief should be preferred over the reason for the opposing belief, in service of the believer’s well-being. This conception clearly opposes deontological evidentialism, as defined by Clifford, which tends to reduce epistemology to ethics. Clifford’s evidentialism rejects equating epistemic duties with moral duties, especially since we do not possess moral duties capable of formulating specific ethical instructions for our beliefs (ibid, p. 130). Moreover, duties are not contingent on our ability to control or voluntarily govern our beliefs. Ethics, therefore, requires that belief be founded on two key epistemic standards: the standard of truth and the standard of knowledge. Hence, Engel’s insistence on adhering to normative evidentialism (ibid, p. 130).

Engel’s conception of justification does not prioritize the data supporting our beliefs as much as it does their causality and reasonableness—specifically, the reasons and causal processes that led to their formation. If these processes are highly reliable and yield the maximum number of true beliefs, then the beliefs they produce are justified and eligible to be considered knowledge (Goldman, 1986, p. 134). Thus, Engel seeks to derive a central thesis from Clifford’s principle, which can be expressed as follows: the necessity of adhering to the epistemic duties of belief based on the available evidence, as a moral obligation (Engel, 2019, p. 137). Clifford’s thesis is founded solely on the epistemic characteristics of belief, without imposing the burden of practical conditions on belief states. The essence of belief does not submit to any form of practical duty (ought), but rather to formative epistemic duty, which reveals its specific regulatory conditions. Formative epistemic duty (epistemic

ought) does not impose any rule, principle, or directive that belief-forming processes must follow, nor does it subject systematic inquiry to any such rule (*ibid.*, p. 137). This contradicts what proponents of the intellectual virtues thesis aim for—namely, those who grant intellectual virtues a significant status by reducing the necessary, sufficient, and essential condition for knowledge and the justification of beliefs to the dispositions, abilities, qualifications, and specific traits of agents (i.e., believers). Without these, beliefs cannot achieve their epistemic extension (Sosa, 2007). The focus on the agent (i.e., the believing human) instead of the belief itself spares them the need to define the concept of knowledge (assuming, for the sake of argument, that it is definable). If normative justification is required to rely on epistemic justification of type (A) (i.e., a belief is not justified unless it is based on sufficient arguments and reasons), and thus rejects pragmatism and any tendency to define knowledge and justification according to the meanings accepted by reliabilism or intellectual virtues, it (normative justification) does not find itself obligated to specify the characteristics and traits that grant beliefs their hoped-for epistemic extension. Nor does it find itself obligated to determine the patterns of belief formation. For instance, it does not need to accept the internalist conception that aligns with justificatory tendencies (i.e., the ability to grasp the reasons that lead us to belief) or the deontological conception of justification, which views knowledge as a commitment to a set of epistemic duties (Engel, 2019, p. 135).

If we refrain from constructing belief according to epistemic commands and duties, how then can we believe or avoid believing what others believe? How can we accept one belief and reject another? How can the believing individual bear responsibility for their beliefs? To what extent can we discuss justification that fails to reprimand people who persistently believe in flying saucers, the superiority of the white race, that the Earth is flat, or that it was created nearly six thousand years ago?

If former U.S. President “Trump” did not believe in the content of his statement when he said, “Global warming is just a funny story,” or “a nice idea,” or “a hoax,” or “a joke,” then he is undoubtedly lying. However, if he indeed believed in what he said, this reflects his avoidance of available arguments and evidence. Regardless of whether he believed or did not believe in what he expressed, he acts in an unethical and irresponsible manner, especially since he governs the affairs of millions of individuals politically (*ibid.*, p. 138).

An objector might say: The fact that normative justification does not necessitate a specific definition of knowledge or deontological justification does not mean that we are not responsible or blameworthy for our beliefs. But isn’t it mistaken to view epistemic duties as a pathway leading to the subjugation of belief to the will? Undoubtedly, speaking of obligation or duty depends on the presence of will; if we are required to do something, this means we cannot do it unless we possess the will. However, rejecting the normative justification

of voluntarist doxastic tendencies implicitly entails the error of direct voluntarism. “Pascal Engel” assumes that the thesis asserting that beliefs escape the control and domination of the will invalidates the possibility of epistemic duties existing in the first place. This is due to his rejection of the logical premise that states: If there are epistemic duties specific to belief, this means that belief is subject to the will (Chuard and Southwood, 2009).

The agent who obligates themselves to respect epistemic standards and subjects them to abstract epistemic duties (i.e., the standard of justification and the standard of knowledge) is not merely required to act in a particular way concerning their beliefs. They must also recognize that their commitment and diligence in respecting those standards and duties presuppose and necessitate the detachment of belief from the control of the will. Even if we struggle to conceive of practical standards or rules incapable of exerting an effect—whether positive or negative—on behavior, this, then, is the characteristic of epistemic standards (Engel, 2019, p. 138-139).

A person may acknowledge the existence of certain standards without feeling a sense of obligation to act according to what those standards dictate, especially highly abstract standards (i.e., logical rationality). Most agents agree on the statement: “If our actions contradict the standards, or if we act in a way that lacks coherence and consistency with our inclinations, we have then completely violated the standards of rationality” (ibid, p. 139). It is difficult here to discuss normative rationality that could guide us toward appropriate belief and action pathways without examining the reasons that might lead us to be convinced of something or to take a particular action. We are all aware of the preference for the pursuits of freedom and justice over those of slavery and oppression. Yet we lack an idea about the means that might lead us to achieve the former or avoid the latter. It seems we confuse, in a manner similar to the above, responsibility on the one hand and the ability to exert voluntary control on the other. Love and other emotions—happiness, misery, and foolishness—often escape the control of the will. However, this does not mean that we are not responsible for them (or at least a significant part of them). Likewise, most erroneous or foolish beliefs, when issued by our peers, escape the will’s control. Yet we do not stop blaming and reproaching them. We often hold ourselves accountable for our dispositions and the reality of our circumstances, even though we did not choose either (Fisher and Ravizza, 1999). To this end, we should abandon the idea that responsibility is connected to freedom of choice and will (Engel, 2019, p. 140). Being responsible for our beliefs does not mean that we are obligated to control them voluntarily. We may often find ourselves believing in certain matters or issues without our will intervening in any way. Although belief is not subject to the control of the will, as “John Locke” previously highlighted, a person who does not act according to what their reason dictates and engages in actions inconsistent with what they are

capable of doing is considered responsible for their errors (Locke, cited in Engel, year, p. 140).

Thus, Pascal Engel wagers on the ethics of primary belief, as a pathway leading to adherence to epistemic standards. He emphasizes his view that if we wish to hold a belief, we must possess the ability to respond to the reasons and standards that result in it or have a sense toward them. The actor responding to these reasons and standards is unable to subject their belief to the test of scrutiny and control. However, this does not mean they are not responsible for their beliefs, especially since they perceive themselves as capable of responding to those reasons and standards. Awareness of commitments and implicit knowledge—which often becomes explicit—may transform them into both an actor and a subject simultaneously, without being free in their belief or abstention from belief, and without imposing epistemic duties on themselves that would compel them to act in one way or another (*ibid.*, p. 140-141).

Working according to the mechanisms of normative evidentialism provides opportunities to engage with the endeavors of the counter-voluntarist approach, as it aligns with the normative conception of belief proposed by Pascal Engel. This approach also harmonizes with William Clifford's cherished idea, emphasizing the necessity of taking responsibility for beliefs and adhering to the duties associated with them. Consequently, there arises the possibility of convergence between what Engel calls the ethics of primary belief, which focuses on knowledge and its fundamental epistemic standards, and what he terms the ethics of secondary belief, which emphasizes the necessity of employing these standards within our intellectual lives (intellectual virtue). According to Pascal Engel, the virtues and vices prevalent in our intellectual lives do not define epistemic standards, justification processes, or ways of knowing; otherwise, they would become the foundation for the entire epistemological endeavor. Instead, these virtues and vices are based on standards specific to intellectual life and are connected to systematic inquiry processes, the acquisition of beliefs and the emergence of knowledge, and methods for maintaining or abandoning them. The function of intellectual virtues is thus confined to organizing and regulating intellectual life (a regulatory, not constitutive, function) (Baecher, 2011). For this reason, Engel tends to divide the ethics of belief into two levels:

- **The Ethics of Primary Belief:** Emphasizing the epistemic standards we must adhere to when constructing our beliefs and ensuring commitment to the ethics of truth and knowledge. This type directs us from ethics toward what we should generally believe without specifying a particular belief or a specific method that would compel us to adopt it over others. Thus, the ethics of primary belief is founded on a specific conception of justification and knowledge, revealing its evidentialist tendency.

- **The Ethics of Secondary Belief:** Emphasizing the necessity of formulating a specific theory of intellectual virtues and delineating specific descriptions of epistemic duties (Engel, 2019, p. 142-143).

Some may reject Engel's conception, claiming its artificial nature. How can the abstract standards presented by the ethics of primary belief serve as a source for ethics? How can they guide us toward pathways of belief and action? Are not true ethics those that draw from intellectual virtues? According to Engel, there is no doubt that the true ethics of belief are those that emerge from intellectual virtues, as they provide ways to formulate good and commendable actions and to reject undesirable and reprehensible ones (from permissible to forbidden). However, the first type of ethics does not reveal the possibilities for improving or refining our intellectual lives—or at least the possibilities that enable us to live a respectable intellectual life—since it focuses on the conditions of belief in their most general aspects. Nevertheless, it serves as a foundational entry point for the second type, as without it, the conditions of regulation and organization lose their meaning. To this end, Engel rejects Roderrick Chisholm's particularist conception (Chisholm, 1966), which emphasizes the importance of our ordinary intuitive judgments—that is, believing first and then deriving general principles from that belief. Instead, Engel prefers the conception he calls the methodist conception, which starts from principles to reach conclusions (Engel, 2019, p. 143-144).

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the distinction between the two aforementioned levels within epistemological or ethical theory is not a new matter; it is present within the traditions of pragmatism, particularly in the works of Henry Sidgwick (1838–1900) and Richard M. Hare (1919–2002). They distinguish between critical ethical thought at its abstract level, aiming to achieve the ideal objectivity of moral principles, and ethical thought at its intuitive practical level (Sidgwick, 1981). According to Sidgwick, this distinction leads to a governmental pragmatism that relies on a duality: practical reason places the elite, who possess the correct theory, on one side, and the general public, who are ignorant of it, on the other. Hare, on the other hand, categorically rejects any possibility of constructing ethics based on intuition. According to him, there is a rupture between the abstract level and a priori principles (which can only be analyzed at the conceptual level, according to principles that can be expressed as categorical and universally applicable imperatives) on the one hand, and our intuition about the morality of our actions on the other. Consequently, both Sidgwick and Hare are preoccupied with understanding the possibilities of connecting the two aforementioned levels (Engel, 2019, p. 144).

Some may object by saying: We are not angels, as we do not comprehend how to transition from the first level to the second, nor do we understand the

means of their fusion. Is it not possible for these two levels to conflict? Could not a society of angels rebel and revolt against its elite? John Rawls (Rawls, 1970) previously proposed a solution to this issue by adopting a method of reflective equilibrium. This involves starting from theoretical and abstract principles to evaluate them comprehensively by employing intuitions within a process that subjects these principles to mutual revision. However, according to Engel, the difficulty of reflective equilibrium lies in the challenge of understanding how and when we should practically revise those principles and intuitions (Engel, 2019, p. 145). The distinction made by “Engel” between the first ethics of belief and the second ethics of belief intersects with “Hare’s” philosophical endeavor at a pivotal point; the first ethics of belief precedes experience (= a priori ethics) and is concerned with the standards of belief as ideals, even possessing an angelic character. The second ethics of belief, however, is not only concerned with ethical actions and intuitions but also with dispositions, qualifications, and abilities: virtues and vices. The first ethics of belief, therefore, is not a theory of the good in the intentional sense adopted by the second ethics of belief; the latter can determine when we apply the standards of the first ethics of belief. For this reason, it calls for a return to the question of epistemic good (ibid, p.145) and, consequently, the refinement of intellectual life. Thus, “Pascal Engel” is preoccupied with determining the implications of epistemic action as well as the distinction between belief and acceptance, and the intersections between them (Engel, 1998).

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Good Life According to Philosophy

The Philosophical Foundations of the Art of Living

Nacer Amara

Université de Mostaganem, Algeria

Abstract

Philosophy is a part of knowledge that ultimately aims to improve ways of living, as no knowledge is entirely valid in itself, but rather all knowledge is validated by the criteria of quality of life that represent a direct reflection of theoretical thinking. Therefore, we suppose that the structure of the good life, according to the philosophical conception, is founded on a path in which the self transcends thresholds, one upon the other: from merely living to living a life that is worth living, to living a happy life, then living a quality life, and reaching a successful life in light of the features of a philosophical life. To prove this hypothesis, we use the analytical method through which we deconstruct the possible meanings of the good life according to different philosophical backgrounds, and then derive the central ideas about the conception of a way of living a good philosophical life.

Keywords: life, goodness, living, happiness, philosopher.

Introduction

The question of the good life and the best way to live it has been a central question since the inception of philosophy. Socrates' life itself represented one possible answer to this question, as it was the life of a philosopher who applied philosophy to his existence. The issue of good life has taken on various philosophical stances throughout the history of philosophy, yet it has remained a shared epistemological, ethical, and ontological concern among the major Socratic schools (Epicureanism, Stoicism, and others). It was later reformulated into the question of happiness by Aristotle, leading to Kant's separation of happiness from ethics when he attempted to answer the difficult question: How can the highest good be practically possible? This led to the conception of the good life in the application of the ethics of duty. Philosophical reflection on the good life was later resumed with Nietzsche's critique and reopened in discussions about the art of living with Michel Foucault (1926–1984) and

its extensions among French philosophers, particularly Pierre Hadot (1922–2010) and André Comte-Sponville (1952–).

Today, the question of the good life resurfaces with urgency in light of immense human challenges (artificial intelligence, wars and conflicts, climate change, and the decline of higher human values such as solidarity and tolerance). When philosophy examines the nature of the good life and how to attain the joy of living, it simultaneously reconstructs what constitutes its essence and being. In this sense, the philosopher becomes a guide to a philosophical life that is lived first before being theorized. Since Parmenides stated that “thinking and being are the same” (Parmenides, 2009, p. 59; τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι), deeper thinking leads to a better position within existence. As philosophy is the epitome of good thinking, it is a path to living a good life for being. Philosophy is also a way of being and a style of living, so living according to it means living in a different way, where this difference guarantees the quality of life as measured by the modern contemporary perspective, as well as the intellectual and spiritual dimensions of human life.

The importance of researching what philosophically builds the good life and establishes the joy of living arises from the pressing and critical questions imposed by the constraints of contemporary life on philosophy. If philosophy itself is preceded by the primacy of life in the expression “live first, then philosophize,” then it faces a decisive challenge to prove its worth in contemplating possible solutions to the enigma of life. This enigma is reflected in the original tension between a life worth living and a life lived well. It is also a high-stakes challenge in the face of the potential loss of its original essence amidst the conflict between philosophy as a way of life and philosophy as the theoretical production of concepts. This is what Nietzsche warned against when he bitterly spoke of the “misuse of philosophy” (Nietzsche, 1988, p. 102). However, when philosophers abandon the demand for glory in their discourse, and the dense fog of philosophy’s pride dissipates, what remains is for these philosophers to “demonstrate the power of life, that culture which corrects itself” (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 187). Thus, the issue of the good life places philosophical discourse to the test. The primary goal of philosophical inquiry into the nature of the good life is to outline a different framework for thinking about the quality of life, attaining the joy of living, and redefining the content of goodness outside its normative determination, in light of the philosophical transformations that are inherently part of life’s transformations as well.

The studies of Pierre Hadot (e.g., *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* or *Philosophy as a Way of Life*) marked a decisive turning point in the history of research on this topic, followed by the works of André Comte-Sponville (e.g., his writings on happiness), and extended to the comprehensive studies of Juliusz Domański (*Philosophy: Theory or Way of Life*), or the collaborative work of the German scholar Holmer Steinfath (*What Is the Good Life?*). The

most recent of these studies is the encyclopedic research by German scholars Sebastian Hüscher and Oliver Victor (*The Concept of Life in the History of Philosophy*), in addition to David Machek's research on "A Life Worth Living in Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy."

This research and others reveal the extensive invocation of Stoic and Epicurean philosophies to reintroduce the question of the good life in a formulation that suits the problems of this era and contributes to redefining philosophy itself, in fidelity to its ancient history and in accordance with its relevance today. This is evident through pressing questions about happiness, the good life, a life worth living, and quality of life. This implies reconnecting philosophy with the practical field without philosophy losing its relevance on one hand, or its role being confined to developing an alternative epistemic ethics to traditional normative ethics on the other. If we aim to reach a comprehensive formula to express this mission of philosophy, we would heed Domanski when he says: "To be true philosophers, it is not enough to have knowledge of how to manage our lives; it is necessary to live in complete harmony with that knowledge" (Domanski, 2024, p. 9). This ensures the coherence of philosophy with itself and with life as well, and at that point, the philosophical life becomes sufficiently justified because it derives its legitimacy from a state of harmony and alignment with what has been philosophically contemplated.

Accordingly, the **problematic addressed by this research** is: To what extent does philosophy provide rational foundations for living a good life? What is the good life philosophically? And does the philosopher's own life represent a sufficient experience for living life with enjoyment?

Philosophy Without Life and Life Without Philosophy: A Problematic Situation

Philosophy today occupies a profound theoretical epistemic position in the history of human thought. It constructs a discourse furnished with theories, sculpted with conceptual material, and written in highly abstract language. Based on this theoretical strength and abstract capability, many contemporary philosophical texts have gained a high status among intellectual works produced by the mind in its logical and epistemic evolution. However, the magnification of theoretical philosophy has led to a crisis situation, where philosophy has turned into a discourse devoid of life, from which people seem to drift away. This crisis has prompted a reconsideration of the essence and core of philosophy through the multi-dimensional question: What is philosophy? Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) sounded the alarm about the state of philosophical discourse when he pointed out that "in our days there are professors of philosophy, but there are no philosophers. To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity,

and trust” (Thoreau, 1997, pp. 14, 15). This diagnosis identifies the reason for the absence of philosophers, in the true sense of philosophy, as the separation of philosophizing from life, as we scarcely perceive the effects of philosophy beyond the walls of universities or schools.

The transcendence of discourse over life in contemporary philosophical texts has had destructive effects on the image of philosophy itself among people, as doubt has begun to creep into their minds about philosophy’s ability to address the questions and problems arising from their daily lives. The beginning of welding philosophy with life starts with practicing a radical critique of its nature and then charting the course it should follow; for “the only possible critique of a philosophy, the one that proves something, that is, an attempt to know whether we can live according to that philosophy, is a critique that has never been taught in universities. All that has been taught is the critique of words by other words” (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 178). The value of philosophy stems from its ability to serve as a guide (Guide/Manual) for living a certain life, not merely from organizing its discourse into theories. The crisis of philosophy only emerged after contemporary academic philosophical discourse abandoned the way philosophy originated in its Greek roots. For “throughout the history of ancient philosophy, and in almost all philosophical schools, we always encounter the same warnings about the danger faced by the philosopher if he imagines that his philosophical discourse can suffice in itself without being connected to the philosophical life” (Hadot, 1995, p. 422). This is because the Greek philosopher considered himself a sage teaching people the most rational ways of living that lead to a better life. Moreover, the life of the philosopher himself was a direct reflection of his philosophy; he acted and lived according to the wisdom he comprehended, evidenced by the fact that some of those referred to as philosophers left no written works or philosophical texts.

Philosophy is part of knowledge that ultimately aims to improve ways of living, as no knowledge is entirely valid in itself but is defined by the standards of quality of life, which represent a direct reflection of theoretical thinking. Just as the design of a house plan is not architecturally valid unless its inhabitants feel comfortable living in it and their way of living in it becomes safe and enjoyable. The good life is the essential subject of any genuine philosophical endeavor; otherwise, all philosophical discourse turns into lifeless discourse or knowledge without a subject. “Philosophy is not primarily about forming theories but is about attempting to live and testing what one can live. Philosophy is the study of life and the art of living; it is translating life into philosophy and realizing philosophy in life” (Zwierlein, 2023, pp. 149, 150). Defining this central role of philosophy means that philosophical discourse itself must be composed of the material of life, that is, the source of its concepts, perceptions, and theories must be the problems of life itself. Philosophical lan-

guage should be imbued with the connotations of everyday life language, and those connotations should gain the necessary clarity within the framework of philosophical theorization. Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1889–1951) work *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* marked a significant turning point in the path of reconnecting philosophy with life through the link of language. Wittgenstein declared at the beginning of this work that “the book deals with the problems of philosophy and shows that the reason for posing these problems lies in the misunderstanding of the logic of our language. The whole meaning of the book can be summed up in the following words: What can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence” (Wittgenstein, 1974, p. 3). Thus, the problem of philosophy today lies in its theoretical and abstract language, which distances itself from the clarity necessary for all understanding. For whatever can be said in life can be said clearly in philosophy.

The closure of philosophy upon itself, methodologically and theoretically, reached its peak during the era of the formation of philosophical systems (with Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) as the most prominent example). Philosophers were concerned with constructing a cross-disciplinary philosophical theory that was logically applicable to all discourses and subjects, while disregarding the immediate dilemmas posed by life. Consequently, a philosophical discourse emerged that was detached from the discourse of life and transcended it through concepts and logical images. However, this era began to disintegrate, and life returned as a “primary phenomenon,” meaning as a subject of priority for philosophical thought and description. This task was undertaken by contemporary phenomenology and some related schools, such as existentialism. Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) declared that “the age of systematic thinking has ended. As such, the values of life that were valid in that era no longer align with the changing condition of humanity or with the conceptual knowledge of the world that has been meticulously and skillfully formed. It is no longer sufficient to rely on newly selected facts, and thus emerged those thinkers who heralded a new day in the life of philosophy” (Dilthey, 1984, p. 38). This marks the rebirth of philosophy from the womb of life, from the richness of everything that humans encounter in objects, events, and situations. This signifies rescuing philosophy from its systematic nature, placing it on the path of discourse, and propelling it into the experience of living, where it must find its unique essence and reclaim its fundamental function. Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) called for fulfilling this ultimate task through the slogan “Let us live anew in the vitality of life” (Heidegger, *Zur Bestimmung der Philosophie*, 1987, p. 88) (*Leben wir uns wider ein seine Lebendigkeit*). This call implies that philosophy had not previously been in a vital relationship with life due to its adoption of strict objectivity, influenced by experimental sciences, in its epistemological approach to life—maintain-

ing a cognitive distance from it. Meanwhile, life is lived close to us, as we live it within ourselves. The way to approach life, instead of methodological and theoretical rigor, is to “immerse ourselves anew in the experience of living” (Heidegger, *Zur Bestimmung der Philosophie*, 1987, p. 68) (Versenken wir uns Wieder in das Erlebnis), because it is through this experience that philosophy regains its original essence as a way of life and a mode of living rather than merely a theory. Since the experience of living ensures that there is no distance between humans and life, it thereby represents the genuine experience that reflects the actual practice of philosophizing.

The beginning of a new era for philosophy by reconnecting it to the subject of life, whether within the stream of *Lebensphilosophie* (Philosophy of Life) extending from Dilthey to Henri Bergson (1859–1941), or within the stream of spiritual philosophy¹ extending from Foucault and Pierre Hadot to André Comte-Sponville, does not signify a transformation in the essence or function of philosophy. Rather, it signifies a return to the spirit of philosophy and the recovery of the “original” way of philosophizing—a way that seeks the shortest paths through which life comes into thought without theoretical or categorical mediations that distort the raw nature of the phenomenon of life. This aligns with Heidegger’s principle that “philosophy is, quite clearly and emphatically, the establishment of what life itself is in the system of thought” (Heidegger, *Phänomenologie der Anschauung und des Ausdrucks*, 1993, p. 156). The more philosophy succeeds in reconstructing life as it originally is, within the system of thought and consciousness, the more it can be a true philosophy and connect with its essence. Developing a philosophical discourse does not mean addressing the mind to itself, nor does it necessarily involve producing a language that is abstract and unclear, as this inevitably leads to the failure of the discourse itself and its inability to engage with the problems of life. Since “philosophy is an activity, not a collection of doctrines” (Wittgenstein, 1974, p. 29), the fundamental philosophical activity is based on its capacity to transform into a possible living experience and to make this

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1. What is meant by spiritual philosophy is that philosophical trend that spread particularly in France (since the works of Michel Foucault and the historian of philosophy Pierre Hadot). This trend revives the idea of spiritual exercises from ancient Greek philosophy (especially the Epicurean and Stoic schools), which involve spiritual training to endure life’s hardships and disturbances to avoid anxiety and turmoil. These exercises are not linked to religion or any external source; they stem solely from the self. Accordingly, the word “spiritual” here has no connection to religious contexts. This trend explores the possibility of establishing spirituality without a deity. This position reflects a kind of disturbance in contemporary spiritual representations after the exhaustion of the rationalist legacy in the history of philosophy, which reached its peak in postmodernity, without providing sufficient philosophical alternatives for the art of living spiritually in non-philosophical contexts. For more details, see our article: Nasser Amara, “Philosophical Spirituality: Pierre Hadot’s Approaches to Spiritual Exercises in Ancient Philosophy,” *Saudi Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Issue 3, March 2023, pp. 59–69.

experience a vital one—starting from the existential foundation of being to attaining the values and virtues of good living. Thus, philosophy connected to the subject of life is itself a way of living philosophy.

Philosophy as a Living Experience

The primary questions of philosophy, in its existential, epistemological, and ethical dimensions, are fundamentally questions about life. Philosophy emerged to answer these questions and to enable humans to live better lives in accordance with the principles of wisdom, or, in the words of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), “lived wisdom” (*Lebensweisheit*) (Schopenhauer, 2001, p. 27). The inception of philosophical thought was nothing other than the beginning of a different experience of life. If the central question for ancient Greek sages was: What is the origin of life? Then, starting from Socrates, the question became: How should life be lived? And how can it be lived better in particular? Accordingly, “the concept of life has always been part of the core of the central philosophical subject. From its beginnings, philosophy posed the question: What constitutes a truly good or successful life, and how can it be achieved? In ancient Greece, this question was fundamental to philosophy in general, as evidenced at least by the major Socratic schools (Epicureanism, Stoicism, Skepticism). With the prioritization of practice, philosophy was tasked with analyzing the problems arising from the immediate reality of people’s lives and actions, conceptualizing them, contextualizing them, and pointing to potential solutions. This ideal of philosophy oriented toward practice aligns with the idea of philosophy as an art of living or a way of life” (Sebastian Hüsch, 2023, p. 7). From this, it is understood that philosophy is not a theoretical apparatus prepared in advance but a task guided by the questions posed by reality. The most important question is: How should we live? That is, what is the best way to live a good life? From this question arises the epistemological and ontological relationship between philosophizing and living: philosophizing as living, and living as philosophizing.

Philosophizing about the nature of living is not a selective intellectual activity, nor is living a good life a topic that takes priority among other subjects; rather, it is inherent to the nature of philosophy itself. For “learning to live is the only true philosophizing” (Comte-Sponville, 2000, p. 20). This is because if the act of philosophizing is genuine, it necessarily leads to addressing life’s imbalances or improving its quality for those who wish to live it according to what reason dictates and the wisdom that represents the focal point of the connection between thought and practice. In this sense, “life, thinking, theory, practice, the knowledge of life, and the art of living are in a state of interaction with one another, where theory devises an intelligent path for the practice it guides. Practice follows the path and explains to theory whether its assumptions are correct and whether what it claims exists in reality. In this way, we

can once again understand the intimate relationship between knowledge and life. We also discover the primacy of practice or life, from which thought emerges, is clarified, and illuminated. Hence, new light is cast on the ancient expression {live first, then philosophize} (*primum vivere, deinde philosophari*), as life is both the essence, the subject, the means, and ultimately the criterion of knowledge” (Zwierlein, 2023, p. 127). Philosophy and life are of one and the same nature and are not separated by any boundaries unless philosophy is considered a path through which living flows in such a way that practice follows wisdom.

A new light has been shed on the phrase “living through philosophizing” after its meaning was obscured in the context of the dominance of Aristotelian philosophy over the essence of philosophizing in the history of Western thought, decisively resolving the rhetorical conflict between the thought of life and the life of thought. Aristotle conceived of “three types of life: contemplative, practical, and sensory, considering the first type to be of higher status than the other two” (Laerte, 1847, p. 226). This made Aristotle’s era a pivotal moment in the history of the relationship between philosophy and lived life, as philosophy became enclosed within itself according to the logic of intellectual contemplation, which focuses on crafting the internal life of the mind in the form of formal logical rules. For, according to Aristotle, “if the intellect is something sacred in the human being, then life according to the intellect is sacred in relation to ordinary human life” (Aristote, 1992, p. 419). This stance does not mean that lived life was not at the core of “Aristotelian ethics,” but rather that the way it was conceptualized in his texts was “non-vital,” unlike the philosophical tradition in Epicurean and Stoic schools, for example. In this “ancient tradition of philosophy, to be a philosopher means to be fundamentally committed to using one’s capacity for thought in one’s life, and the philosophical life is simply where life is managed on this basis. This basic commitment is what every genuine and complete philosopher has undertaken when they adopted this commitment and chose to be a philosopher, regardless of the ancient philosophical school to which they belong” (Cooper, 2012, p. 18). Based on this philosophical and ethical commitment, philosophy is intrinsically connected to its essence, such that reason is not separated from the content of life. This is what wisdom signifies, as it is the practice of reason, living through reason, and understanding life, ultimately leading to a philosophical life.

Living wisely is the focus of thought, as all human dimensions converge at the moment of living life, and thus the ability to feel that life according to a specific and distinct conception. Philosophy presents itself as a way of living and a vision for conceptualizing the life that is actually lived. This way begins with the philosopher’s own life as a direct reflection of the practice of philosophizing, passing through philosophical conceptions of life and the practice of

exercises in living it, and reaching the transformations that arise from all this, redirecting the self toward a good or virtuous life in accordance with wisdom. However, “wisdom is not another life where everything is fine—in your relationships, work, and society—but rather another way of living this life as it is” (Comte-Sponville, 2000, p. 80). The search for this other way of living is not a newly invented function of philosophy but is its fundamental function since its inception. For “beginning with Socrates, ancient philosophers made philosophy the foundation and sole guiding principle for the entirety of human life, not merely concerning questions of right or wrong action. These questions are just a limited part of anyone’s life, as no one can live their life in a fully satisfactory way without philosophy and the understanding that, ideally, only philosophy can provide when it ultimately succeeds and is complete” (Cooper, 2012, p. 6). The completion of understanding, from the philosophical perspective, does not mean the completion of a philosophical theory, the formulation of a concept within a pre-established categorical system, or the achievement of a highly abstract idea aimed at the meaning of life. Rather, it means allowing life to express itself as it truly is.

The philosophical way of living life is based on understanding that focuses on the process of self-change and transformation rather than changing the world. Thus, “the process that derives from the experience of life itself an interpretation of life takes freer forms, as they are integrated to form a non-systematic but impressive interpretation of life. This type of writing is connected to the ancient art of sophists and orators, which Plato vehemently excluded from the realm of philosophy. Yet the eyes of these thinkers remain fixed on the mystery of life, though they despair of solving that mystery through metaphysics with universal validity, based on a theory of the world’s interconnectedness. At that point, life must be interpreted from within life itself (*das Leben soll aus ihm selber gedeutet werden*). This is the great idea that connects these philosophers of life to the experience of the world” (Dilthey, 1984, p. 39). Dilthey’s text clearly refers to the return to the essence of philosophy “excluded” in the history of Western philosophical thought, an essence tied to life from within, in opposition to a philosophy that derived its legitimacy from metaphysics with universal validity—interpretations that are holistic and not linked to the particulars of life. This practically means invoking the sage instead of the philosopher, according to the technical distinctions of ancient Greek philosophy.

The Philosopher as the Teacher of Life: The Task of Living through Philosophy

Nietzsche (Friedrich Nietzsche, 1844-1900) announced his supreme task, as the task of every philosopher, after he practiced intense criticism on the contemporary philosophical education system in its academic form, by saying,

“My general task is to show how life is deeply connected to philosophy, without philosophy being superficial or the philosopher’s life becoming a false life” (Nietzsche, 1988, p. 104). It seems that this philosopher’s task is the result of a historical critique of the development of the concept of philosophy from ancient Greek philosophy until the collapse of contemporary philosophical systems on one hand, and a radical critique of the philosopher’s task and the relationship of his life to his philosophical production on the other. The original task of the philosopher, associated with producing wisdom, i.e., philosophy as a way of living and an existential choice for the self, stemming from the philosopher’s own life as an exemplary practitioner of that wisdom, appears to have declined. The reason is that the philosopher no longer lives a philosophical life but an academic life. “Philosophical education is merely a means of deterring from philosophy” (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 187). Philosophy is lived first and then taught; there is no evidence of the authenticity of philosophizing more than the philosopher’s own life, and more clearly, “The philosopher’s product is his life” (Sebastian Hüscher, 2023, p. 8). His life becomes a philosophy whose influence extends to others and motivates them to change their lives according to the principles of wisdom, which include the vision of the world, contemplation of the present and destiny, and the transformation of the self into a different actor in nature and society. In this sense, “the decisive product of the philosopher, before his words and works, is his life, because this is his actual work; the decisive product of the philosopher is the work of his thinking and its impact on life” (Zwierlein, 2023, p. 149). Thus, the essence of philosophy lies in the role the philosopher plays in life; the philosopher does not represent, originally, a philosophical school, doctrine, or theory as much as he represents his life lived according to his philosophy. For this reason, the texts of early philosophers (Socrates and his contemporaries) had no prior theoretical planning, but rather were texts alive with human problems and active dialogue to solve them.

In the philosopher’s character, all the philosophical dimensions that founded the philosophical discourse throughout its history converge. Life was the motivation for dialogue, where questions form and answers emerge. Ultimately, a concept of life is formed according to nature, logic, or moral virtues in their various values. Hence, “the philosopher’s life, behavior, and character constitute the realization of the complete and integrated concept of philosophy, and this almost additional element to the triadic system (nature, logic, and ethics) is present throughout metaphilosophical contemplation in antiquity (...). Ethics realized in life, i.e., in behavior, and even the philosopher’s character in the later periods of antiquity, was a component of the integrity of the concept of philosophy and the concept of wisdom alike, an indispensable component, indeed a primary and essential one” (Domanski, 2024, pp. 9-13). Thus, the philosopher’s life is the practical guarantor of the legitimacy of philosophizing

from the outset; the observer of the history of philosophy studies doctrines, schools, and currents, examines the development of philosophical ideas, but also asks: How did philosophers live their lives? Because philosophers are the closest people to representing the bond of reason with life, considering “philosophy as a reflection of reason on all its behavioral patterns up to its ultimate requirements” (Dilthey, 1984, p. 25). This reflection is the philosophical way of life that expresses the philosopher’s view of life and his representations of nature, ethics, and the world. All of this forms the ontological conditions for living life as a philosophical experience.

The way of living life is determined by the existential position the philosopher takes in the world, then this position is specified in philosophical discourse statements, and then reaches the recipient as a guide to a way of living within a holistic vision. Therefore, “the philosophical way of life includes perspectives on humanity and our place in the universe; it should not offer some claims about a limited area of life only, but should provide an idea of a worldview. We also ask all those who live a philosophical life to be able to express all aspects of these views and defend them fully, yet they need, to guide their lives and actions, a basic sense of what a particular worldview claims to live that life” (Ambury, Irani, & Wallace, 2021, p. 239). In this sense, philosophy does not become a discourse restricted to a specific elite of people who build its concepts, establish its theories, and retain the title “philosopher” for themselves, but it is a way of life that anyone can follow if they commit to engaging in living with a holistic vision that aligns with reason, nature, and existence.

The philosopher is a teacher of life, not merely a theorist of ideas. This means that his philosophical production must fall within life works that accomplish methods and exercises for better living performance. Therefore, “the feature deeply associated with philosophy as a way of life is its performative character, i.e., its ability to have a transformative impact on the lives and characters of individuals. Transforming one’s way of life is the ultimate motivation of philosophy understood as a way of life (...) not scientifically pretentious nor using mathematical language. It offers contemplation and guidance on how to live and manage life with the aim of self-transformation. Contrary to the way philosophy is taught today in universities, if philosophy is taken as a way of life, it does not mean merely accumulating knowledge or displaying intelligence, but it means a real transformation process based on a change in one’s way of viewing the world, and the resulting consequence is to be in a new and different way” (Ambury, Irani, & Wallace, 2021, p. 202). Philosophy, then, is not a method of academic teaching with content that weakens its transformative performance and fixes the lifestyle on ready-made forms in living habits, but it is the feeling of a different existential position in the universe that allows changing traditional perceptions of the moment of living.

Philosophy, as Nietzsche says, is “the knowledge that unifies the experiences of life into a specific consciousness, and through expanding beyond individual life, it controls the general destiny and makes the narrowness of the moment fade away within it. Thus, it truly becomes philosophy and leads to belief in the value of existence” (Nietzsche, 1988, p. 147). This Nietzschean lesson in defining philosophy reveals the threshold of true philosophizing, which is the transcendence of the limits of individual life and living according to conceptions of universal life, that is, according to the values of holistic existence. These conceptions can only be internalized if a genuine and effective transformation of the self occurs, enabling it to surpass that threshold—this is precisely what is meant by the phrase “living according to philosophy.” Accordingly, “in order for one to live philosophically, they must practice an action that influences both themselves and others” (Hadot, 1995, p. 269). Therefore, a philosopher is someone who can live according to a certain philosophical vision and apply the existential and ethical changes resulting from that vision to themselves. If philosophical discourse does not transform into a procedural performance aimed at changing the pattern of ordinary life and placing humans in existential dimensions broader than the boundaries of individual life, where all obstacles to living a good life dissolve, it fails to fulfill its purpose.

The Nature of Good Life: Happiness, Quality, and Well-being

Philosophy, at its core, is a universal epistemic event. Philosophical questions emerged to change a human condition that had succumbed to stagnation due to dogmatic ideas and monologic discourses devoid of dialogue. When we return to Socrates for the symbolic history of philosophy, it is because Socrates laid the foundation for questions that confront life and push it toward transformation. His life and fate bore witness to the philosophical drive to change life. Hence, Nietzsche pointed out that “the most important question in all philosophies is: to what extent do things possess an immutable character? For when this question is answered, we will embark with the most daring courage to improve this aspect of the world that has been recognized as changeable” (Nietzsche, 1988, p. 230). The purpose of philosophizing is to explore life’s questions and place them in a state of continuous discussion, such that the possible answers—whether as statements, discourses, concepts, theories, phrases, or logic—lead to envisioning the best way to live life and the paths to virtues that allow for rational and simultaneously distinct enjoyment of it. Cicero (106 BCE–43 BCE) noted that “the effective motivation for those who initially devoted themselves to the study of philosophy was the desire to occupy themselves with the search for the best state of life; they certainly spent a great deal of time and effort in this pursuit, hoping to live happily” (Cicero, 1886, p. 251). To prove this original drive of philosophy, Cicero cites the example of

Socrates, saying of him that he “brought philosophy down from the heavens, gave it a place in the cities, introduced it even into homes, and compelled it to investigate life, morals, and the good and bad things” (Cicero, 1886, p. 257). Thus, the symbolic beginning of philosophizing with Socrates was only referenced in the history of philosophy based on this profound interaction between the philosophical way of thinking and the way of living. Philosophy became alive through its renewed function of understanding life and then exploring the best ways to live it, while life acquired a philosophical character through its universal wisdom-based manifestation. Therefore, “this change in the stance of philosophy coincided with the emergence of new definitions for it. According to Cicero, philosophy is the teacher of life, the inventor of laws, and the guide to all virtue. Seneca (4 BCE–65 CE) defines it as the theory and art of living a proper life. This means that it is a way of life, not merely a theory; hence, one must use the term wisdom to express it” (Dilthey, 1984, p. 18). For if survival requires a special art—a set of techniques and exercises that ensure continuity—then living a good life also requires art and wisdom. According to this conception, it can be said that while the outward aspect of life quality is material, its essence is philosophical.

The fundamental concern for any philosophy is: What is good life? And how should it be lived? The answer to this question determines the content of philosophical discourse and the substance of its concepts, ultimately defining the very essence of philosophy. If philosophy must necessarily provide an interpretation of life, this does not mean imposing layers of theoretical meanings onto it from the outside. Rather, it means allowing the essence of life to unfold within the statement; this self-unfolding is the original practice of the act of living. This is because human nature does not contain any pre-existing meaning for living—life is lived in the way it has been lived, and hence it is life. Accordingly, “the concept of a life worth living differs from the concept of a meaningful life. When we ask whether life is worth living, we are asking whether this life is worth living for the person who lives it. This internal evaluative perspective forms the basis of ancient narratives about the happy or good life; the good life is the life that is good for the person who lives it. However, we can also ask whether life has value from an external perspective for the individual whose life is being evaluated, such as the perspective of others, society, or the world” (Machek, 2023, pp. 2–3). Thus, the philosophical approach to the issue of the good life branches into two directions: one subjective, in the sense that the meaning of the good life is tied to the individual who lives it and their internal assessments, independent of any external vision or evaluation; and the other objective, forming a holistic normative view of the nature and rules of the good life, such that these rules are generalized to society and the world.

The question of the nature of the good life has undergone a trajectory of

ups and downs throughout the history of philosophical thought. However, it has consistently remained present in the deep structure of every philosophical idea in some sense, as it is an unavoidable question that represents a fundamental choice for the life and essence of philosophy. It can thus be said that the good life is metaphilosophy or descriptive philosophy. Holmer Steinfath summarized this trajectory in his book *“What is the Good Life? Philosophical Reflections”* by stating, “The question of what constitutes the good, happy, or successful life is witnessing a remarkable revival in current philosophical discussions and has never been entirely abandoned since Socrates and Plato proclaimed it as the central question of philosophy in general. However, at the latest, with Kant’s critiques of the moral justifications for the good life—which many considered resounding—the issue of the good life was displaced from the center of philosophy and pushed to its peripheries, and from there to the experimental social sciences (especially psychology) or to various forms of popular life advice” (Steinfath, 1998, p. 7). The question of the good life is thus tied to a trajectory of philosophical interpretations that begin with rethinking the ontological status of the being in relation to life. This status was shifted from the individual sphere to the universal sphere, passing through the rational justifications for living the good life by delineating the epistemological dimensions that emerge from interpreting life based on life itself. This task was undertaken by the phenomenology of life (Edmund Husserl [1859–1938], Heidegger, and their extensions), culminating in the ethical approach to the question of the good life by tracing the ethical implications of the art of living according to philosophical representations inherited from traditional schools of thought (especially Epicureanism and Stoicism).

For a philosophically grounded inquiry into the nature of the good life, it is necessary to “distinguish between the value of a happy life, a life worth living, and mere existence. An axiology [philosophy of values] of life emerges at three different levels: at the lowest level, life may be good in itself regardless of its contents; at a higher level, life may have value in the sense of being worth living or deserving to be lived (...); and at the highest level of the value hierarchy, there is the happy life or the life lived well” (Machek, 2023, p. 4). Based on this, the essence of the good life is tied to the conceptual sources from which it derives its meanings, enhancing philosophy’s role in producing concepts and representations that drive life to manifest its quality and the best ways of living it. Aristotle provided an initial conception of this life, stating that “Life fundamentally consists of sensation and thought, and life in itself is a good and pleasurable thing because it is finite and defined (...). To feel what we feel, or to feel what we think, means to feel that we exist; being means sensing or thinking. Therefore, feeling that we are alive is one of the inherently pleasurable things because life is inherently good” (Aristotle, 1992, pp. 384, 385). This radical proposition about the concept of the good life precedes

all subsequent semantic enrichments of the concept of happiness. Happiness, in its ontological foundation, is the state of being at the moment of feeling one's existence—a moment that cannot be replaced by any internal or external pleasure. Thus, the happy life begins with the relationship between thought and existence, which is manifested in a continuous awareness of the importance of staying alive as a foundational pleasure in life.

Aristotle, therefore, draws attention to the internal source of the joy of living, which is the source of existence. From this, the metaphysical foundation of the phenomenon of life, through the distinction between what is essential and what is incidental in it, leads to a rational definition of the good life, considering living it in itself as evidence of its quality. Hence, “we must distinguish, from the perspective of internal evaluation, between the question: What makes life worth living? and the question: Does the mere fact that a person is alive carry some value regardless of the contents of life? Many philosophers agree that mere living carries practical value because it is the necessary condition for living well. But can it also carry non-practical value, regardless of whether the person is living a good or bad life?” (Machek, 2023, p. 3). What constitutes the good life, then, is a completely neutral element between the demand for happiness in life and the worthiness of living life. It is a constant element amid variables because it is an existential condition for life itself, while ethics or happiness are the contingencies of life that are realized in contradictory practical contexts. Accordingly, “we can discern that all metaphysical systems are driven in their background by the question of the good life. Suppose human existence is organized in reality in a way that creates a tension between the desire for complete happiness and the limitations of human capabilities, and this tension cannot be resolved in principle. In that case, it makes sense to reinterpret the world and our position in it, at least at the level of thought, in a way that, if we cannot be completely happy, we at least achieve those significant meaningful elements in our lives” (Steinfath, 1998, p. 35). This philosophical conception of existential essence and the good life is rooted in the Greek obsession with the universal (especially Aristotle), whereby all values of life are traced back to a common value that aligns with the general order of reason.

The personal vision of the meaning of a good life centers on the sufficiency of the self's feeling of what is good to be lived in life, according to the rationalization of the value of that feeling. Accordingly, there are no standards outside the mind that can judge the nature of the good life or determine its requirements. Thus, “the personal concept of the good life, in essence, affirms that what is good for a person depends on their inclinations, preferences, or desires, regardless of their content, and nothing philosophical can be said about the good life.” This necessitates the assertion that happiness is the harmony of living with inclinations and desires as an essential part of human nature,

and that the criterion for this harmony is reason, as the epistemic guarantor of the coherence of that nature. To this meaning, Emmanuel Kant (1724–1804) referred by defining happiness or ultimate happiness (*Glückseligkeit*) as “the state of the rational being in the world where everything proceeds, throughout their existence, in accordance with their desire and will, and thus it depends on the harmony of nature with their entire purpose and also with the fundamental factor, namely, their will” (Kant, 2024, p. 181). The good life, in this sense, is a life that is rationalized to be lived by making it a happy life according to the personal conception of happiness, such that each person embodies their own happiness in the perspective where life aligns with their inner will, within the meaning given by Plato to the concept of happiness as “the ability of a person to suffice themselves for good living, and the perfection of virtue is for the living person to be self-sufficient in managing their existence” (Plato, 2008, p. 196). Accordingly, the concept of philosophy has been defined through this rational construction of the image of the good life and the way to attain happiness in it in a fundamental and enduring way. Whether we rely on the self-sufficient happiness of Plato, the happiness of the soul in Aristotle, or the happiness of the will in Kant, the happiness of living life, according to this, exists within the being that rationalizes itself, and the outcomes of this happiness have generated concepts such as the ideal, conformity, will, and harmony.

The connection between the good life and the happy life raises a profound philosophical problem if we invoke the history of philosophy to deconstruct and analyze this link. Is the good life the happy life? Is the happy life the pleasurable life? Principally, “the phrase ‘the good life’ (*gutes Leben*) must be understood in the sense of happiness as expressed by the Greek term (*Eudaimonia*), which has a stronger meaning than the [ordinary] word for happiness (*Glück*)” (Wolf, 1998, p. 3). This is because *eudaimonia* is not sensory happiness that can be achieved in various ways, but rather the result of applying a set of values aimed ultimately at living life better. This leads us to the necessity of linking it with another Greek concept, “*Aphrodisia*,” which Foucault says means “proper conduct, not as a code of laws (codes) or directive systems or theoretical frameworks, but as a set of techniques (*tekhnai*) whose subject is life or whose aim is life (*tekhnai peri ton bion*), that is, as techniques for living, aiming to bring about a certain number of transformations in a given being” (Foucault, 2014, p. 253). Based on the techniques of living that achieve happiness, we can identify two main paths in this regard:

- a) The path of self-sufficient value in achieving happiness, and the path of values applied with recourse to external necessities. In the first path, we speak of happiness with the tone of Epictetus (50–135 AD): “Why do you seek happiness in external appearances? It cannot be found in the body, nor can it be found in possessions. If you do not believe me, look at the wealthy of today and see how their lives are full of regret, and happiness cannot be

found in holding high positions” (Epictetus, *The Complete Works*, 2022, p. 254). In this Stoic conception, happiness already exists within the self, and the search for it is merely the discovery of a way for the self to harmonize with itself, where it can be said that the feeling of happiness has no external source. However, attaining that feeling requires enhancing this state of harmony through spiritual exercises to train oneself in ways of dispensing with everything external to the self. As Seneca puts it, “Your good lies within you; disregard the thirst for happiness, for your happiness is in your hands” (Seneca, 1996, p. 46). Thus, happiness is attained through contemplation, which is the reflection of thought on itself to extract the self’s capacities for feeling the pleasure of living, such that the less one is attached to external happiness and its various contents (wealth, status, etc.), the greater the feeling of inner happiness, which derives its importance from achieving the spiritual balance of the self.

The state of self-sufficiency with the values given to happiness represents a philosophical way of living. Through this way, the connection between the essence of philosophy and the style of wisdom according to which reason operates can be understood. In this sense, Epictetus guides us to the model of this philosophical way through Socrates. “Socrates became a complete philosopher by caring about nothing but his mind in everything he faced, and you, even if you are not yet Socrates, ought to live like someone who wants to be Socrates (...). But if you neglect caring for yourself, you will make no progress and will end up being a non-philosopher throughout your life and after your death” (Epictetus, *Handbook of Epictetus*, 1983, pp. 28, 29). Living according to the virtue of reason and practicing that virtue in life is truly living with philosophy, for it is the way to answer the central question: What life is best? And what way of living is best?

- b) As for the path in which the values of happiness are tied to external content, Aristotle points out that “everyone believes that the happy life is a life of pleasure, and that pleasure is always associated with happiness. And I admit that this belief is not without reason. No action ever reaches completion from the moment it encounters an obstacle. But happiness is something complete, and this is the way in which a person, in order to be happy, needs bodily pleasures, external pleasures, and even the pleasures of wealth, so that there is no obstacle preventing him from all of this” (Aristotle, 1992, p. 311). Therefore, the need for external pleasures for happiness is a need for the completeness of happiness, so that good living becomes free of obstacles or requirements. For dispensing with those pleasures does not signify a state of value sufficiency in internal happiness as much as it signifies the mind’s inability to reach it due to its failure to overcome the obstacles preventing its attainment. Accordingly, the success of the mind means, in Plato’s terms, living “a life that combines pleasure, thought, and contem-

plation” (Plato, 2008, p. 811). This conception is based on placing human nature in a rational perspective, as it is a continuous desire for perfection, just as life derives its completeness from being a life lived in its limitations. Hence, happiness exists in the difference between the desire to attain what matches human nature and what life itself offers when material pleasures are transcended. For this reason, Aristotle distinguishes “between vulgar and crude natures that believe happiness is pleasure and material delights only, given the existence of three types of life: the life of pleasure, then the political or public life, and finally the intellectual life (...) and between truly distinguished and active minds, those that place happiness in glory, as this is the most common goal of political life (...) for we often seek glory only to affirm ourselves in the idea we have of our virtue, seeking the appreciation of the wise and the world we know, as we consider this a just honor for the merit we assume we possess” (Aristotle, 1992, pp. 42, 43). At that point, life becomes a practical virtue, lived best when it is lived in a way that enhances the philosopher’s role in public life, thus living a truly philosophical life, that is, a good life. The meaning of “goodness” here is the common good that arises from obtaining the pleasures of the soul and external pleasures in public life.

The equation of the good life with happiness raises a sharp philosophical dilemma because happiness is a concept subject to variable factors, in addition to its semantic transformations throughout the history of philosophy and its connection to the development of social systems. From Greek *eudaimonia* to modern happiness, then to well-being, and finally to quality in contemporary societies. Diogenes Laërtius (180–240 CE) summarized this dilemma by saying, “Perfect happiness is impossible because the body is subject to thousands of diseases, and the soul feels all the pains of the body independently of its own disturbances, and fortune often deceives our hopes, in addition to a set of reasons that prevent us from achieving happiness” (Laërtius, 1847, p. 107). Therefore, we must distinguish in happiness between the moral meaning of a normative nature, such as the meaning of good and evil, and the ethical meaning in which happiness is associated with daily practices and changing public judgments. Just as we distinguish between subjective happiness, where the self is the criterion for feeling happiness, and objective happiness, where the feeling of happiness reflects the social vision and rules of connection to well-being and others. All of this makes understanding the content of the “good life” a complex matter. Because “the issue of good living is usually understood as an issue related to happiness, yet happiness is a highly ambiguous concept. There is happiness in the sense of fortunate coincidence, there is incidental happiness in joyful moments, and there is happiness that encompasses the entire life. Happiness can mean an emotional state or a particular state of life. And when talking about human well-being or well-being instead of happiness, the

connotations of pleasure are usually influential. In general, happiness seems to be an aspect of the good life, not the good life itself" (Steinfath, 1998, p. 13). This prompts us to re-understand the dimensions that the good life takes from a post-moral perspective, by combining the state of desire in human nature, which is centered in the mind, with the state of happiness generated through pleasure, thought, and contemplation.

After the collapse of the modern moral foundation for representations of the good life, with the growing value of individual independence in contemporary social and political systems, the concept of happiness itself has become an empty concept because it does not undergo any real empirical process. Therefore, it has been replaced with an empirical concept, namely "quality of life," which means "the objectively measurable and subjectively experienced aspects of life, and what philosophers traditionally call the good life is a life of good quality" (Michalos, 2017, p. 62). This definition seems to align with the factor of abundance and satisfaction that grows rapidly in contemporary modern life. This factor finds its roots in Epictetus, who saw that "happiness and desire cannot coexist, for in order for a person to be happy, he must obtain everything he wants, like someone who eats until full, so he must not feel thirst or hunger" (Epictetus, *The Complete Works*, 2022, p. 270). Thus, a description of the good life can be determined according to the criterion of quality, based on a simple principle: "Life is good if it gives us what we want from it or if it meets our requirements of it" (Steinfath, 1998, p. 59). If this description relies on the material nature of the concept of quality, it is because philosophy cannot transcend the content that life itself produces when it expresses the lived values within it. In the sense that a life of quality is "a life lived in good health, with loving friends and family, in a safe and attractive natural environment, with good governance, financial security, and the freedom to pursue one's aspirations in peace" (Michalos, 2017, p. 56). A life lived, then, is a way of living according to the given quality, where what is lived can be measured. Therefore, these values of living align with the nature of the mind that produced them, as all contemporary cultural forms are techniques for producing quality of life.

The concept of happiness has been imbued with material connotations and linked to the good life in such a way that its perfection lies in satisfying individual desires. However, as Epicurus stated: "Some desires are necessary for happiness, others are necessary for freeing the body from discomfort, others for preserving life itself, and some are neither necessary nor significant" (Epicurus, 2012, p. 158). It is wise, therefore, to consider what the good life means outside the evaluation imposed by the concept of happiness or the equations between the good life and pleasure and its extensions in various cultural forms. The good life "can also mean a meaningful life, an admirable life, or a morally valuable life. The good life can have different dimensions. Equating

the good life with a happy life obscures this possibility, as does the equation we sometimes encounter between the good life and the morally good life. To avoid this classification, people often speak of a successful life instead of a good life” (Steinfath, 1998, p. 13). Thus, living philosophically goes beyond merely living happily or morally well in itself, as that would ultimately just be living, and perhaps living without any method at all. But if the good life is the successful life, then what is the successful life? And what is the criterion for success in it? At this level of thought, the successful life is one that surpasses the thresholds of merely living, of a life worth living, or a happy life, and then the threshold of the good life or a life of quality. Because “unless the value of living alone is sufficient to make life worth living, the life worth living will consist of the value of living alone, if it exists, in addition to the value of some good contents, or the freedom from bad contents, sufficient to exceed the threshold of a life worth living” (Machek, 2023, p. 14). Thus, philosophy teaches us that the good life is not sought but rather created by making the meaning of living transcend the semantic thresholds attached to life when it is lived at a distance. Meanwhile, the interpretation philosophy offers of life, starting from life itself, leads to achieving the quality of life, whose most important foundation is for life to be itself in order to truly be lived.

Learning to Live Well: Is It Possible?

Philosophical exercises began, since Socrates, with training in the exercise of death, to give the idea of living its ultimate value. Thinking about death means thinking about a better way of living, and thus learning to live as an art that begins with Marcus Aurelius’ rule: “Remember that no one loses any life other than the one he lives, nor lives any life other than the one he loses” (Aurelius, 2006, p. 14). Learning to live means reconfiguring the perception of life as the life of the person himself, as he belongs to it and it belongs specifically to him. He thus needs to live it within the boundaries he establishes for himself or those he learns from the spirit of wisdom, which serves as his guide to the techniques of the art of living well. Since the source of that wisdom is Greek, studying Greek philosophy is considered a rich reservoir of techniques for living and fundamental conceptions about life and its nature. Based on this, Foucault warns us that we are on the verge of “losing the unity of life and its essential meaning in the Greek sense, because life for us is defined by social division according to profession and status, whereas Greek life is neither a profession nor a craft, nor is it centered around salvation or a state of connection or opposition between this world and that. Both the idea of salvation and the idea of status risk, to some extent, obscuring the meaning of living in the Greek sense” (Foucault, 2014, p. 253). At that point, the unity of life requires a person to live life better by living what is lived of it, that is, by living the reasonable aspects of life. But this way of living requires learning,

which involves intellectual and spiritual exercises to master the art of living in a way that does not reduce being to less than life, to the extent that the being loses its ability to genuinely connect with its existence, and time becomes more biological than ontological.

Living is a general state, while living well is a specific individual state. Therefore, in principle, the good life cannot be regularized into general rules that can be followed and applied. This is because “increasing doubts about all attempts to derive generalizable statements about the good life from an anthropological, holistic, or theological definition of human nature are reinforced by the normative demand to leave matters of individual lifestyle entirely to the autonomy of the individual” (Steinfath, 1998, p. 7). This does not imply a nihilistic character in the idea of the non-learnability of the arts of living well; rather, it means that turning life into an idea is inherently utopian, as this causes living itself to lose its original meaning as living a life that flows before any idea, intuition, or preformed statement. Not because these mental faculties are incapable of constructing techniques for learning life, but because life itself is of a nature that is not learnable in the way other phenomena are learned. Life is so intrinsic to us that we cannot create the distance that allows for the process of generalization, which is the fundamental law of learning. “Because life, despite its drive toward happiness and despite the inherent strength of the virtues in which happiness is realized, cannot be elevated to the level of universally valid knowledge (*allgemeingültigen Wissen*)” (Dilthey, 1984, p. 14). Any attempt to reach this type of knowledge is merely an external encirclement of life. Meanwhile, living itself, encompassing knowledge, cannot be living from the outside, even if it is formed in the shape of concepts, statements, or theories, as all of this is contrary to its intrinsic nature.

In order to overcome the risks of nihilism in this description, we can resort to what Epicurus calls “good judgment,” which “is valued even higher than philosophy, as all virtues stem from good judgment, in the sense that it shows us that it is impossible to live a pleasant life without living a reasonable, noble, and just life, just as it is impossible to live a reasonable, noble, and just life without living a pleasant life” (Epicurus, 2012, p. 160). It seems that good judgment here is a middle principle between wisdom and philosophy, as it seeks a possible way of living that is not impossible to achieve—a way that combines the reasonable and the pleasant. However, this judgment cannot be turned into general knowledge or taught; rather, it can only be grasped in the moment of living itself. Based on this, this judgment arises from within life itself, and it is sound judgment (not in the logical, moral, or normative sense) because it is a judgment “on life as it is and by which it is lived.”

The question of living brings philosophical thought back to its central preoccupation, from which all other questions branch out. It also reconnects philosophy with its essential nature, which makes it philosophy in the first

place, such that there is no difference between the philosophy of life and the life of philosophy. Living better is a fundamental issue inherent in the act of existence itself and not merely an exceptional question in the history of philosophy. Since Socrates, in the dialogue “Crito,” pointed out the necessity of “knowing that it is not important to live, but to live well” (Plato, 2008, p. 189), the question “How do we live well?” has become a defining question for the nature of philosophy itself—that is, a defining question for the mode of thinking that reason must adopt in a non-cognitive situation, when thinking about life and living it at the same time. When the style of philosophy is itself the style of life, the statement becomes inferior to life, which cannot be transcended through knowledge or language. At that point, there is no way to a good life except through the acknowledgment that “there is nothing pitiable in a way of life that habit has made natural, and little by little we come to enjoy what necessity originally dictated” (Seneca, 1996, p. 36). This means that philosophy must dismantle all the cognitive and moral layers that have accumulated over the philosophical origin of the question: Which life is better? Only then can the true meanings of living and the values buried beneath the edifice of the history of philosophy, built in the spirit of the grandeur of discourse and its transcendence, be liberated.

Thus, the idea of the good life is not an innovative one but rather a constant search for what maintains harmony and balance between human nature and what that nature achieves when it lives as it is. While philosophy presents reason as a shared guarantor of that harmony and balance, it also presents itself as the virtue of virtues—that is, the supreme value of life that grants happiness and gives life its quality. Diogenes pointed to this by saying that for “rational beings to whom nature has given the greatest good—reason—living well and living according to reason still means living according to nature. For reason in them is the artist responsible for directing inclinations. Living according to nature is living according to the laws of virtue, for virtue is the goal toward which nature drives us. Our nature is part of cosmic nature, and virtue is the source of happiness that allows life to flow gently” (Laertius, 1847, p. 108). Accordingly, if the philosophical life is a good life as the virtue of reason, it is not because it is a second life lived instead of life itself, but because it is an art of living that maintains the flow of life within the course of human nature.

Conclusion

This long history of philosophy testifies to the centrality of the question about the nature of the good life and how to live it. If philosophy investigates the art of living and the spiritual and intellectual exercises that establish that art, it inherently represents a way of living life—a way that began with training in the exercise of death, aligning with reason and nature, embodying the true temporality of being, situating the self in a universal world, and inventing

the city and its various systems. From this research, we can conclude that the structure of the good life, according to the philosophical conception, is founded on a path in which the self transcends thresholds one after the other: from mere living to living a life worth living, to living a happy life, to living a life of quality, and ultimately to living a successful life in light of the features of a philosophical life.

The following conclusions can be drawn:

- The question of the good life is central to the history of philosophical thought and not a secondary matter. It is a fundamental criterion for the act of philosophizing itself, as the essence of philosophy is tied to the ability of any philosophy (school, doctrine, theory...) to develop techniques for good living within a general concept of the art of living.
- Happiness is merely another formulation of a better life. That is, philosophical thinking about the value of happiness is a stage within the broader inquiry into the essential question: What is the best life? Thus, the happy life is just one part of the good life.
- The separation of the inquiry into happiness from the inquiry into ethics has led to a reconsideration of the values that constitute the good life (pleasure, enjoyment, desire, will, thought...). This implies a renewed focus on non-traditional values in the history of philosophical thought (from Hellenistic philosophy to Roman philosophy) to gain a broader understanding of the nature of the good life and connect it to developments in contemporary life (technology, well-being, health, intelligence...).
- The philosopher's life is an important part of philosophical thinking, as their life serves as evidence of a way of living according to philosophy. Hence, no philosophical theory holds value unless it contributes to building a quality life. The evidence for this is that many individuals considered philosophers by the historians of philosophy left no written works (such as the Stoic philosopher Cato the Younger from the 1st century BCE, who wrote no philosophical texts; and Rogatianus, the Platonic philosopher and student of Plotinus, who also wrote no philosophical texts). They adopted a philosophical way of life, while a Latin writer like Aulus Gellius, who was a contemporary of Marcus Aurelius and a student of the Platonic philosopher Taurus, included many philosophical texts in his works but did not claim to have lived a philosophical life.
- Living a good life does not begin with obtaining desires as much as it begins with affirming an existential choice upon which the self builds a path, training itself to make its condition a universal one that transcends narrow individual life. Nevertheless, the perfection of a good or happy life conflicts with the existence of desire, considering this conflict a human paradox.

- Kant offers a solution to this paradox through the concept of “will,” as a rational value for conceptualizing desire and its relationship to happiness.
- The two philosophical schools (Epicureanism and Stoicism) remind us that reflecting on the sources of a good life, through the philosopher’s own life and the spiritual exercises he proposes, is metaphilosophy, i.e., the practical guide to constructing philosophy itself. Accordingly, philosophy is not the production of concepts, as some contemporary philosophies (Deleuze and others) advocate, but rather the production of life exercises that lead to better living.
 - The philosophy of living cannot be learned theoretically in the way it is taught today in schools and universities. Rather, it is an art practiced through meditative exercises, in which the philosopher plays the role of a guiding teacher, not obligated to construct a discourse as much as to provide wisdom.

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The Role of Solidarity in Supporting Female Athletes at Sports Clubs for Disabled in Saudi Arabia

Najat Alshafie

Alasala Colleges, Saudi Arabia

Abstract

The study aimed to shed light on the importance of competitive sports and the role of solidarity in supporting female athletes with disabilities affiliated with one of the disability sports clubs in Saudi Arabia, as well as identifying the nature of challenges they face. The study employed a qualitative approach, conducting interviews with the athletes and their coach at the club. The study found that sports enhance the psychological and physical health of the athletes, and solidarity plays a significant role not only in developing their athletic skills, but also in providing moral support, encouraging them to exchange knowledge, and share experiences. The findings highlighted the empowerment of Saudi women through sports, as the athletes presented a positive image of Saudi women with disabilities, their achievements, and aspirations despite the obstacles they encounter. The study recommends supporting sports for people with disabilities, as this contributes to enhancing well-being, improving quality of life, and promoting their integration into society

Keywords: Quality of life, disability, sports for the disabled, philosophy of disability, people with disabilities.

Introduction

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 introduces two concepts related to quality of life: the first is livability, reflected in meeting basic living standards such as providing essential services like healthcare, education, housing, job opportunities, infrastructure, and transportation; the second is lifestyle, which refers to various options and ways of enjoying life, such as culture, sports, entertainment, and more. Integrating people with disabilities into society benefits both them and the community, a process known as social integration. Among the fields that enhance their integration are sports activities. Therefore, engaging in sports and games within the community, including individuals with disabilities, contributes to promoting well-being and improving quality of life ('Aşr, 2020).

Undoubtedly, participating in competitive sports, whether individual or team-based, impacts players' quality of life from psychological, moral, material, and social standpoints. Similarly, sports for the disabled have a positive effect on them (Rashīd, 2023), helping achieve psychological balance, athletic accomplishment (Al-Sayyid, 2020), which leads to personal harmony, as well as alignment with the sports system (Al-Sayyid, 2020). Sports hold significant value for people with disabilities, enhancing their self-esteem, as well as social confidence (Muḥammad, 2022), proving their athletic abilities, effectiveness, and societal integration. Supporting individuals with disabilities through collective solidarity in sports clubs serves as a crucial motivator for their pursuit of achievement, enabling the exchange of varying knowledge in sports and other areas, as well as sharing life experiences that inspire them to overcome life's adversities and challenge their disabilities.

Through this qualitative study of the perspectives of female athletes in a Saudi sports club for people with disabilities, the research will explore the importance of competitive sports and the role of collective solidarity in supporting the athletes, their playing abilities, and achievements, as well as the challenges they face. This study is significant in understanding the role of competitive sports in women's lives, the impact of solidarity within disability sports clubs on shaping their identity and experiences, the nature of challenges they encounter, and the dimensions of support they require in the field of disability sports.

Research Problem

The rates of disability are steadily increasing worldwide due to environmental disasters, car accidents, wars, pollution in all its forms, modern lifestyles, and other factors. Locally, some general statistical indicators suggest that the percentage of people with disabilities and difficulties in Saudi Arabia is 4.2% of the total population, with males representing 3.9% and females 4.7% (General Authority for Statistics, 2017). This increase in disability is met with a scarcity of Arab studies addressing this important topic, which concerns a significant segment of society. Addressing disability solely from medical, health, or scientific perspectives is insufficient without a deeper philosophical understanding of disability to first examine common perceptions and then establish an informed view that dispels misconceptions linking disability to inability and need.

This shortage of Arabic resources on the philosophy of disability stands in contrast to the global publishing trend of producing diverse and contemporary works, such as a book in the Cambridge series on "Philosophy and Public Health" titled "*Quality of Life and Human Difference: Genetic Testing, Health Care, and Disability*" (2005); the "*Encyclopedia of Disability*" by Sage Publishing (2006) in five volumes; the "*Oxford Handbook of Philosophy*

and Disability” (2020); the “*Bloomsbury Guide to Philosophy and Disability*” (2024); and others. Additionally, there is a dedicated section on disability in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Wasserman and Sean, 2023). This indicates a growing body of knowledge driven by research in the emerging field of disability philosophy as a branch of analytical philosophy, highlighting the need to keep on pace with this momentum by increasing the studies on this important topic.

Since persons with disabilities are underrepresented in discussions concerning their own lives, such as health policy, quality of life assessment, and other areas (Bickenbach et al., 2009), resulting in difficulty recognizing that persons with disabilities can live lives as good as those of non-disabled people, both objectively and subjectively. The self-assessed well-being of persons with disabilities is often rated much lower than how they themselves evaluate it (Goering, 2008). Therefore, it was necessary to include the voices of female athletes with disabilities in the current study on sports and quality of life, as it is important to listen to their opinions and closely examine their experiences instead of relying on preconceived assumptions about their lives. They should define their own concept of disability through solidarity within the club community. A person with a disability has the freedom to express themselves through their interaction with others who share similar experiences, presenting a different concept of disability that may be either positive or at least neutral (Barnes, 2018).

Research Questions

The research revolves around three main questions:

- What is the role of sports in the lives of female athletes in disability clubs?
- What is the role of solidarity within the club community in supporting female athletes?
- What challenges do female athletes face in disability clubs?

Study Objective

The study hypothesizes that disability and sports are significant factors in the lives of female athletes with disabilities, shaping their identities and enhancing solidarity and close bonds among them within the community of disabled female athletes formed in disability clubs. These clubs bring together athletes with similar and somewhat different conditions, striving to achieve shared goals, including athletic excellence, individual achievements, and collective accomplishments in sports. Therefore, the study aims to highlight the importance of sports in achieving a quality life for female athletes in disability clubs in Saudi Arabia, to identify the role of collective solidarity formed within these clubs, and to monitor the challenges and obstacles faced by the athletes.

Previous Studies

In this section, we review a collection of studies related to the research topic in chronological order, followed by commentary, as no Saudi studies on the research topic—female athletes with disabilities in disability clubs in Saudi Arabia—were found in the Saudi Digital Library database at the time of conducting the research.

1. Barriers to and Facilitators of Sports Participation for People with Physical Disabilities : A Systematic Review (Jaarsma et al., 2014)

This documentary survey research aimed to understand the factors that hinder or encourage the participation of people with physical disabilities in sports activities, as low participation increases their risk of additional health problems. The study focused only on individuals with various types of physical disabilities, excluding cognitive or sensory disabilities, organ transplants, limb amputations, or spinal cord injuries. Regarding the research methodology, four research databases were reviewed up to April 2012, including articles on individuals with physical disabilities, sports, barriers, and/or facilitators. It was found that personal barriers include disability and health issues, while environmental barriers include lack of facilities, transportation, and accessibility difficulties. Personal facilitators include enjoyment in sports and health benefits, while environmental facilitators include social interaction. Additionally, barriers and facilitators are influenced by the individual's age, type of disability, and type of sport, which should be considered when providing advice on sports participation. The extent of participation increases when individuals choose sports that are most suitable for them, influenced by their age, type of disability, and type of sport.

2. Barriers to Sports Participation Among Visually Impaired Girls (‘Abd Allāh, 2015)

The study aimed to identify personal and environmental factors that hinder visually impaired girls from participating in sports. It adopted a descriptive survey method, selecting a random sample of 41 girls. The researcher used the “List of Barriers to Sports Participation Among Visually Impaired Girls” to collect data. The study concluded that the most significant barriers to sports participation for visually impaired girls are: fear of injury (personal factor), family fear for the girl of being injured (environmental factor), and a lack of information about available sports opportunities and locations (environmental factor). The study recommended that relevant authorities support visually impaired girls and provide sports activities that meet their needs in a safe environment.

3. Disability and Sports Achievement of Disabled Individuals: A Field Study in Baghdad (Hasan, 2018)

The research sought to understand the motivations behind the sports achievements of individuals with disabilities by studying the relationship between family support and their athletic accomplishments. It employed a social surveying approach, which included observation, interviews, and questionnaires, to study a purposive and random sample of 50 disabled individuals affiliated with Paralympic clubs in Baghdad, Iraq. The study found several motivations encouraging individuals with disabilities to engage in sports and achieve accomplishments, ranked by importance as follows: love for sports, desire to prove oneself and challenge feelings of inadequacy, receiving financial rewards, overcoming feelings of loneliness and boredom, representing their country in international forums, gaining fame and recognition, and entertainment and enjoyment. The study also found the biggest supporters and motivators of athletes to be family, followed by peers, followed by schools, etc. Some participants noted challenges in practicing sports due to the physical demands of the exercises, but they expressed happiness in overcoming these challenges. Key recommendations included providing health, financial, and moral support to individuals with disabilities by relevant authorities and preparing all necessary sports equipment and facilities for them.

4. Physical Activity Practices for Girls with Intellectual Disabilities in Saudi Arabia from Their Parents' Perspectives (Al-Qahtani, 2018)

The study highlighted the importance of involving girls with disabilities, especially those with intellectual disabilities, in physical activities due to their numerous health and psychological benefits. The study aimed to explore the relationship between engaging in physical activities and improving the health and developmental aspects of girls with disabilities aged between 2 and 16 years, from the perspective of their parents. A descriptive analytical method was utilized, collecting data through a questionnaire directed at the parents of these girls in Saudi Arabia. The study concluded that parents' attitudes were positive towards the participation of girls with disabilities in physical activities, emphasizing the importance of encouraging this participation and providing suitable opportunities for it.

5. Quality of Life Among Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities Practicing Recreational Sports Activities from Their Mothers' Perspective (Aşr, 2020).

The study aimed to measure the quality of life among individuals with intellectual disabilities who engage in recreational sports activities, from their mothers' perspective. The researcher employed the descriptive method (survey studies) and used a specific quality of life scale in a questionnaire dis-

tributed to a random sample of 156 mothers of individuals with intellectual disabilities enrolled in Egyptian charitable associations. The study indicated that the quality of life is an important indicator of the quality of services provided to individuals with intellectual disabilities and reflects their satisfaction and happiness with engaging in individual and group recreational sports activities. The study confirmed that practicing sports contributes to developing positive personal traits among individuals with intellectual disabilities, enhancing physical and psychological health, and improving the quality of life in various aspects. It noted that the topic of quality of life has not received sufficient attention in previous studies, especially regarding individuals with intellectual disabilities who practice sports activities. It emphasized the necessity of not neglecting this group and providing the necessary support and services to improve their quality of life.

6. Psychological Compatibility and Its Connection to Achievement Levels Among Sitting Volleyball Players (Al-Sayyid, 2020)

This research aimed to explore the relationship between psychological Compatibility and the level of athletic achievement among sitting volleyball players. Psychological Compatibility includes various aspects such as personal, emotional, and health, as well as adjustment to the sports system, teammates, family, and society. The research was conducted on a purposive sample of male sitting volleyball players from ten Egyptian sports clubs, totaling 84 players registered with the Paralympic Committee for the 2017/2018 sports season. The findings indicated a positive relationship between some aspects of psychological adjustment (such as personal adjustment and adjustment to the sports system) and the level of athletic achievement. However, no relationship was found between other aspects of psychological adjustment (such as emotional adjustment) and achievement levels. The researcher recommended the importance of measuring psychological adjustment among sitting volleyball players, providing psychological support to enable them to achieve optimal athletic performance, conducting psychological rehabilitation and training programs to cope with disabilities and the resulting psychological pressures, and encouraging media coverage of sports events involving individuals with disabilities. Additionally, further studies on sports for individuals with disabilities were suggested.

7. Mutual Social Trust and Its Relationship to Self-Perception Among Physically Disabled Individuals Practicing and Not Practicing Sports (Muhammad, 2022)

This study aimed to examine the nature of mutual social trust and self-perception among physically disabled individuals in Baghdad, particularly the differences between those who practice sports activities and those who do not. The researcher employed a descriptive approach and collected data on two scales:

one for social trust and another for self-perception. These were developed and applied to a sample of physically disabled individuals in Baghdad, totaling 124 participants, including 62 who practiced sports activities and 62 who did not. The study found that physically disabled individuals in Baghdad exhibited a good level of mutual social trust and self-perception. It also revealed differences between those who practiced sports activities and those who did not, with the former showing higher levels of social trust and self-perception. The study concluded that engaging in sports activities improves many positive psychological variables, including mutual social trust and self-perception.

8. The Role of Recreational Sports Activities in Enhancing Psychological Resilience Among Students with Disabilities at Minia University (‘Abd al-Ma‘nīm, 2023)

The study aimed to identify the role of recreational sports activities in enhancing psychological resilience among students with disabilities at Minia University in Egypt. To achieve this goal, the descriptive method (survey approach) was used, and a stratified random sample of 90 students with disabilities from Minia University was selected, in addition to an initial sample of 25 students. The researcher employed two tools for data collection: a questionnaire on the actual status of preferred recreational sports activities among students with disabilities, and a psychological resilience scale. The results showed that students with disabilities at the university preferred engaging in various sports activities such as walking, running, table tennis, karate, simple exercises, shot put, and discus throw. Moreover, participating in recreational sports activities contributed to improving psychological resilience among students with disabilities. However, there were no statistically significant differences in the psychological resilience scale based on gender (male or female) or type of disability (motor, auditory, visual). The study emphasized the importance of encouraging students with disabilities to participate in sports activities to enhance their psychological health and resilience.

9. Physical Activity and Its Relationship with Social Factors Among Students with Intellectual Disabilities in Inclusive Schools in Al-Baha Region (Al-Ghamdī & Šāliḥ, 2023)

This study was conducted to explore the physical activity habits of students with intellectual disabilities in inclusive schools in the Al-Baha region of Saudi Arabia. The descriptive and inferential methodology was employed, collecting data through a questionnaire that included 171 male and female students with mild intellectual disabilities across all educational stages, from elementary to high school. The data was then analyzed to examine the relationship between physical activity and social factors. The results showed that approximately half of the students (52.6%) adopt a healthy lifestyle regarding physical activ-

ity habits and related behaviors. A statistically significant relationship was found between physical activity and social factors, with the physical activity rate being higher among the age group (6–10 years) at 69.1%. Additionally, there was a connection between subjection to bullying and reluctance to engage in physical activity, at a rate of 65.5%. It was also found that 81.3% of families with more than one disabled member do not engage sufficiently in physical activity. The primary reasons for avoiding physical activity were the lack of equipped facilities, followed by lack of time, and then health reasons. The study concluded that it is necessary to raise the awareness of families of students with intellectual disabilities about the importance of physical activity, establish special programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities, create equipped facilities, and prepare specialized sports trainers.

Comment on Previous Studies

Most of the selected studies were local and Arab in scope, as the sports context is closely related to culture and society, with the exception being the study by (Jaarsma et al., 2014), which sheds light on the factors that hinder or encourage the participation of individuals with physical disabilities in sports activities in a Western context. It is also the only study among the previous ones that relied on documentary survey research, whereas the other studies employed the descriptive methodology and measured performance or indicators through questionnaires analyzed statistically. Regarding the type of disability focused on in the studies, they were diverse, including motor, visual, intellectual, or mixed disabilities. The studies also covered both recreational and competitive sports. As for the gender of the athletes, most were male athletes, except for the studies by Al-Qahtani (2018) and ‘Abd Allāh (2015), which focused on females, and ‘Abd al-Ma’nīm (2023), which addressed both genders. What distinguishes this study from previous ones is its use of a qualitative research approach that delves deeply into a phenomenon to understand all its dimensions. It specifically examines female athletes with motor disabilities who engage in various competitive sports, including athletics such as javelin and discus throwing, running, and boccia.

Geographical Scope of the Research

The research focuses on female athletes at one of the disability sports clubs in Saudi Arabia, making the geographical scope the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. According to statistics published by the Ministry of Sports on its website (2024) regarding “The total number of sports practitioners classified by type (able-bodied athletes – athletes with disabilities),” the number of “able-bodied athletes” was approximately 99,900, while the number of “athletes with disabilities and the deaf” was 4,208, representing about 4% of the total athletes. Looking at the statistics of “athletes with disabilities practicing sports by type

of game,” the number of female athletes was approximately 308, while the number of male athletes was 3,900, making the percentage of female athletes about 7%. Female athletes participated in 11 sports, while male athletes participated in double that number, 22 sports (see Table 1). The website does not provide statistics for comparisons with previous years regarding the number of able-bodied and disabled athletes. However, the aforementioned percentages indicate that some sports are highly popular among women with disabilities or may be more accessible to them. Overall, these statistics highlight the need to support disability sports to increase the number of athletes with disabilities and provide more diverse sports opportunities for disabled female athletes.

#	Game Name	Number of Female Athletes
1	Women’s Bowling for the Deaf	1
2	Women’s Badminton for the Disabled	4
3	Women’s Swimming for the Disabled	4
4	Women’s Judo for the Visually Impaired	4
5	Women’s Karate for the Disabled	4
6	Women’s Archery for the Disabled	6
7	Women’s Table Tennis for the Disabled	12
8	Women’s Weightlifting for the Disabled	14
9	Women’s Wheelchair Basketball	21
10	Women’s Boccia for the Disabled	31
11	Women’s Athletics for the Disabled	207
	Total Number of Female Athletes	308

Table 1: Female Athletes with Disabilities Practicing Sports by Type of Game

Source: Open Data, Ministry of Sports website

Theoretical Framework of the Research

Although people with disabilities have existed throughout history, philosophical attention to them and their circumstances only emerged recently. The lack of philosophical interest in disability may be attributed to the absence of a clear concept of it before the 19th century, when scientific thinking began cat-

egorizing differences in human functions and forms into natural and unnatural categories. With the emergence of political philosophy and social justice in the second half of the last century, disability was addressed as a primary source of deprivation, with solutions focused on medical correction or government compensation. Later, social philosophers began viewing disability as a source of collective identity and discrimination, similar to race or gender. Philosophers in the field of bioethics and other practical areas focused on helping policymakers build and interpret new legal and regulatory frameworks that address disability and related concepts (Wasserman and Sean, 2023). The 21st century has seen an increase in studies and books on the philosophy of disability in the Western world, a trend that has not yet been matched in the Arab research community, where studies on the philosophy of disability and related topics remain a rarity. Below, we review the main disability models and the model on which this study will be based.

Disability Models

Disability has been studied in sociology and medicine for a longer time than in philosophy. These fields do not provide a precise definition of disability as philosophers do, but rather focus on “models” of disability that attempt to identify the phenomena constituting disability and explain why individuals with disabilities face certain challenges. Consequently, there are various approaches to understanding “disability,” including the medical model, which emphasizes medical causes, and the social model, which focuses on social and environmental factors. However, these models face criticism for oversimplifying a complex phenomenon where biological and social aspects intertwine. Additionally, the concept of “disability” itself is influenced by social and cultural factors, complicating attempts to define and understand it (Wasserman and Sean, 2023).

Disability models vary. Medically, disability is viewed as a condition of deficiency or physical impairment resulting from illness or injury, as reflected in the Saudi Ministry of Health’s definition of disability: a complete or partial, permanent or long-term impairment in one of the physical, sensory, mental, communicative, educational, or psychological abilities, which prevents the individual from fulfilling the normal requirements of life independently, necessitating reliance on others or the use of special tools that require training or special rehabilitation for proper utilization.

From another perspective, inspired by Michel Foucault’s ideas on power, authority, and discourse, disability is shaped as a socio-cultural authoritative system represented by the marginalizing linguistic discourse about disabled individuals, negative perceptions of them, and their exclusion from society (Tremain, 2015, 2024). Meanwhile, the World Health Organization (2001) considers disability the result of a complex relationship between an individ-

ual's health condition, personal factors, and external factors that shape their living conditions. Another perspective posits that individuals with disabilities are not necessarily worse off due to their disabilities; this judgment is made by able-bodied individuals from their own perspective, not from that of the disabled person themselves (Goering, 2008).

Disability as Solidarity

American philosopher Elizabeth Barnes (Barnes, 2018) criticizes traditional models for their tendency to overgeneralize, classifying any deviation from normal functioning as a disability. She also critiques the social model of disability, which views disability as a direct result of social bias, arguing that these models overlook the real impact of physical differences. Instead, Barnes proposes a modified social construction model of disability, where disability is defined through solidarity among individuals with diverse physical disabilities. These individuals recognize the similarities in their experiences with their bodies, how they are stigmatized and treated due to these physical differences, and how these differences create challenges in their daily lives. Barnes emphasizes that disability arises from this solidarity, stemming from the application of social judgments to the objective realities of their bodies. This perspective on disability challenges traditional concepts and calls for a reevaluation of the relationship between disability and well-being. By understanding disability as a social construct, we can begin dismantling the social barriers that contribute to the marginalization of individuals with disabilities and work toward a more equitable and inclusive society for all. In her view, disability may be a positive neutrality, built on solidarity among individuals with similar physical conditions and shared experiences, who find common ground that helps them understand themselves and others, support one another, and strive to achieve their goals (Barnes, 2018).

Research Terminology

This section outlines three key terms central to the research: competitive sports, disability as solidarity, and features of solidarity.

- **Competitive Sports**

The term "sports" used in this research does not refer to sports for recreation or leisure but rather "competitive sports." This type of sports aims to enhance the fitness and physical efficiency of players and also involves competing with others in a specific sport. Competitive sports rely on practical training, development of skills and tools, and sports medicine. Adherence to rules and regulations governing performance during play is essential, as is compliance with technical and medical classifications based on the physical, psychological, and neurological fitness levels, or the degree of impairment of the disabled individual before participating in competitive activities. This ensures the principle

of fairness, maximizes the benefits of participation, and avoids any medical complications that could affect the life of the disabled person (Rashīd, 2023).

Despite the problematic nature of terms such as “disability” and related expressions like “disabled” and “persons with disabilities,” I will use them in the context of this research for two reasons. First, they remain the terminology used in scientific research. Second, the research pertains to athletes classified as disabled. Despite the constraints imposed by both the scope of scientific research and the field of sports, I will attempt to use terms like “athletes,” “sportswomen,” and “participants” in some contexts of the study whenever possible. This aims to establish a different type of discourse, which continues to be debated question in the circles of academic, philosophical, and disability studies: what is the appropriate term for the disabled community? The issue becomes even more conspicuous when discussing sportswomen who have achieved accomplishments in sports that some of their peers, referred to as able-bodied or non-disabled, may never achieve.

• Disability as Solidarity

The disability-as-solidarity model proposed by Elizabeth Barnes (Barnes, 2018) serves as an alternative to the medical model, which views disability as a condition of impairment and illness, or the social model, which focuses on the marginalizing social, political, and cultural framework of the minority group of disabled individuals (Tremain, 2015, 2024). In her book “The Minority Body,” Barnes introduces the concept of disability as solidarity, arguing that the disability rights movement has created the social category of disability through collective solidarity. The disability rights movement represents a diverse group of individuals with various physical conditions who have come together to promote justice and equality for people with disabilities. They have done so by raising awareness about the challenges faced by disabled individuals, advocating for legislation to protect their rights, and fostering a positive culture around disability that celebrates it as a form of diversity. Barnes argues that the disability rights movement has succeeded in changing society’s perception of disability. In the past, disability was often seen as a personal tragedy, a medical issue, or social marginalization. However, the disability rights movement has helped redefine disability as a social and political issue. Barnes’ concept of disability as solidarity suggests that disability is not something defined by individual limitations but rather by a shared commitment to social justice and equality. The disability model underpinning this research is what Barnes calls “disability as solidarity.”

• Features of Solidarity

The current study adopts a philosophical approach to solidarity, drawing on Elizabeth Barnes’ perspective, which she uses to support her solidarity-based model of disability. This approach is influenced by the ideas of American phi-

philosopher Tommie Shelby in his book “We Who Are Dark” (Shelby, 2005), where he analyzes the concept of solidarity within the Black Rights Movement. Shelby identifies five central features of collective solidarity: (1) identification with the group, reflected in members’ tendency to identify with one another and with the group as a collective; (2) mutual care, including offering help and comfort to those who are recognized as part of the group; (3) shared values and goals, whether vague ideals, specific policies, practical principles, broad social programs, political ideologies, or utopian social visions; (4) loyalty and commitment to the group’s values, along with a willingness to make extra efforts to support the group’s interests; and (5) mutual trust among members, characterized by the belief that others will not let them down, betray their trust, or take advantage of them.

Research Methodology

The study employed a qualitative methodology, which aligns with its goal of exploring, understanding, and analyzing the importance of sports and the role of solidarity within the club community in supporting female athletes with disabilities and the challenges they face. Data was collected using interviews, a key tool in qualitative research (Creswell, 2009). It is worth noting that interviews are conducted in a way that aligns with the researcher’s philosophical stance regarding their worldview (ontology) and knowledge perspective (epistemology) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). A positivist researcher asks well-structured questions, assumes a neutral role to avoid bias, and generates data leading to valid conclusions. In contrast, a constructivist assumes that they and the interviewee jointly construct the data, working together to understand the research topic. However, the researcher’s perspective aligns with the phenomenological approach, where the aim of the interview is to obtain descriptions of the world as experienced by the participant, focusing on the meaning of the described phenomena (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). The interview seeks to uncover both the internal aspect—the phenomenon under study—and the external aspect, which includes the cultural frameworks of the social worlds of the interviewees (Miller and Glassner, 2004).

Types of interviews vary, and the semi-structured interview was chosen for this study. This common qualitative research method allows the researcher to gather more detailed information by exploring the perspectives, perceptions, actions, and motivations of the participants regarding a specific phenomenon. It also enables the formation of diverse viewpoints on the same phenomenon, known as “multivocality,” by capturing the participants’ narratives in their own words and expressions. This reflects the distinctive characteristics of qualitative research, which facilitates the exploration of the “emic perspective,” or the internal view of the phenomenon (Hennink et al., 2011).

The researcher prepared a set of questions for use in the semi-structured

interviews. These began with specific questions about the participant, such as name, age, educational background, marital status, employment (if applicable), type and cause of disability, year of joining the club, and the sports they participate in. The second section consisted of open-ended questions about the importance of sports in their lives, the role of solidarity within the club community, the challenges they face, and suggestions for improving their performance and the club. This type of interview is characterized by its flexibility, allowing for the possibility of additional questions based on participants' responses to gain deeper insights into the phenomenon and, if needed, dive extensively into certain aspects during the interview (Gray, 2014).

To analyze the interviews, the researcher used qualitative content analysis as the primary method for analyzing qualitative data. This involves systematically and objectively identifying specific characteristics within the data. The analysis process includes dividing the data into smaller units to uncover its distinctive elements and structures. Descriptions form the basis of the analysis, which then moves beyond description to interpretation, understanding, and explanation (Gray, 2014). The qualitative research methodology based on content analysis is a structured approach to analyzing interview content, aiming to identify patterns, themes, and meanings within the data, and subsequently draw conclusions to answer the research questions.

Study Participants

Four female athletes with different disabilities and their coach from a disability club in Saudi Arabia participated in the study. The researcher selected the participants using the sequential purposive sampling method (snowball sampling). In this method, the researcher identifies a small number of individuals, who in turn refer others from the community under study (Gray, 2014). This method was suitable because the researcher was not previously familiar with the study community, which is the disability club. She needed to build a positive interaction and relationship with one of its members, "Amal," an athlete from within this community, to pave the way for her entry and close acquaintance with it. The researcher communicated with Amal several times via WhatsApp, creating an atmosphere of familiarity and warmth. Through these interactions, the researcher began to form an idea about the study community. Subsequently, Amal introduced her to the athlete "Ruaa" and the athlete "Reem," and Reem introduced the researcher to her friend, the athlete Hanan, until the sample of athletes became saturated in terms of fulfilling the purposes of the qualitative study. To complete the picture of the study community, the researcher conducted a fifth interview with Mona, the coach at the club.

The athletes were contacted to obtain their consent for the interview procedures via WhatsApp, and a copy of the proposed questions was sent before

the interview and its arrangement. The researcher conducted interviews with the participants and recorded them on the Zoom platform. Additionally, there was a conversation with the first athlete on WhatsApp to gain a better understanding of the study community. During the research, the researcher decided to conduct an interview with the athletes' coach to gain insight into the study community from another perspective. This enriched the study, adding depth to the research, and the diversity of perspectives gave it greater credibility due to the variety of voices.

Coach Mona, who holds a bachelor's degree in special education and volunteers at the club, explained that the disability club was established in 2020 with a small number of no more than five athletes. Currently, it includes 20 athletes: 7 athletes with visual impairments, 3 athletes with paralysis, 6 athletes with physical disabilities, and 4 athletes with Down syndrome. The duration of membership varies from one to another, with some having joined only two months ago, while the longest duration being four years, since the club's establishment. As for the sports they practice, there's track running (100m/200m/400m), as well as athletics: such as discus throw, shot put, javelin throw, club throw, and boccia. The club had participated in four championships at the national level up to the time of the study. Table 2 provides some information about the athletes participating in the study: Amal, Ruaa, Reem, and Hanan, their types of disabilities, and their dates of joining the club. The interviews with them were conducted between September 12 and 25, 2024, while the interview with Coach Mona was conducted on October 4, 2024. Each interview lasted between 45 and 95 minutes. The researcher replaced the real names to ensure the participants' privacy and concealed other information that could identify them.

	Amal	Ruaa	Reem	Hanan
Age	24 years old	30 years old	Over 30 years old*	27 years old
Marital Status	Single	Married with children	Single	Single
Educational Level	Bachelor's degree	Middle school	Middle school	Vocational secondary school
Type of Disability (Medical Diagnosis)	Upper limb paralysis since birth	Lower body paralysis due to a car accident at around 27 years old	Lower body paralysis due to a car collision at 8 years old	Spinal cord and optic nerve inflammation at 16 years old
Year of Joining the Club	February 2024	Early 2024	2022	2022
Sports Practiced	Running, javelin throw, discus throw	Various exercises	Boccia	Shot put, javelin throw, discus throw
Athletic Achievement	Two gold medals and two silver medals in 2024	Did not participate in competitions	One gold medal in 2024	One bronze medal in 2023
Interview Date	September 15, 2024	September 12, 2024	September 14, 2024	September 15, 2024

* Did not wish to specify her exact age.

Table 2: Information about the athletes participating in the study

Results of Qualitative Analysis

The analysis revealed numerous and diverse themes, most of which were related to the sports domain, which aligned with the research objectives. These included the importance of sports, the role of solidarity within the club community, obstacles and challenges, and some themes that extended beyond the direct sports context, such as the impact of disability on the athlete's life, societal support and opportunities, as well as the challenges faced in adapting to these circumstances. The theme of Disability as a Positive Neutrality was also highlighted, alongside the theme of Women's Empowerment in Public Life and Sports, reflecting the societal transformations regarding women. Sports,

in its broader sense, is not limited to gameplay, training, and competitions but is considered a complex social and cultural phenomenon that influences, and is influenced by various aspects of life (Khouli, 1996). Below, we will shed light on the results of the analysis across the following axes: disability as positive neutrality, the importance of sports, the role of solidarity, women's empowerment, and the challenges faced by female athletes.

Disability as Positive Neutrality

The athletes participating in the study notably presented a positive perspective on disability, countering the common negative view of disability as weakness and incapacity. This reinforces the concept of disability as positive neutrality proposed by Barnes (2018). The athletes highlighted their ability to overcome challenges and achieve excellence and success not only in sports but also in other fields, leading fulfilling lives packed with diverse and enriching experiences, sometimes surpassing those of others. Below are some of the achievements shared by the athletes during the interviews.

Athlete Hanan introduced herself as an activist for the rights of people with disabilities, advocating for the city municipality to make public spaces accessible for individuals with disabilities. She identified three key needs: ramps, suitable, comfortable seating for people with disabilities, and accessible restrooms. Hanan also has multiple hobbies; she became a visual artist after acquiring her disability at the age of sixteen, using art to express her feelings following harsh criticism related to her disability. She continued drawing and painting until she excelled, participating in local and international exhibitions, giving television interviews, and receiving media praise for her achievements. Hanan also obtained a helicopter pilot license, contributed to a volunteer campaign during the COVID-19 pandemic, and currently volunteers in an art therapy program, teaching drawing to children with disabilities. She is also writing a book about her life before and after her disability, detailing how she overcame feelings of weakness and despair. In sports, she won a bronze medal in javelin throwing and aspires to join the Saudi national team and compete in international championships. Hanan emphasizes that she would not have accomplished any of these achievements if not for the disability she acquired at age 16.

Athlete Amal obtained a patent at the age of 17 for an assistive device for individuals with upper limb injuries. While studying software engineering at university, she developed an idea for smart speed bumps and participated in local and regional specialized conferences. Amal describes her ambitions as limitless, aiming to continue her innovations, excel in horseback riding, and pursue a master's degree in political science. In sports, she seeks to enhance her javelin-throwing performance, practice running, break records, as well as qualify for global Paralympic competitions.

Athlete Reem describes herself as possessing six skills: design, photography, designing Snapchat lenses, crafting incense burners, creating coffee blends, and selling them either online or at local exhibitions. On the sports front, she won a gold medal in a competition. Meanwhile, athlete Ruaa, as a wife and mother of six children, considers her achievement to be caring for her family despite the challenges of being wheelchair-bound. She has not participated in any matches yet, as she joined the club only four months ago, focusing on strengthening her muscles to aid her mobility. These are examples of outstanding female athletes in both their personal and sporting lives. Such inspiring figures challenge dominant stereotypes that women with disabilities are less capable or skilled than others. Consequently, it can be concluded that disability can represent positive neutrality rather than merely negative neutrality (Barnes, 2018).

1. The Importance of Sports

Engaging in competitive sports at the club proved to be a significant factor in the participants' lives across psychological, physical, social, and financial levels. Psychologically, it boosted their self-confidence and morale through training, acquiring sports skills, and developing physical abilities. Socially, it provided them with opportunities to meet others with similar needs and goals in a supportive and competitive environment. Financially, their travel expenses, either alone or with a companion, were covered, and winners in competitions received monetary rewards as encouragement.

Athlete Ruaa explained the psychological impact of sports on her: "I always return in a good mood, happy, and, as you might say, my energy changes... It provides support in terms of body strength and energy. Even the environment changes; you're not always in one place... at home all the time, which can make a person feel tired and even hate their life."

Similarly, Amal elaborated on the psychological and physical benefits of sports during a WhatsApp conversation (verbatim text):

- **Amal:** In general, I used to face difficulties with sports before joining the club for people with disabilities, because I would train incorrectly and didn't know the exercises suitable for me. The trainers weren't familiar with my needs, or able to determine what was best for me, so I didn't have the desire or love for exercising until I joined the club... Under the supervision of specialists and qualified trainers, I came to enjoy sports, trained correctly, and found both psychological and physical benefits.
- **Researcher:** What do you mean by psychological benefits?
- **Researcher:** And also the physical benefits?
- **Amal:** The physical and psychological benefits are clear. When you train in a place that is not equipped or specialized, you get negative results, which worsen your psychological state because you exert effort without positive outcomes. The physical benefits emerge when you perform exercises correctly.

The coach, Mona, also emphasizes the role of sports in the lives of the club's members through her experience with them, using the phrase "Sports is life" to explain that it provides a sense of independence and enhances self-confidence:

"For me, based on what I've seen with the cases I have, I always tell them sports is life, it's life. Even you may have noticed how your abilities have changed. How your reliance on yourself has improved. Before, you used to say, 'Bring this for me, do that for me,' but now you go and do it yourself. This in itself gives you independence, a different feeling of self-reliance. Your confidence becomes better. So, I always console them, saying that sports is life—it transforms you. You might enter as one person and come out as completely different person."

The coach also notes improvements in the physical abilities of the trainees: "I've noticed that the girls have changed, mashallah, their physical flexibility and abilities have improved." On the other hand, player Hanan points out how her relationship with her friend and fellow player Reem has strengthened through practicing sports together at the club and supporting one another: "Sports have become an essential part of our lives. Every step we take, we encourage each other to continue. We don't even think about stepping back. No. Every time we move forward and one of us wins, she motivates the other to keep going and earn medals, just like Reem did. And the same goes for Reem—if she sees me winning, she gets excited and continues."

The coach also highlights how competitive sports lead to positive changes in women's personalities: "Yes, there is a change in her personality, a change in her way of thinking. At first, it was like, 'I have no role, I can't do anything,

I'm incapable.' But thank God, now there's an opportunity. Even when she earns a medal and receives a reward, she says, 'You know, today I took my family out for dinner.' She has become involved, even with her family. She was able to treat them from her personal earnings. She was able to change something in the house, for example, from her personal income. She says, 'I contributed to paying for something, or I did this.' They became proud of themselves, of their achievements."

Thus, the players highlighted the various psychological, physical, and social benefits of competitive sports and how they can play a pivotal role in improving the quality of life for women with disabilities.

2. The Role of Social Solidarity in the Disability Club

The community of the Disability Club, which includes players, coaches, and club management, played an important role in supporting the players from the moment they joined, during preparation and training, and throughout participating in sports competitions across the kingdom. The interviews revealed several themes that reflect the strong spirit of solidarity within the sports club community as a whole. Some of these themes correspond to the five characteristics of social solidarity identified by Shelby (Shelby, 2005), which are: identification with the group; mutual care and offering help and support; shared values and goals; loyalty and commitment to the group's values; and mutual trust among members. The analysis showed an overlap between these characteristics, making it difficult to separate them distinctly. Participants mentioned several situations that reflected more than one characteristic at the same time. Therefore, the following section will address solidarity in general without isolating one specific characteristic.

The role of solidarity in the club is evident in various aspects, starting with recruiting players to join the club, then supporting them during the training phase, which includes exploring their abilities and preparing them for competitions. On the other hand, it also includes offering help and support from coaches and players to one another in personal, athletic, and other areas, as well as sharing diverse life experiences and knowledge.

The players joined the club either upon the request of one of the club's players or through the two main coaches at the club: a volunteer coach with a bachelor's degree in special education and a coach who was a former athlete but became wheelchair-bound after a car accident and now works as a sports coach at the club, along with a volunteer who occasionally assists the coach. Initially, the players joined the club either to break their routine, out of mere curiosity to explore the club's environment, or to engage in regular sports activities to strengthen their muscles. Later, they became seriously involved in training for one or more sports after receiving encouragement from their coaches.

Player Amal spoke about her experience of joining the club and the significant change it brought to her life during a WhatsApp conversation:

- **Amal:** We were at a café, and there I met a girl with a disability. She took my number and sent it to Coach “Mona,” who contacted me and invited me to the club. I was hesitant and didn’t know anything about them, so I decided to go just to explore. As soon as I entered, they greeted me warmly and said, ‘Come on, put down your bag and cloak and warm up with us for the exercises.’ 😊
- **Amal:** From then on, I started training with them naturally. I used to do javelin and discus throwing, and I was focused on them and was going to participate in competitions for those. But then I casually told Coach “Munir” that I like running, and he said, ‘Let’s try it.’ We went to the track, and he started counting my time in seconds. He discovered that I was achieving record times in running, better than in javelin and discus. So, three weeks before the competition, he canceled my participation in javelin and discus and registered me for the 400-meter and 100-meter races.

And just as the coach supported the player Amal, there was an initiative by the female coach who invited a famous player with a disability at the national level to come to the club to encourage the players and boost their morale. It is noteworthy that when she spoke about this initiative, she referred to the players as “my daughters,” which indicates a sense of intimacy in the relationship between her and the players. She said: “I brought her for my daughters at the club... I made her motivate them more. She talked about how she was worried at first, wondering how she, as a girl, could be alone. But thank God, this idea spread, and it’s a good thing. Yes, she became a national team player. Yes, with training and so on, she became a national team player, thank God. This is something we aspire to for our players as well—to improve their performance. If your performance and work improve, you might not only be with the club; you could go on to represent the national team. Yes. This gives them more motivation.”

Solidarity is also evident in the players’ sense of belonging to the club, which was apparent in interviews where some used terms like “family” and “home” to describe the club and “sisters” to refer to their teammates, expressing the atmosphere of warmth and affection that prevails in the club’s environment. Amal said: “It really felt like my second family. The girls’ relationships with each other were truly beautiful. Those younger than me felt like my younger sisters, and those older than me felt like my older sisters.” She also referred to sharing experiences, saying that as a university student, she provided advice and guidance to others: “The other girls... they contacted me recently because

they just got accepted into university, asking who could guide them, where to go, and whether there were services available for them.”

Player Hanan also mentioned the sharing of experiences among the players and their support for one another in various fields: “I gained confidence from them. I gained a large group of girls. I love being with them. Just as I gained from them, I gave to them. Just as they made me love the club, I made them love drawing, volunteering, and the things I now love. I encouraged them to have the courage to speak in press interviews and on television.”

What strengthens the bonds of affection and love and enhances the spirit of belonging to the sports club community is the celebration of social and personal occasions such as graduations and birthdays, along with organizing some games and competitions.

Hanan enthusiastically expressed her sense of belonging and loyalty to the club by representing her region with the following statement: “Definitely, definitely, there is belonging. The biggest proof is that I am representing my region in all areas. Yes, this reflects belonging and loyalty. Of course, when you present something, you do so with love and pride, knowing that you are proud of yourself just as your region is proud of you, and you are raising the region’s name high.”

The coach mentioned that sports enhanced cooperation among the players: “They started guiding each other. For example, when a visually impaired player couldn’t place the weight, a player with a physical disability would come to help her.”

Amal also explained during a WhatsApp conversation the coach’s support for her during training and in a national-level competition:

- **Amal:** The coach played a big role. Before the training sessions, he would encourage us and be honest, like, he’d tell us, ‘Your performance is excellent, but you need a little improvement.’
- **Amal:** He would tell me, ‘You will come back with a gold medal; I am confident in you,’ and he instilled incredible confidence in me.
- **Amal:** While I was competing in the 400-meter race, I was ahead, and behind me was a girl with a guide running alongside her. He was her coach, a big, strong man. I got scared because they were closing in on me, and I could hear him encouraging her as he ran with her. Suddenly, the coach’s voice from the other end of the track interrupted my thoughts, shouting my name and saying, ‘Faster, Amal, faster!’ At that moment, I remembered his encouragement and kept running until I took first place, with only a one-second difference between me and the second place.”

The concept of identification among the players emerged as a feature of solidarity, manifested in the resemblance and similarity among the players with disabilities who joined the club, as they all share some form of disability. Amal mentioned how joining the club influenced her perception of herself. Born with atrophy in one of her arms, which caused her to lose its function, she had adapted from a young age with the support of her family, who helped meet all her needs. Therefore, the club experience was different for her; she did not consider herself disabled and had not previously interacted with others with disabilities. She wrote the following during a WhatsApp conversation (quoted verbatim):

- **Amal:** When I joined them, to be honest, I had never mingled with a community of people with disabilities, and I didn't see myself as one of them. So, I wasn't keen on admitting to myself or publicly that I was one of them. But once I joined, it was a very comforting feeling. I felt I had found myself in that place, as if they were my second family. Talking to them and sharing experiences and events that happened gave me the feeling that I wasn't alone. We are all together.
- **Researcher:** Could you clarify this part: 'I didn't see myself as one of them. So, I wasn't keen on admitting to myself or publicly that I was one of them'?
- **Amal:** My entire life, I lived among my family, relatives, and an environment where I didn't see anyone with disabilities. I didn't even see myself as one of them. I considered myself just like my siblings—normal. The people around me always told me, 'You're normal; there's nothing wrong with you compared to others,' etc. So, going to a place full of people with disabilities made me admit to myself that I was one of them, in front of them, myself, and my circles."

In the interview, player Amal delved deeper into expressing the transformation she experienced and her perspective on herself after joining the community of women with disabilities at the club. She used the term "reflection" and repeated it multiple times to describe how the community of women with disabilities mirrors and resembles her, and the effect that had on her sense of comfort within the club community. She explained: "I honestly feel my reflection. Yes, my reflection, I mean, very, very, very much. I feel comfortable in it. I feel like I'm in a place where I don't have to, for example, worry about looks or worry about, for example, someone being curious about me. No, I feel, we're all here, we're all equal, we've all gone through the same experiences. So, really, really, I mean, it was very comforting for me."

On another note, participants Hanan and Ruaa explained that new members joining the sports community need some time to integrate with the rest of the members. Hanan clarified: “There are two new entrants with us. We, who were here before, were very close to each other, so the new ones who joined, we still haven’t interacted with them much yet.”

Finally, the sports community extended from the real, physical world setting of the club and its environment to the virtual world. In the WhatsApp group that includes the trainees and their coaches, the players mentioned that official information related to training times and other matters is exchanged. Meanwhile, in the Snapchat group, they share, comment, and interact on sports and personal events, exchanging conversations and humorous jokes, which contributes to creating camaraderie and intimacy among the players.

3. Empowering Saudi Women

The theme of women’s empowerment emerged through the research. It was not initially among the study’s objectives. However, since the players are women, and given the recent significant changes in women’s cultural, social, economic, and legislative status, this was reflected in the dialogue with them. From the perspective of the female athletes, significant changes have occurred in women’s status and role in society since Vision 2030, providing them with opportunities to participate in various fields, including sports. This has led to increased women’s participation in sports and competition in sports tournaments. A few years ago, sports for women were not possible due to various social conditions, but now it has become accessible in sports clubs and other venues. The role of female athletes in clubs for people with disabilities has also begun to be an active one, as seen in the club joined by the study participants.

This positive change in society regarding women and the encouragement of their participation in sports was noticeable. Women have begun to gain more opportunities to participate in sports activities, contributing to the integration of this group into society. Participant Reem explained: “Now there’s greater attention to women in sports, and we now have tournaments specifically for women.” She felt that society has become more accepting of women practicing sports: “People are encouraging us and considering us part of the sports community.” This was especially evident when the female athletes at the club achieved significant success and won numerous medals at the national level.

As for Hanan, one of the club’s early members, she was nominated to join the club by the club coach, who reached out to her around the time she got disabled, reflecting the level of attention given to women’s sports. Hanan observed how society has begun to support women in sports, as more girls have joined the club, reflecting increased awareness of the importance of sports for women: “Now, there are more than thirteen girls in the club, rep-

resenting various disabilities.” Sports coach Mona noted the transformations in women’s status from a broader perspective, mentioning that Vision 2030 has “opened many horizons for girls.” It has changed the traditional view of sports: “I mean, before, sports were exclusively for boys, but now it’s normal for women in many fields.” The coach also mentioned that Vision 2030 has contributed to the emergence of new names in women’s sports, reflecting the progress made in this field: “There are now many prominent names... like Maryam Al-Muraisel from the disabled community, Sarah Al-Jumah, who has represented Saudi Arabia in multiple occasions.”

4. Challenges Faced by Female Athletes in the Club for People with Disabilities

The interviews highlighted social barriers, including the environment in which the players live and move outside the club. These include the lack of adequate facilities in public spaces for people with disabilities, such as ramps, comfortable seating, and accessible restrooms, particularly in restaurants and cafes, as well as the societal view that still tends to be discriminatory and condescending toward people with disabilities. The players also identified a range of challenges they face in the sports field, including the lack of suitable transportation for women with disabilities to easily access the club, the lack of female trainers specialized in training women with disabilities—given the privacy considerations of female players, who prefer female trainers over male ones—and the limited availability of competitive individual and team sports for women with disabilities at the club. Additionally, the limited time allocated for women with disabilities was noted, as the club assigns different times for female and male players to use the same sports facilities, allowing only two hours for female players on two different days of the week. This time increases before competitions. Finally, they requested the provision of medical and sports supplies for women with disabilities. One participant mentioned that she needs a catheter with specific features to remain inconspicuous, enabling her to move and play sports effectively and without embarrassment.

Study Results

The study aimed to explore the importance of sports in the lives of female athletes with disabilities and the role of solidarity in supporting them, characterized by five attributes: (1) identification with the group; (2) mutual care, assistance, and consolation; (3) shared values and goals; (4) loyalty and commitment to group values; and (5) mutual trust among members. The study highlighted the significance of sports for female athletes on psychological, physical, and social levels. It also revealed that solidarity with its five attributes was clearly evident through the voices of the participating athletes. Generally, it can be concluded that two factors formed the cornerstone of the

cohesion within the community of the disability club and enhanced solidarity: sports and disability, which worked to strengthen the bond among the athletes, enabling them to share knowledge, life experiences, and sports expertise. Additionally, the findings showed that women's empowerment under Vision 2030 played a role in creating a socially supportive environment for accepting women's participation in sports and celebrating their achievements. Finally, it was evident that disability is not necessarily a negative deviation from normality but can be a positive neutral factor that motivates women to achieve in personal and athletic domains. Although the study focused on sports, its findings can be generalized to educational, cultural, recreational, and occupational fields to support recreational or competitive sports activities in these areas, enhancing the well-being and quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

Study Recommendations

The study recommends conducting further research in the field of sports for individuals with disabilities through qualitative studies to understand their situation, identify their needs, and consider their perspectives during the planning and implementation of any sports activities or projects related to them. It also suggests opening specialized fields at the university level for physical education and sports training studies for women, as these disciplines remain limited, insufficient, or restricted to men in some Saudi universities. Lastly, the study emphasizes the importance of providing financial, moral, and social support from governmental and private institutions for sports activities for individuals with disabilities in sports clubs, schools, universities, and other educational, cultural, and social institutions. This support would have a positive impact by enhancing the well-being, improving the quality of life, and increasing opportunities for integrating individuals with disabilities into society.

Conclusion

The research examined the importance of competitive sports and the role of solidarity for female athletes affiliated with a disability club in Saudi Arabia, as well as the challenges they face. It included athletes with physical disabilities practicing various sports such as athletics (javelin throw, discus throw, running) and boccia. The study employed a qualitative methodology through interviews conducted with four athletes from the club and their coach, followed by data analysis using quantitative methods.

The study concluded that competitive sports are essential for athletes in terms of psychological, physical, and social aspects. The club community provided the athletes with a positive and comfortable training environment. Solidarity within the club community among the athletes themselves and between the athletes and their coaches played a significant role in motivating them to exert more effort and achieve accomplishments in sports. It also offered

support in other life aspects, such as sharing knowledge, experiences, and life lessons. The findings revealed that disability could serve as a positive neutral factor through the achievements made by the athletes in their personal and athletic lives. Furthermore, the empowerment of Saudi women in society, following the significant transformations under Vision 2030, contributed to their empowerment and support in sports.

The study identified several challenges faced by the athletes, including the lack of specialized female sports coaches, insufficient transportation options suitable for individuals with disabilities, limited diversity in sports offered by clubs for individuals with disabilities, inadequate training time, and the need to provide specific medical requirements for certain types of disabilities. The study also recommended conducting more scientific research in the field of sports for individuals with disabilities, given its current scarcity, especially concerning disability clubs, as well as listening to the perspectives of individuals with disabilities when planning and implementing sports-related initiatives. Additionally, it called for increasing women's specializations in physical education and sports training at Saudi universities and providing financial, moral, and social support from governmental and private institutions for disability clubs. Expanding disability clubs to include schools, universities, and other institutions would enhance the well-being, improve the quality of life, and facilitate the integration of individuals with disabilities into society.

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Philosophy of Mind and Quality of Life

Nada Sayed Mohammad Othman

Cairo University, Egypt

Abstract

This paper presents an analytical and critical perspective to understand the relationship between the philosophy of mind and quality of life, shedding light on the role of mental and philosophical concepts in enhancing human life quality. The study analyzes three fundamental concepts: first, consciousness as one of the most mysterious phenomena in the universe, especially in light of the development of artificial intelligence; second, free will and its role in shaping moral responsibility and the human perception of their place in the world; and finally, personal identity as the foundation of an individual's self-conception and continuity over time. This is followed by a critical review and commentary on each of these concepts. Through this approach, the study seeks to demonstrate that the philosophy of mind represents a rich intellectual field capable of contributing to improving our quality of life.

Keywords: Free Will, Artificial Intelligence, Moral Responsibility, Consciousness, Personal Identity, Quality of Life, Philosophy of Mind.

Introduction

The human mind is considered one of the primary subjects that garner widespread attention in academic and scientific circles, as it has become a fundamental issue that researchers study and critique across various fields, including philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, artificial intelligence, and cognitive science⁽¹⁾.

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1. Cognitive sciences emerged in the 1970s as a scientific study of the mind and mental phenomena. This field incorporates contributions from psychology, linguistics, philosophy, artificial intelligence, and anthropology. It aims to explain the idea that cognition can result from information processing or computation. Many researchers in this field view themselves as rebels against the behaviorism that dominated the previous era, which argued that mental states could be fully explained in terms of behavior or behavioral dispositions. According to this self-perception, cognitive scientists show greater enthusiasm than behaviorists in explaining intelligent behavior through reference to mental representation. Among other topics of interest to cognitive scientists are perception, cognition, memory, and concepts.

In the context of philosophy, despite the deep historical roots of philosophical thought on the issue of the mind, the philosophy of mind as an independent field of study did not take clear shape until the second half of the 20th century. The beginning of contemporary philosophy of mind can be marked by the publication of Gilbert Ryle's (1900–1976) book *"The Concept of Mind"* in 1949, and Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1889–1951) book *"Philosophical Investigations"* in 1953 (Ismail, 2015, p.15).

The philosophy of mind is a branch of philosophy concerned with philosophical issues related to the mind and mental states. Its topics can be categorized into three main groups. The first group relates to the nature of the mind and its relationship to the brain, known as the mind-body problem, in addition to studying mental states. The second group focuses on issues such as consciousness, intentionality, and artificial intelligence. The third group addresses personal identity and free will (Ismail, 2024). These topics raise numerous significant questions in the major branches of philosophy: metaphysics, ethics, and epistemology. Thus, the philosophy of mind plays a pivotal role in our understanding of reality, our place within it, and the ethical state of existence, while also providing us with tools to achieve this understanding (Mandik, 2010).

Since the concept of quality of life is associated with the level of well-being, satisfaction, or happiness an individual experiences in their life and is considered a fundamental concept in evaluating human experiences and societies (Bunnin, Yu, 2009), the philosophy of mind, with its concerns and questions, plays a central role in shaping and understanding it.

The importance of this research lies in its quest to answer fundamental questions related to the impact of mental aspects and philosophical concepts on human experience and quality of life. It aims to highlight the central importance of the philosophy of mind in providing intellectual insights that contribute to clarifying the theoretical frameworks through which human life quality can be enhanced by investigating the contributions of concepts like consciousness, free will, and personal identity.

Therefore, through the following sections of this research, we will:

- First: Delve deeply into the concept of consciousness as one of the most enigmatic phenomena in the universe, especially in light of rapid technological advancements and innovations in artificial intelligence. These developments raise new questions about the nature of consciousness and the possibility of its replication in machines, necessitating a reevaluation of the role of consciousness in shaping human experience and its impact on quality of life.
- Second: Address the concept of free will, which is linked to issues of moral responsibility. The question of free will is a question about human con-

sciousness and the human mind, and what follows from it in understanding oneself and one's place in the world.

- Third: Explore the concept of personal identity, which constitutes a fundamental element in an individual's self-conception, such as: Who am I? When did I begin to exist? What will happen to me after death? These profound questions raise issues related to continuity and change in identity over time.

1. Consciousness and Human Quality of Life: Between Human Experience and the Challenges of Artificial Intelligence

Consciousness refers to various forms of subjective experience, such as sensation, emotion, thought, memory, and self-awareness, and it has been a subject of philosophical contemplation for thousands of years. However, philosophers face numerous challenges in explaining its nature and interpreting it. Descartes (1596–1650) believed that consciousness is the essence of the mind or the general property of mental states, meaning that every mental state has a subjective sense or experience, implying that all mental states are conscious states. On the other hand, theories such as behaviorism and functionalism oppose Descartes' ideas about consciousness and attempt to explain it from a functional or neurological perspective. Yet, the problem of understanding consciousness from a material or neurological perspective, known as the explanatory gap (how to explain the non-material through the material), remains unresolved to this day.

The key contemporary issues related to consciousness include: Does consciousness have a causal role? If so, what is it? Are all mental states conscious? Are humans the only beings capable of consciousness? And, for instance, can machines possess consciousness? In this context, the question of the emergence of consciousness in artificial intelligence⁽²⁾ represents one of the greatest challenges facing philosophers and scientists today.

2. Artificial Intelligence: Many attribute the derivation of this term and its current concept to John McCarthy (1927-2011), a professor of mathematics at Dartmouth College. During a conference he organized with his friend Marvin Minsky (1927-2016), a professor at MIT, on the topic of generating mentality in machines, the term gained prominence. AI scholars differ in defining this science, and among the various definitions of artificial intelligence are the following: linguistically, it is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as the theory and development of computer systems capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and language translation. Alternatively, it is the science capable of building machines that perform tasks requiring a degree of human intelligence when performed by humans. Or, it is the machine's ability to perform tasks that require human intelligence, such as logical reasoning, learning, and adaptability.

Consciousness and Artificial Intelligence

The concept of intelligence differs from consciousness. Intelligence, in one of its definitions, is the ability to act appropriately at the right time (Seth, 2023). As for consciousness, despite the difficulty of obtaining precise definitions for it, it is used to refer to states of sensation, such as sensory perceptions, and awareness, which may include thoughts and feelings (Ismail, 2018).

Given that consciousness is a complex philosophical concept that is difficult to define, opinions about consciousness, both in general and in relation to artificial intelligence systems, vary greatly.

The debate over the issue of consciousness has become widespread in the era of artificial intelligence, raising the question of whether humans are the only ones who possess consciousness or whether others share this privilege as well. Aristotle (384 BC–322 BC) believed that humans possess rational souls, while other animals only have the instincts necessary for survival. During the Middle Ages, the Great Chain of Being classified humans at a higher level than unconscious animals, with gods and angels above them (Blackmore, 2018). In the modern era, French philosopher René Descartes argued that humans are the only beings with consciousness, while all other animals are merely complex machines lacking awareness (Ismail, 2018).

In the 20th century, Alan Turing (1912–1954) and John von Neumann (1903–1957), the founders of modern computing, envisioned the possibility that machines could eventually simulate all the capabilities of the human brain, including consciousness (Dehaene and Lau, 2017).

In his famous 1950 paper “*Can Machines Think*,” published in *Mind*, Alan Turing provided his well-known answer to this question. Not only did Turing defend the idea that machines could think, but he also proposed a game called the Imitation Game, later known as the Turing Test. This test involves a human examiner engaging in multiple conversations via a text interface (such as typing on a keyboard and reading text on a screen) with several participants, one of which is a machine while the others are humans. If the examiner cannot determine, based on the conversation, which participant is human and which is the machine, then the machine has successfully passed the Turing Test.

This paper served as the official manifesto for artificial intelligence. Although it sparked significant controversy at the time, the prevailing intuitive answer to the question was that machines could not think because they lack a human-like mind and merely perform calculations. Nevertheless, the paper had a profound impact on several fields, particularly philosophy, as the test raised numerous philosophical questions about the nature of artificial intelligence and its relationship to consciousness.

One of the key questions relates to the behavior of these systems: Can we truly develop a computational system that outwardly behaves like a human

and acts in intelligent ways? Some philosophers of mind believe this is possible, arguing that the human brain might ultimately be a large machine that can be simulated. If the interaction between neurons in the human brain is well-simulated, it might be possible to create a machine that produces behavior similar to that of the human brain. Consequently, achieving levels of intelligent behavior comparable to humans might, in principle, be possible. However, this raises another question: Does a good simulation of human behavior ultimately mean possessing consciousness? In other words, does this imply that the system has awareness? Can such a system truly perceive colors as humans do, feel pain as they do, or experience other emotions like happiness and sadness? Would it thereby possess subjective experience?

Supporters and Opponents of the Idea of Consciousness in Artificial Intelligence

The aforementioned questions have sparked extensive debates among philosophers of mind. American philosopher John Searle (1932–) summarized these differing positions in his distinction between Weak AI and Strong AI. Proponents of Weak AI argue that AI-powered computers are merely powerful tools that enable us to formulate and test hypotheses more rigorously and accurately. However, they do not understand the meaning of the numbers or operations they perform (Searle, 1980) and will never be more than mere simulations of intelligence.

Objections to artificial intelligence typically take one of two forms. First, there are external objections, which attempt to prove that computational systems in computers cannot even behave like human cognitive systems. According to these objections, there are certain functional capabilities humans possess that no machine can replicate.

Internal objections, on the other hand, are more common. These acknowledge, at least for the sake of argument, that computers might be able to simulate human behavior. However, they assert that these machines lack the conscious inner experience that the human mind possesses. Therefore, a computer lacks a mind (Chalmers, 1997).

John Searle presented a widely known argument supporting this position, called the Chinese Room Argument. He argued that no matter how closely a computer's behavior resembles human behavior, it will never possess true intelligence or understanding. This means that while artificial intelligence can simulate some characteristics of consciousness, it does not necessarily possess true awareness. Consciousness is a causal result of the human brain and involves more than merely processing information according to specific rules (Searle, 2002).

In contrast, proponents of Strong AI believe that a well-programmed computer is truly analogous to a mind (in the sense of the human mind) and can

understand and perform many cognitive processes and states. Accordingly, a form of emergent consciousness could arise from AI systems, not merely simulation, because consciousness is an intrinsic property of intelligence, and any sufficiently intelligent system will necessarily become conscious (Searle, 1980).

Critique and Commentary

Human consciousness is characterized by its ability to perceive complex contexts and appreciate the emotional and cultural dimensions of situations, allowing for the interpretation of experiences in ways that go beyond mere logical information processing. In contrast, despite AI's immense capacity for data processing and analysis, it lacks self-awareness and the ability to authentically experience or interact with emotions. This gap is attributed to the uniqueness of human consciousness in areas such as ethics, decision-making in contexts requiring human sensitivity, and social interaction that demands genuine understanding of human needs and emotions. In this context, the superiority of human consciousness over artificial intelligence is considered one of the main factors contributing to the improvement of human quality of life. While artificial intelligence technologies are advancing rapidly and approaching the simulation of some aspects of human intelligence, human consciousness, with its unique characteristics, remains a distinctive element that machines cannot fully attain. This superiority is not merely a philosophical claim but has tangible implications for quality of life, as it enhances self-satisfaction, fosters deep social relationships, and develops creative thinking and problem-solving abilities. This makes the superiority of human consciousness a unique privilege that cannot be entirely replaced or replicated in computational systems, even with accelerating technological advancements.

When examining the views of proponents and opponents regarding the possibility of achieving consciousness in artificial intelligence, it becomes evident that despite remarkable progress in this field, we are still far from reaching genuinely conscious artificial intelligence. This is due to an unresolved philosophical problem at the core of this subject, as current scientific methods remain incapable of uncovering the secret of generating human consciousness. This adds complexity to efforts aimed at developing artificial intelligence with true consciousness. However, if it is concluded that current or near-future artificial intelligence systems possess consciousness, it would raise fundamental social and ethical questions. For beings to enjoy moral status, they must be conscious. Since most people currently believe that machines are not conscious, they do not possess moral rights. But if they were to acquire some form of consciousness, should they then be granted moral rights, like animals? Or would they need to achieve the same level of consciousness as humans to obtain the same rights? If they eventually attain the same level of

consciousness as humans, would they then possess the same moral status? Or would they remain under human control? This could profoundly affect human quality of life by reshaping relationships and responsibilities between humans and technology.

Instead of focusing on fears associated with the development of artificial intelligence, its potential should be harnessed to serve humanity and improve individual lives, while ensuring that humans remain the primary decision-makers responsible for directing technology toward the common good. Enhancing human awareness and self-perception strengthens their sense of power and control over their environment, enabling them to achieve a more fulfilling and satisfying life.

2. Free Will and Human Quality of Life: Between Choice and Moral Responsibility

David Hume (1711–1776) described the problem of free will as one of the most contentious issues in metaphysics (Hume, 1907, p. 95). The problem of free will has been a longstanding issue, and like any ancient subject, it has evolved over time. Since Aristotle (384 BC–322 BC) discussed actions and our control over them in one of the earliest and most significant ethical debates conducted by philosophers, contained in his book “*Nicomachean Ethics*,” the concept has developed. Although Aristotle spoke in his book about our control over our actions, stating that our actions “*ep’ hemin*” are up to us, he did not use the word “*eleutheria*,” the Greek equivalent of “freedom,” to describe this control over actions. The use of the word “*eleutheria*” was still limited to political discussions to express political freedom or liberation. However, after Aristotle, philosophers began using it in a new, entirely non-political sense to express control over our actions. Since then, philosophers discussing the idea of our actions being up to us have followed the Greeks, and the term “freedom,” which was used to express political freedom, has also been used to express a person’s freedom to control their actions. If what you do falls within your control, then it can be said that you are “free” to act differently from the way you are currently acting. You are a “free agent,” as philosophers say (Pink, 2015, p. 12).

Philosophers have used the term “will” in various ways, but one important usage has been to express a fundamental psychological capacity possessed by all normal, intelligent humans: the ability to make decisions (Pink, 2015). It is the faculty through which events that occurred are considered actions we performed, rather than mere occurrences (Mandik, 2023, p. 24).

The will has an essential characteristic: freedom. One cannot speak of one without mentioning the other. Freedom is the capacity to act independently of any necessity that serves as a complete cause; it is the choice of a rational

being to act on their own without external coercion or internal necessity. Even when external coercion succeeds in producing an action, the will remains resistant to accepting it, retaining its freedom (Karam, 2017, p. 88).

The will holds particular importance for philosophers of mind, perhaps more so than any other aspect of the mind, in evaluations of moral responsibility. Perhaps the fundamental aspect of our self-conception is that we and others perform certain actions freely. Ostensibly, the most important element in determining whether a person is morally responsible for something is knowing whether they acted with free will. However, the true idea of free will might be incorrect; perhaps everything that happens is predetermined, meaning there is no such thing as a person acting freely. Everything a person does actually occurs through a complex network of causes, including biological and social factors. Perhaps this is not the case.

The problem of free will in the philosophy of mind lies in questioning whether free will truly exists, and if it does, what its nature is. How can it be explained in light of the principle of determinism, which states that every event, including our decisions, has been predetermined?

Philosophical Theories on Free Will

Theories in the philosophy of mind regarding free will vary significantly and can generally be classified into three main directions:

- **Determinism**

The term determinism, in all its derivations, originates from the Latin word “Determinere,” which means “fixed determinate.” The term determinism in European languages such as English, French, German, and Italian—Determinismus, Determinisme, Determinism—is also a newly coined term, derived and formulated in the 17th century, introduced as a name for two different but interconnected principles, one of which follows from the other. The first principle states that the choice between various courses of action can always, and in all circumstances, be fully explained by psychological conditions and other surrounding circumstances, meaning that the will of the agent itself has no role or does not exist; that is, humans are not free but rather instruments of the surrounding circumstances. The second principle, which is the origin upon which the first principle is based as a result, is what can be called Universal Determinism. This principle means that everything that happens forms a link in the causal chain (Al-Khouli, 2019, p. 25). It can be said that the principle concerning prior events determining subsequent ones conflicts with concepts of free will, where the agent is the ultimate source of their actions. It can also be said that the principle concerning events that cannot be otherwise conflicts with concepts of free will, which require free agents capable of acting or choosing differently.

There are five intellectual paths that support determinism, generally agreeing on their outcomes, but differing regarding the types of reasoning that lead to their deterministic conclusions. These paths can be classified into two groups, which differ regarding the number of events that are deterministic; the first group pertains to Global Determinism, which is the view that all events are deterministic, while the second group pertains to Local Determinism, which is the perspective that a specific category of events is deterministic. Local determinism focuses on those events that can be classified as human actions. Global determinisms include: Physical Determinism, Theological Determinism, and Logical Determinism. Local determinisms include: Ethical Determinism and Psychological Determinism (Mandik, 2023, p. 263).

- **Physical Determinism**

The claim of physical determinism (or causality or lawfulness) aligns with the idea that every event in the universe is governed by the laws of physics (every event has a physical cause), such that the state of the universe at one moment completely determines the subsequent state. This idea means that any present event is the inevitable result of previous events and natural laws.

- **Theological Determinism**

Many believers in the existence of God hold that God knows everything, including what will happen in the future. If God does not know all the facts about the future, this would imply a deficiency in His knowledge. This also includes human choices. For example, if God knows that you will turn left at a square, you cannot turn right at the same time, as this would contradict His knowledge. Therefore, according to this idea, human free will appears to be limited, as humans cannot do anything other than what God already knows in advance.

- **Logical Determinism**

Logical determinism arises from an issue discussed by Aristotle in his book “On Interpretation.” Logical determinism refers to the idea that every statement must be either true or false, and cannot be in an intermediate state. For example, the statement “There will be a naval battle tomorrow” can be true now or false now. If it is true, this means the battle will occur. If it is false, there will be no battle. Regardless of what happens tomorrow, when the matter occurs, it will still be true that there cannot be a contradiction with the truth value of the statement today. Thus, if there is a naval battle tomorrow, it will be true, and if there isn’t, there cannot be a naval battle at that time.

- **Ethical Determinism**

Ancient Greek philosophers, such as Socrates and Plato, believed that a person’s choices depend on what they consider to be good. However, this does

not mean that people always think about what is actually good; they may believe they are choosing something good even though it is bad. According to Socrates and Plato, everything an individual chooses is what they perceive as good. But if a person thinks something is good, why would they choose it if it is actually bad? Does their choice mean they truly desire it? In this case, a person's choices are determined by their previous psychological states and their thoughts about what is good.

- **Psychological Determinism**

Psychological determinism is similar to ethical determinism in an important aspect; psychological determinism is the view that a person's choices are always determined by their previous mental state, just as is the case in ethical determinism. However, psychological determinism differs from ethical determinism in that there is a distinction between desiring something and thinking it is good.

- **Compatibilism:**

Compatibilists believe that free will is compatible with determinism (Strawson, 2003). As noted, determinism has two principles: the first states that your preferences and actions are determined by prior events, including those that occurred before your birth. The second assumes that, given the current state of the universe and natural laws, there is only one possible future. These philosophers argue that determinism does not negate free will but rather defines its scope within the boundaries of natural laws and the initial conditions of the universe. They see humans as free to make their decisions as long as they act according to their internal motivations, even if these motivations themselves are the result of prior events. However, compatibilists differ from incompatibilists on whether these two principles pose a threat to free will. In this context, a school of thought supported by Harry Frankfurt (1929–2023) seeks to demonstrate that free will is compatible with the second principle, arguing that the ability to act differently is not a condition for possessing free will. He suggested that free will or moral responsibility does not require the ability to do otherwise, meaning that the sense of freedom can persist even under determinism, reinforcing the idea that free will can manifest in choices based on an individual's internal motivations, even if these motivations result from prior events (Frankfurt, 1969).

- **Incompatibilism**

We realized that compatibilism is the perspective that affirms the existence of free will and the validity of determinism. There are three ways to reject compatibilism and affirm incompatibilism. The first way is Hard Determinism, which denies the existence of free will and affirms the validity of determinism. The second way is adopting a form of incompatibilism known as Libertari-

anism, which believes in the existence of free will and sees determinism as false. The third way denies both the existence of free will and the validity of determinism (Mandik, 2023, p. 269).

Criticism and Commentary

It is important to note that the current philosophical debate about free will involves another, arguably more significant, issue: the debate concerning moral responsibility. Free will implies that its possessor bears moral responsibility, making them accountable for their actions. Thus, determining a person's responsibility for an action depends on whether they chose that action of their own free will. Reflecting on the philosophical theories related to free will, determinism assumes that an individual's state at any given time is the result of all the internal and environmental causes, as well as the entire universe's prior states (Bunge, 2019, p. 535). Consequently, the individual lacks initiative, rendering them incapable of self-control, and thus unable to be held responsible for their actions. This leads to negative effects on quality of life, as the person feels powerless and indifferent, believing that any attempt to change their fate is futile. Additionally, the sense of responsibility for actions diminishes, as individuals perceive their deeds as mere outcomes of forces beyond their control. This belief also leads to a loss of meaning in life, as individuals feel that everything is predetermined, leaving them without a real purpose or sense of significance. As a result, the virtuous and the criminal would be treated equally, as they would be regarded merely as products of their environments, with no rewards for good deeds or punishments for bad ones, thereby weakening the importance of moral initiatives or striving for positive change.

In contrast, compatibilism offers a positive impact on quality of life by striking a balance between determinism and freedom. It acknowledges the existence of factors beyond our control while simultaneously affirming the importance of our role in shaping our lives. This positively affects quality of life and enhances the sense of responsibility for our actions, while recognizing the influence of external factors. In this way, compatibilism can help provide meaning to life, granting individuals the feeling that they have the ability to influence the course of their lives. This sense of control and purpose motivates self-improvement and contributions to society.

As for theories that reject compatibilism, hard determinism, which denies the existence of free will, may lead to feelings of despair and helplessness, as individuals perceive themselves as mere components of a cosmic machine whose path they cannot alter. On the other hand, libertarianism, which affirms free will, grants individuals a sense of responsibility and control over their lives, boosting their confidence and inspiring change and creativity. However, libertarianism is considered flawed, as the notion of absolute freedom is erro-

neous; one cannot ignore the impact of circumstances and external factors on individual choices. The position that denies both free will and determinism leaves individuals in a state of confusion and ambiguity, making it difficult for them to comprehend the nature of their actions and choices.

3. Personal Identity: Exploring Personal Identity and Its Impact on Quality of Life

The research primarily focused on the mind, addressing aspects such as consciousness and will. Let us now turn to the subject of persons. Many philosophers believe these topics are not entirely separate; some think that a person is merely a mind, while others view the mind as part of the person but not the entirety of what defines their essence. For some of these philosophers, the mind and mental phenomena are highly significant in determining what a person is, even if they do not reflect all aspects of personal identity⁽³⁾.

The issue of personal identity has been a major concern for Western philosophers, starting with Plato (424BC-347BC), who proposed his famous theory of the soul as the true essence of a human being, through Descartes, who revisited this issue in the context of modern philosophy, and continuing to this day. This indicates that the matter is not merely a historical issue but an ongoing and present concern, and that any serious philosophical inquiry must address it, highlighting its importance in understanding human nature.

Questions and Issues Related to Personal Identity

Personal identity deals with a variety of questions and issues, including:

- The problem known as the question of characterization, which concerns the nature of the person. It raises the question of what kind of entity a person represents. What is the self? Is the self merely a bundle of perceptions? Or is it an entity containing various properties? Perhaps the self is not a thing at all, and maybe there is nothing that can truly be called persons. In this context, the empiricist philosopher David Hume (1711–1776) offers an answer to this set of questions. He rejected the concept of personal identity as illusory and proposed the Bundle Theory of the Self, which posits that personal identity is nothing more than a collection of perceptions that do not remain constant over time (Rivera, 2023).
- Another issue concerns what constitutes a person and what can be considered a person. For example, can a suitably programmed computer be considered a person? What about a fertilized human egg? Could an intelligent being like a chimpanzee or a dolphin be considered a person? Additionally,

3. Outside the scope of philosophy, personal identity generally refers to the characteristics that we feel a special sense of attachment or ownership toward. A person's personal identity in this sense consists of the characteristics they choose to define themselves or that make them the person they represent and distinguish them from others.

the question arises about a human with damaged brain parts preventing thought or feeling, but who can still breathe and maintain a heartbeat—does this being remain a person?

- A third issue pertains to numerical identity, dealing with the number of persons at a given time. For instance, could there be two persons in one human body? Or one person in two distinct bodies, as in some hypothetical cases known as fission?⁽⁴⁾
- The fourth issue is persistence, which concerns whether a person remains the same over time despite various changes, and how this continuity is maintained if it is true, or why it is not if it is false.

These issues encompass a wide range of loosely connected questions that are largely independent and should not be conflated. Below, we will focus on the issue that has garnered the most attention in recent decades: our persistence over time.

The Problem of Persistence: The question of continuity often historically arises from hope or fear regarding the possibility of our existence after death, as mentioned in Plato’s dialogue “Phaedo.” This possibility is tied to the question of whether biological death necessarily means the end of an individual’s existence. If we imagine the existence of someone resembling you after your death, how could this being be you and not someone else? How can one person remain the same over time? And if this is not possible, why is it not?

The problem of continuity arises when we attempt to reconcile Leibniz’s Law⁽⁵⁾ with the logical view that the same person can have different properties at different times. According to Leibniz’s Law, if a person changes in any of their properties, they cease to exist and a new entity appears. However, this conflicts with common sense, which holds that people can persist despite changes, such as cutting hair or physical changes over time. Contemporary philosophers have proposed various solutions to this problem; however, none of them are without issues.

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4. There is a set of issues raised in philosophical discussions of personal identity known as Fission Problems, which involve the idea that splitting a person entails what common sense describes as one person continuing to live as two distinct individuals. Most philosophers argue that this contradiction shows that common sense conflicts with a logical principle known as the transitivity of identity. This principle can be described as follows: if (A) is identical to (B), and (B) is identical to (C), then (A) must be identical to (C). This principle is closely related to the idea that if (A) is not identical to (B), then if (C) is identical to (A), (C) cannot be identical to (B).
 5. The fundamental logic governing the ideas of identity and non-identity is a principle of reasoning that philosophers and logicians call “Leibniz’s Law”: the principle that if X and Y are the same thing, then X and Y must share all their properties. If there is a property that one possesses and the other lacks, then X and Y are distinct; they are two distinct things and not the same thing.

Methods of Addressing the Problem of Continuity

In this section, we will discuss several philosophical approaches to addressing the problem of continuity: the psychological approach, the bodily or somatic approach, the temporal parts theory (also known as perdurantism or four-dimensionalism), and the no-self or personal nihilism perspective.

• The Psychological Approach

Until recently, this was the most common view of personal identity, a significantly modified version of John Locke's (1632–1704) associative memory criterion. Locke proposed that consciousness determines personal identity, with a person's continuity based on their conscious memories from earlier times in their life. Even if the components of their body completely change, identity remains linked to conscious memory. This theory supports the idea that personal identity is tied to the brain as the organ responsible for consciousness and memory, rather than the physical body. Thus, if a person's brain were transplanted into another body, personal identity would persist with the brain. Therefore, it can be said that Locke reinforces the psychological approach by emphasizing that a person remains the same as long as memory and consciousness continue, even if their body changes (Mandik, 2023).

• The Somatic or Bodily Approach:

The theory of animalism suggests that personal identity is fundamentally tied to bodily existence. It views humans as thinking animals, without implying that all beings or humans are persons, as personhood may be temporary or unrelated to organic vitality, as in the case of conscious robots or deities. A human's continuity as a being depends on the continuity of their physical entity, linking this idea to the bodily approach.

Some philosophers support the bodily approach without adopting the idea that we are animals, arguing that our identity is determined by our bodies and their continuity over time, known as the somatic approach to personal identity. A common objection to the bodily approach is that it implies you would still exist even if your brain were transplanted into another body, which some find unreasonable. Nevertheless, this approach aligns with our real-life experiences regarding personal identity, unlike the psychological approach, which ties identity to psychological continuity. Most of us believe we were once embryos, despite lacking psychological continuity with that stage. This suggests that some challenges facing the bodily approach are not necessarily greater than those facing the psychological approach, but they do raise questions about the role of the body in defining identity. Thus, the concept of animalism is closely related to the bodily approach by emphasizing the importance of the body in defining identity (Rivera, 2023).

- **Temporal Parts Theory aka Perdurantism aka Four-Dimensionalism**

This theory is a reductive⁽⁶⁾ approach that highlights the significance of identity. Temporal parts theory views time as a spatial dimension similar to the three spatial dimensions: up and down, right and left, front and back. In line with contemporary physics, this theory considers space and time as interconnected, forming what is known as spacetime. In this framework, the entire life of a being is depicted as a four-dimensional spacetime “worm” extending through time, from the moment of the being’s birth to the moment of their death.

The spatial thickness of the worm is determined by the three spatial dimensions it occupies at any given time. According to the temporal parts theory of personal identity, an individual can be considered a spacetime worm, with different moments of their life representing different temporal parts of this worm. For example, the version of the self at their ninth birthday is one “temporal slice” of this worm, while the version reading this book is another temporal slice.

Temporal parts theory offers a solution to the problem of continuity, which concerns understanding how a person remains constant despite changes. This solution demonstrates how a person can have one set of properties at a certain time and a different set of properties at another time. Instead of viewing a person as a static entity, they are seen as a four-dimensional spacetime worm composed of different parts located in different places and times. Thus, the version of the self at age 42, the current version at age 27, and the version at age 9 represent different temporal parts of the same being. Overall, it can be said that the person does not change in essence because they exist across multiple times (Mandik, 2023).

- **The No Self View or Personal Nihilism:**

Many philosophers, both in Buddhist philosophy and Western philosophy, have claimed that the self does not exist. There is no such thing as persons as independent entities; rather, there are only brains, bodies, thoughts, and experiences. According to the teachings of Buddha (563BC–483BC), actions and their consequences exist, but the person performing the action has no real existence. On the other hand, the materialistic view of the no-self perspective acknowledges the existence of human bodies but does not consider them as selves or persons. The arguments of the non-self perspective include that other theories are not effective in solving the problem of persistence and related issues such as the problem of division. Another line of thought is the Problem of the Many Argument, which suggests that a person, as a physical entity,

6. Reductionism is considered one of the most common theories, though it is still accepted by only a few philosophers. This perspective asserts that individuals live separately and independently of their minds and bodies, and thus their lives are unified, from birth to death, by virtue of living in distinct entities.

consists of trillions of particles, making it difficult to identify a single person. When we analyze the particles, we find that there are trillions of different groups that could represent a person, highlighting the significant complexity of the concept of identity. If a person is composed of particles, there are many possible ways to form this person, which increases the difficulty of determining their identity.

As for the idea of “I,” the term refers to a single entity, but if it represents a collection of particles, selecting one group seems arbitrary. Accordingly, it is concluded that there are no persons as independent entities but merely collections of particles (Chalmers, 2002).

Criticism and Commentary

Personal identity plays a significant role in shaping ethics and responsibility in human life; an individual with a clear perception of their identity is able to understand the values and moral principles that guide their behavior and decisions, enhancing their sense of responsibility for their actions. Understanding the nature of personal identity is essential in determining moral responsibility and requires consideration of the concept of continuity that strengthens the connection between the past, present, and future.

Modern technological developments, such as artificial intelligence and social media, significantly impact the concept of personal identity, raising questions about how our identity is affected over time and intertwined with digital identities. Addressing these issues within the philosophy of mind contributes to enhancing the quality of human life by achieving a deeper understanding of personal identity and building more sustainable relationships, helping individuals adapt to major life changes and reducing fears related to an uncertain future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the philosophy of mind asserts its position as a rich field of knowledge capable of contributing to improving the quality of life by analyzing fundamental mental concepts, enabling us to gain a deeper understanding of ourselves and the world we live in. This contribution is evident in the following points:

- Despite advancements in artificial intelligence, human consciousness remains a unique phenomenon that cannot be fully replicated. Consciousness is characterized by its ability to comprehend sensory and emotional experiences, enhancing the quality of life and providing individuals with a sense of empowerment and control over their experiences.
- The discussion on free will highlights the necessity of finding a balance between determinism and freedom, as this balance enhances the sense of

- moral responsibility. This contributes to improving the quality of life by enabling individuals to assign meaning and value to their life experiences.
- Personal identity demonstrates that its recognition and continuity enhance moral responsibility, contributing to improving the quality of life and helping individuals adapt to major life transitions.

Recommendations

In the context of exploring the future and deepening the discussion, a set of recommendations can be proposed, including long-term research questions:

1. How can a more comprehensive understanding of human consciousness be achieved? What are the boundaries separating human consciousness from artificial consciousness?
2. What role does free will play in shaping moral responsibility? How can it be redefined in light of rapid technological and social challenges?
3. How do modern technological and medical transformations affect the continuity of personal identity? What are their implications for self-understanding and values of responsibility?

These questions aim to stimulate future research on the relationship between the philosophy of mind and the quality of life, enhancing awareness of the fundamental issues of human existence.

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Ethics and the Challenge of Living Together

A Study on the Standards of The Good Life in Günther Patzig's Philosophy

Nada Kamal

Suez Canal University, Egypt

Abstract

The research paper highlights the role of communicative ethics in improving human and natural relationships by fostering mutual understanding among individuals, promoting values of justice, equality, dignity, and safe coexistence. It also emphasizes the importance of asymmetrical relationships with life participants to create a good environment that respects differences and acknowledges diversity. Hence, the paper illustrates the impact of ethical standards on shaping community identities and prioritizes vital effectiveness over linguistic effectiveness as a primary influencer for achieving quality of life from the perspective of the German philosopher Günther Patzig. Based on this, I will follow an analytical and critical approach to address the main challenges hindering the process of ethical protection and peaceful coexistence, in addition to a comparative approach to clarify the difference between Kantian duty ethics and communicative duty ethics to establish the principle of vital respect.

Keywords: Coexistence, Communicative Ethics, Good Life, Law, Vital Respect.

Introduction

In this study, I will start with the question of the necessary ethical standards that in turn enhance the pattern of communication among individuals in a way that meets their needs without coercion or violation of the diverse rights and interests among individuals and other creatures they coexist with. On the other hand, reconsidering the declared legal rules that lack an ethical basis despite applying justice rules, and exploring the biological and vital justifications for ethical coexistence within a social framework from the perspective of Günther Patzig (1926-2018), who attempted to establish a universal and broad meaning of ethics that includes creatures integrated into nature by proposing a critical

view on utilitarian and rational justifications for ethics with the aim of achieving the necessary global protection for creatures, ensuring a fair and equitable life for all.

Here, life refers to the phenomenon that encompasses all living creatures that possess the attributes of life and death, as well as the set of abilities and skills that give existence meaning, in addition to the laws that determine the course of this life and regulate its progression within its temporal extension for everything vital in this world, and the way of living and harmony with the surrounding environment (Quranī, 2017, p. 53).

Accordingly, the study's problem revolves around the challenges facing communities in achieving a safe life for all participants, including humans, animals, and plants, and then proposing ethical standards based on vital communicative effectiveness instead of relying entirely on purely linguistic and rational communicative effectiveness, through the treatment presented by Patzig on the pillars of the good life. This led me to a set of questions:

How did Patzig establish communicative ethical values linking the question of ethics and responsibility to everything vital in nature? How can one choose between ethical justifications for safe coexistence? What challenges hinder the quality of fair life and peaceful coexistence?

Study Objectives

The study's objectives rely on the main research problem as a critical framework aimed at analyzing the challenges of living together among different groups and the possibility of overcoming these differences by formulating realistic solutions that contribute to narrowing ethical gaps. From this main objective, several other objectives arise, including:

- Clarifying the role of vital ethics in regulating unethical practices towards all living creatures for a more balanced life.
- Understanding Patzig's stance on Kantian duty ethics and his communicative foundation for ethics.
- Defining the boundaries between moral, legal, and emotional obligations as established by Patzig.

Importance of the Study

The importance of the philosophical study of ethics lies in the periodic follow-up of current ethical issues and formulating balanced ethical standards through different theories that align with cultural, qualitative, and doctrinal pluralism, through which communication skills and effective wide-ranging ethical dialogue can be enhanced. This also led me to clarify the difference between duty ethics, utilitarian ethics, and communicative ethics. Based on this, I will follow the analytical approach to demonstrate the role of human

centrality in overcoming the rules of equitable ethical life among creatures in this universe, in addition to clarifying the impact of Patzig's theory in formulating standards that go beyond utilitarian justifications for life, as well as the comparative approach to differentiate between Kantian duty ethics and communicative duty ethics to establish the principle of vital respect, and the critical approach to address the main challenges hindering the process of ethical protection and peaceful coexistence.

Moving on to previous studies, the issue of ethics and establishing the principle of vital respect has been addressed from various aspects in several works:

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- Regarding the theory of ethics and communicative dialogue:
- Westphal, Kenneth. (2007). Human Consciousness and its Transcendental Condition: Kant's Anti-Cartesian Revolution. In Sara Heinämaa, Vili Lähteenmäki, Pauliina Remes, eds, *Consciousness From Perception to Reflection in the History of Philosophy*. Springer.
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Based on this, the study plan included the following axes within the framework of Patzig's ethical philosophy:

- Utilitarian Ethics.
- The Ethics of Duty.
- Communication Ethics and the Principle of Vital Respect.

The Ethical Motivation (Utilitarian Ethics – The Ethics of Duty – Communicative Ethics)

In his book (The Rationality of Ethics 1996, *Die Rationalität der moral*), Patzig begins with a set of important questions that form the core of this study, such as: Can objective justifications for ethical standards be found? What are the conditions for the standards that an individual considers applicable? Do utilitarian and obligatory principles determine individuals' behavior toward everything that shares life with them?

In addressing these questions, Patzig distinguished between several types of ethical motivations driving human behavior, including: utilitarianism, as represented in Aristotle's concept of happiness; duty, as found in Kant's ethical philosophy; and communicative ethics, which express Patzig's ethical perspective, a direction affiliated with the intellectual school of Jürgen Habermas (1929–).

• Utilitarian Ethics

Under the broad understanding of ethics as a set of principles and rules that define how humans interact with their external world, ethics is the science of principles and values that govern human actions, with will being a key element driving human behavior to achieve the best form of public life. Ethics continuously guide our behavior toward goodness and virtue, steering us away from evil and its consequences, with the aim of achieving truth, goodness, and beauty, where the human soul reaches its perfection. Based on this, utilitarian ethics emerged as a direction supporting this conception through adherence to a teleological view of the world and humanity for a good life that provides happiness. Patzig directs his philosophical inquiry into utilitarian ethics, particularly with Aristotle, determining his stance on the ultimate good for humanity and whether this good can achieve justice in applying ethical standards across different groups.

All human actions within the framework of utilitarian ethics aim to achieve specific goals considered "the ultimate good" and extend across the various lives of individuals, whether in the teleological ethics of the individual or the teleological ethics of the group. Although their content is reasonable, as they examine beneficial ethical action at the individual and group levels, they contain several contradictions. Patzig illustrated this contradiction with an exam-

ple: pleasurable versus unpleasurable / beneficial versus non-beneficial. He notes that while a person may speak about what is morally pleasurable in the long term, applying behavior that consistently produces pleasure in reality is limited and may fail, as happiness does not always align with various acts of speech, which follow different contexts (Patzig, Günther, 1971, p. 36).

Patzig built his argument based on Aristotle's clear stance in his book *Nicomachean Ethics*, which made practice the foundation of ethical competence for ends, even though it may be insufficient to achieve human happiness (Aristotle, 1924, pp. 349, 353). What ensures true ethical competence for goals and achieves a good and happy life is the structuring of the distinctive human qualities of understanding, perception, contemplation, and experience appropriately in certain behaviors using reason. This distinguishes the ultimate good for humans from that of animals (Patzig, Günther & Dieter Birnbacher, 1996, p. 44).

Moreover, the feeling of happiness is one of the most important ethical motivations for individuals to adhere to correct behavior, according to Aristotle. Any individual who realizes that adhering to ethical standards will positively affect their life will commit to correct behavior for this happy life. The individuals referred to here are those who consider how to achieve their own happiness because they are morally strong, not those who act from a sense of duty (Patzig, 1996, p. 45). Humans always have a teleological task related to happiness that they must accomplish in this world, governed by functional connections, as every existence has a purpose (Patzig, 1971, p. 43). Thus, ethical action is not an action for its own sake but an action for a purpose.

Through this hypothesis, Patzig sought to highlight the clear role of reason in Aristotle's philosophy in determining the ethical standards governing individuals' lives, even in their utilitarian form. However, speaking about the continuity of happiness without considering diverse contexts leads to a contradiction in the utilitarian view of ethics. Additionally, Aristotle's limitation of ethical motivation to the feeling of happiness makes ethical action and correct behavior temporary, transforming ethical values from fundamental rational principles into momentary practices, leading humanity into a moral crisis.

This was evident in Patzig's reference to a set of goals driving human actions, such as the desire to move, the pursuit of power, curiosity, empathy, and the need for recognition. He asserts that some of these goals serve self-interest, while others serve the interests of others. However, these interests are not the true driving force behind human practices. Instead, they are governed by two main principles: the principle of self-love and the principle of good. Through the first principle, the self seeks to achieve the greatest amount of happiness for the longest possible period, while through the second principle, it aims to enhance well-being (Patzig, 1971, p. 44).

What I perceive here is that Patzig included Aristotle's vision within the value-based and religious justifications for ethics. Value-based justifications are a set of standards through which the actor affirms the value of their action, thereby justifying it ethically. All practices become indicative of happiness (Patzig, 2002, p. 3355). Referring back to Aristotle, this justification emerges in the motivation of "virtue ethics," where the individual seeks to practice actions indicative of virtue to achieve happiness. Here, the self relies on emotion, not reason, which reflects a contradiction between the intellectual and emotional dimensions in Aristotle's philosophy. As for the convergence of Aristotelian utilitarianism with religious justifications, it is based on the similarity of the methodological foundation of both approaches. Aristotelian utilitarianism adopted the goal of "human happiness" as the ultimate good that human action seeks. In contrast, religious justifications for ethical behavior adopted the goal of "obedience to sacred commands," which are binding for all human actions and in which human emotion plays a role (Patzig, 2002, p. 3354). In this regard, Patzig rejected the idea that value-based or religious justifications should separately play a role in establishing rational ethical standards, as they are not universal. What he seeks in his approach is to impose rational ethical standards that suit the global moral system, transcending religious conflicts and special interests.

Thus, Patzig does not agree with Aristotle in limiting the role of ethics to the benefits it achieves in the form of momentary happiness as the ultimate good for humanity. He attempts, through this approach, to emphasize the necessity of expanding the circle of values and principles that provide a good life for humans, including higher values such as tolerance, social participation, justice, and vital coexistence, in addition to surpassing the idea of the purpose of ethical action and imparting a rational character to a set of normative judgments. But the question here is: Was Patzig searching in Aristotle's ethics for the idea of moral duty? Or did he want to establish a critical framework that includes classical and modern ethics to formulate a new ethical system?

In answering this question, I will present the ethics of duty through Patzig's critical vision and then lay the foundation for communicative ethics.

• The Ethics of Duty

The principle of the ethics of duty is associated with the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), which had a clear influence on Patzig's thought in most of his intellectual works. This influence was not merely an extension of Kant's rational approach but a critical influence addressing some decisive points in his thought. Therefore, it was logical for Patzig to return to analyzing the ideas of "Father Kant," as mentioned in his book *"Rationality of Ethics."*

Kant's ethics emerged through his work *"Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals,"* in which he affirmed that ethics has a rational and normative basis. It

is not merely descriptive advice received by individuals but a necessary condition for human life, making it obligatory as it determines how individuals should act.

To clarify, Patzig mentions that Kant's ethical theory originated from his concept of the categorical imperative, which is a central part of his philosophy that has had a wide impact on the public. The categorical imperative is the affirmation or rejection of an action in an absolute manner, which gives actions and their motives a rigidity that includes the threat of not allowing the bypassing of this obligation (Patzig, 1971, p148). This imperative deepened Kant's ethical thought about the conditions and controls of obligation and duty, making it akin to respecting law founded on rational rules, transcending emotional motives and sensory indications.

Accordingly, the element of understanding as the primary rational tool of knowledge played a major role in the processes of ethical conduct and judgment for Kant, as he pointed out in his book "Lectures on Ethics" when he emphasized that understanding the difference between the motives of action and the moral rule is one of the most important factors in an individual's realization of the quality of ethical action, and then its practice becomes a law that must be implemented. Understanding the action necessarily results from the presence of a driving force for it, and in their interconnectedness lies the strength of the moral judgment that rises to become a general law (patzig, 1996, p40).

As an example of the power of intrinsic moral motivation leading to sound moral judgment, Kant mentions: "If you want to live happily, take care of your health" (patzig, 1971, p56). The motivation here is happiness, and the action is taking care of health for the goal of "living happily." Kant attempts to transcend the utilitarian concept of ethical action by making health care a binding general law for a happy life.

On a theoretical level, Patzig directs us to the necessity of looking inside the Kantian process of understanding, especially those related to evaluating the quality of moral obligation, to be in front of a sound ethical action. On an operational level, he invites us to explore the principle of execution or the behavioral performance itself. On the first level, he argues that the evaluation process includes understanding what is good or not good, and through that, we can deduce the validity of human action. On the second level, we deduce the strength of the action based on the main question: What drives me to follow these laws? Thus, understanding represents the cornerstone of moral motivation for Kant (patzig, 1996.p41).

It is noteworthy that Kantian rationality of ethics has imparted a different methodological character to stand against the element of selfishness included in utilitarian ethics, both old and new. Kant attempts through this character to establish a global peaceful coexistence based on duty, meaning that every

individual should be aware of their role towards others, committed to their rights and duties, with commitment based on understanding and sound moral judgment.

Kant's ethical call includes searching for the standards that make the self coexist as a global citizen (Cosmopolitan) (Cortina, 2016, p162, 183), capable of determining the distance between the concepts of altruism and selfishness and enhancing the value of mutual moral responsibility (Pigliucci, Massimo, 2019, p133).

This conception contributed to affirming the treatment of the other as an end and not a means, meaning that our moral duty towards the other is an end in itself, not just a stage for utilitarian ends. This is the definitive way to achieve safe coexistence from Kant's perspective. Additionally, this definitive matter that determines the relationship of the self with the other is an unconditional necessary obligation, thus making it mandatory (Skidmore, J. 2001, p542), and the obligation here is a follow-up to the process of understanding, one of the skills of awareness and human intelligence. Therefore, a human is a moral being aware of the foundations of dialogue (Bougoura, 2018, p138).

Here lies the question: Is the understanding base that Kant made the foundation of motivation – action – moral judgment applicable to all contexts and all participants in social life?

In answering this question, Patzig argues that Kant was right in making understanding necessary for interpreting human life phenomena, as well as his philosophical addition, especially the principle of evaluating motives. However, he erred in thinking that the independent driving force of action fundamentally differs from all other empirical driving forces, which he called "pathological motives." Kant considered this assumption imperative to affirm that emotional empirical influences are far from the rational judgment of ethics, and thus far from understanding (patzig, 1996, p50).

Through this, Patzig's definitive response to the previous question is "no," the "Kantian" understanding cannot establish motivations, actions, and moral judgments suitable for all contexts and all participants in this life. Patzig's objections to Kant's tendency towards the ethics of duty can be summarized as follows: First: Regarding the self-motivating force (self-drive) of moral action, which Kant considered capable of asserting itself against any other potential empirical motives based on the idea of law, and that the strength of these motives lies in their respect, akin to self-respect for the law, thereby becoming a sufficient reason to produce morally correct actions (Patzig, 1996, p. 43).

Patzig responds to this premise by arguing that Kant's proposition is unconvincing, involves intellectual exaggeration, and contains a significant contradiction. Kant sought to make the actions of the individual a universal law without considering the desires of all. Moreover,

we are not certain if our understanding of the concept of duty can lead to a satisfactory resolution of the moral problem in all cases (Patzig, 1971, p. 58). This is clearly evident in Kant's statement: "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (Kant, 2002, p. 131), as he did not account for the diversity of events and participants.

As a result, Patzig attempted to correct Kant's view by classifying moral motives into three types: primary motives, which are the set of motives directly driving the action; secondary motives, which are the set of motives that reinforce the primary motive but are insufficient to generate the corresponding action; and reserve motives, which can replace the primary motive in case of its failure. Patzig provides an example to demonstrate that the idea of moral motivation is not limited to the intellectual dimension alone, saying: "The love for our children and grandchildren is a feeling sufficient to motivate a range of actions that can all be acknowledged as valid, such as caring for them, seeking their happiness, and the act of caregiving here surpasses the presence of a strict moral motive as a primary motive, or even the existence of a general moral law. We find the influence of another motive, the emotional motive (a secondary and reserve motive)" (Patzig, 1996, p. 51).

Through this approach, Patzig seeks to highlight the clear deficiency in Kant's vision, which is limited to rational beings alone. This perspective rendered non-rational beings (animals) in Kant's view as mere means to rational human ends. Consequently, moral obligation in Kant's philosophy supports respect for the species rather than respect for nature as a whole (Skidmore, J., 2001, p. 544).

Second: Regarding the idea of absolute necessity or the categorical imperative, Kant sought through it to make speech acts a universal law, such as: tell the truth, keep your promises, help your fellow humans in need, and do not lie.

Patzig comments on this idea by stating that Kant confused the moral rule with its distinctive features and the law. He supports this argument by proposing that human beings share a common rational basis, and thus what is good for one individual is good for all, and what is bad for one is contrary to the concept of duty for all. Patzig asserts here that Kant failed to distinguish between hypothetical necessity (which refers to a set of spontaneous possibilities accompanying the act or event) and categorical necessity. Additionally, Kant denied the possibility of any situation in which lying might be permissible, such as: "One must fulfill one's promises." If fulfilling this promise would lead to subsequent harm, then not fulfilling it should be moral, but Kant rejected this. Patzig cites the example of a father who promised his children to take them to the pool but was unable to fulfill his promise due to the outbreak of a dangerous epidemic. In this case, the prohibition and breaking of the

promise is considered moral behavior from Patzig's perspective, driven by the father's concern for his children's health. However, from Kant's perspective, it becomes an "untruthful promise." Another example is the harm inflicted on someone who opposes the prevailing ideological trends in German society, and the acknowledgment of their location in the context of telling the truth. Here, the act would be morally condemned by Kant, but Patzig sees it as a call for freedom. In this context, Kant's philosophy of the categorical imperative considers actions such as "lying" or "untruthful promises" as morally unjustifiable, thereby negating the conditions for their utility or recognition in society and life (Patzig, 1971, p. 154).

Patzig continues his critique of the categorical imperative of moral commands, arguing that Kant assumed rational thinking alone to be the sole remedy for society's moral issues. He believed this imperative is what unites a large number of individuals despite the diversity and conflict of their interests due to differing living capabilities. It thus becomes the only mechanism capable of achieving moral justice and, consequently, safe communal living for all. If this imperative were to vanish, the result would be chaos from individual efforts and the collapse of collective cooperation systems. Through reason as the primary criterion for our moral judgments, it is the sole faculty capable of testing the validity of these judgments and then universalizing them (Patzig, 1971, p. 157).

Based on this, Kant failed to recognize one of the most significant flaws in his rationalism, as Patzig points out in his essay "Can Moral Standards Be Justified Rationally?"—namely, the deliberate violation of the rights of others who suffer from severe disabilities and incurable diseases, as well as the beings with whom we share life but who lack rational understanding of morality. In such cases, the issue of obligation requires reconsideration (Patzig, 2002, p. 3357).

This is further confirmed by the perspective that highlights coercion in behavior. All Kant sought with his argument was the universalization of rational justifications alone, which rendered his moral system formalistic and abstract. He failed to consider objectivity during the process of justifying moral judgments, which would allow for exceptions in certain actions with a specific nature, such as a doctor's refusal to confront a patient with the expected outcomes of their illness out of concern for the patient's health and to avoid any agitation that might lead to the patient's death (Patzig, 1971, p. 159).

Thus, it can be said that Patzig criticized the legal rigidity characteristic of Kantian duty ethics, which relied solely on reason to understand moral motives and their judgments without considering the realm of practical implementation, which includes various factors that directly and indirectly influence the thought process behind motives and moral actions. The justifications underlying actions are determined by the diversity of external factors, as well

as the necessity of integrating different types of justifications to understand the context properly and to demonstrate the appropriate moral action. The critical framework presented by Patzig in Kant's ethical vision aimed at modernization and refinement, not at entirely dismantling the Kantian perspective on rational judgment but rather at developing it. Patzig supported Kant's endeavor and persistent desire to formulate a theory that upholds universal ethics, which in turn achieves a rational consensus on a set of laws that preserve human dignity. These laws are characterized by the approval that grants moral legitimacy to the proposed standards, aiming to overcome selfishness and protect the virtuous life of the agent, advocating a balance and moderation between altruism and selfishness (Patzig, 2022, p.189). However, Patzig's philosophical pursuit leans toward imparting a communicative vitality to actual moral actions, a method that can only be completed by relying on previous ethical foundations represented in utilitarian ethics and deontological ethics.

- **Communication Ethics and the Principle of Vital Respect**

Philosophical theories intersected with the issue of ethical justification for actions to formulate a coherent moral system that supports societal stability and achieves peaceful coexistence. This was evident in the utilitarian experiment and Kant's ethical experiment as a methodological attempt to search for the standards of good human life, as Patzig acknowledged: "I share Kant's conviction that the change for the better in human affairs, whether individual or collective, can only be achieved through increasing the influence of rational considerations on our actions" (Patzig, 1996, p.52). However, the matter requires complete development so that rational moral justifications can take into account the interests of everyone for a good life.

It is worth noting that despite Patzig's reference to the philosophies of Aristotle and Kant as influences on his moral system, they were not the only influences. Two main factors significantly shaped his system: his personal upbringing and his professional and academic life.

The First Factor (**Personal Upbringing**): Patzig points out that his ethical life took a new turn when his father, a naval officer, completed his participation in World War I and was asked to join the German opposition. His father's response was intriguing (as Patzig mentioned), stating that after participating in the war, he would not allow himself or his family to collude in the injustices committed in the name of the Germans. He sought to protect his family on one hand and preserve his personal dignity on the other (Patzig, 2022, p.190). Here, Patzig saw that his father granted him the first spark of the concept of responsibility founded on rationality.

The Second Factor (**Professional and Academic Life**): This factor includes two aspects. The first is his role as the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Göttingen, where he explored the value of academic conscience

among faculty members and the decline in their understanding of responsibility aimed at teaching quality. This exposed him to acquiring the reputation of a “bad liberal,” despite his declaration of attempting to analyze the deteriorating educational situation and arbitrate human conscience. The second aspect is his role as a father to a son who works as a doctor. Patzig notes that one of his main motivations for philosophical research into contemporary ethical problems, especially biological ones, was his experience with his son, who worked as a doctor in mandatory military service in Germany. Through his professional practice in a children’s hospital focused on conducting neurological tests on premature infants, his son faced numerous challenges in achieving ethical peace amidst the technological influences used for treatment. The accompanying doctors encountered significant challenges due to technological advancement and cultural diversity among patients on one hand, and the dominance of positional authority instead of expertise authority on the other. Patzig states:

“After my son’s questions and reports alerted me, I began to take a closer look at the ethics of the professional spirit of doctors. I found myself compelled to admit that this professional spirit had deteriorated, and daily work seemed directed toward the financial self-interest of professionals... By closely examining the power structures for providing medical services, i.e., the concentration of medical responsibility in the hands of the ward chief, I can empathize with the confusion my son feels” (Patzig, 2022, p.187).

In the first factor, which represented the theoretical framework of Patzig’s thought, he received his ethical education through his father’s rationally justified behavior based on the motive of protection and responsibility. In the second factor, it represents the practical framework and procedural dimension of ethical practices and issuing coherent moral judgments on the value of conscience, knowledge expertise, and work quality amidst clear value collapses at his level as a philosophy professor and researcher in medical professional ethics. From this, it can be concluded that both factors, alongside Aristotelian and Kantian influences, and adding to them Habermas’s communicative theory⁽¹⁾, form the core of Patzig’s ethical philosophy.

Patzig’s ethical treatment began with the necessity of replacing the question: What should I do? with “What should we do?” so that we can determine the means of living and the essence of a good life.

As mentioned earlier, Patzig did not reject the value of rational foundations

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1. Habermas’s Theory of Communicative Action: Human knowledge is based on both reason and practice, and human actions rely on a set of rational principles agreed upon by the concerned parties to achieve individual and collective goals. As Habermas stated, communicative action is an interaction between two entities capable of speaking and acting through verbal expressions, representing mutual agreement based on understanding (Habermas, Jürgen, 2020, P.91, 94, 198).

for ethical standards, even in their Kantian framework. However, his view of this rationality sought to impart an objective character extended to human values and principles to overcome the dramatic sacrifices resulting from strict rationality and to generalize happy life. Thus, rationality for Patzig includes both theoretical and practical dimensions to facilitate the generalization of ethical standards even in complex cases (Patzig, 2022, p.189). He asserts that strict rationality laid a narrow foundation for ethics because it confined the role of ethics within the circle of active and capable agents, overlooking the non-human environment (Habermas, 2019, p.247). This is existentially, epistemologically, and morally unacceptable, as this world encompasses both human and non-human living beings, which constitutes a communicative foundation.

In this context, the British philosopher John Gray (1948–) argues in his book *“The Soul of the Marionette”* that the rational determination of human values such as freedom and happiness does not make them utilitarian for humanity. Instead, it makes moral values a mere set of highly complex commands and prohibitions with a narrow scope, rather than values being an art of good living (Gray, 2015, p.88). Consequently, humans become akin to marionettes moved by external motives, leading to the corruption of the moral justification of human actions. Therefore, Patzig’s rationality differed from Kant’s rationality, as he sought to deconstruct the contradictions that influenced human actions due to the confusion resulting from unifying the concept of the moral rule and respect for the law. This led to restricting the motives driving human behavior and marginalizing free will. The deconstruction process included an initial step: the necessity for individuals to recognize their diversity, as what they consider good may be contrary to others, and they must accept this to avoid coercion or aggression. This step was followed by another phase: the need to distinguish between moral commandments and legal texts. Both are related to human behavior, but they differ procedurally, as clarified below:

- **“Legal texts”** include direct instructions and a set of fully mandatory orders and prohibitions, leaving no room for debate over whether a legal principle is correct or not. Additionally, the positivity of legal rules is expressed when these rules come into effect. If their fragility becomes apparent, they are immediately abandoned to prevent chaos. Thus, they are linked to the external behavior of individuals and the suppression of harmful and destructive activities. Patzig provides an example to define the role of the law: cases of sadism between life partners and the psychological harm caused by false promises. He states that in such cases, the victim falls into the trap of relying on the law to defend them due to the confusion between their understanding of the law, which defines its rulings within a specific framework of actions described as crimes, and the moral rule, which has the license to

distinguish actions as good or evil. According to this example, the offender is in a legally safe zone despite their unethical actions (Patzig, 1971, p.12).

- As for “**moral commandments**,” they involve a style of rejection and warning that cannot be affected if ignored. The rules remain valid despite their ineffectiveness. These are the rules that ensure human behavior addresses the needs and interests among humans and with other living beings (Patzig, 2002, p.3354). Thus, their judgments go beyond being linguistic expressions of condemnation or praise to include indications of empathy, astonishment, and criticism. They are directly connected to both the internal and external behavior of individuals, which makes the moral sphere broader than legal texts. Returning to the previous example of false promises, the moral crime here is clear, as it exploits primary emotional bonds. The task of moral commandments in this context is to preserve and protect (Patzig, 1971, p.15).

Patzig, through this distinction, points to some cases where moral commandments and legal texts may intersect, such as the case of a doctor who encouraged performing surgeries to prevent further pregnancies in a violent and unethical manner. In this instance, the convergence between the legal condemnation of this act as a crime and the moral prohibition of it as unethical was observed. Here, legal and moral arguments can overlap to prevent further violations that directly affect the natural course of life. Based on this, Patzig emphasizes that there is no doubt that criminal condemnation and moral rejection follow parallel paths. However, it is also essential to adhere to an important conclusion: not to always assume that the legal system criminalizes certain actions because they are morally rejected and vice versa continuously (Patzig, 1971, p.17).

Commenting on Patzig’s previous proposition, he was indeed correct in distinguishing between moral commandments and legal rules due to the difference in their methodologies, as well as the difference in the essence of the legislation itself. Legal texts prioritize external contexts and their various factors, whether cultural, ideological, political, economic, or societal. On the other hand, moral legislations involve direct connection to the human essence in addition to the realities of the external world, which gives them a distinct dimension. However, I disagree with Patzig in that divine sources fundamentally influence the essence of both legal and moral legislation, giving them an overlapping nature. It should be noted that this difference is natural, resulting from the cultural, geographical, and ideological diversity between Arab and Western societies. Nevertheless, Patzig’s contribution is evident, distinguished by his attempt to address the moral problems arising from the rapid developments of the era, following the factors of technological and knowledge progress and the divergence of interests and goals, by seeking governing ethical standards with a universal quality.

From this commentary, I present the mode of activating communicative ethics as endorsed by Patzig through the principle of vital respect, which served as a system integrating various ethical justifications (religious, value-based, rational, societal, and biological), significantly influenced by Habermas's communicative theory.

In explanation, Patzig emphasizes the necessity of adopting current ethical judgments with a set of interconnected justifications, allowing all active entities capable of speaking and understanding, along with beings beyond the human scope, to communicate effectively. This grants them a morally safe life. Through this goal, Patzig sought to expand the framework of ethical questions to include inquiries about the good life of nature, raising questions such as: Is there a moral responsibility toward nature independent of human centrality? Are there any standards obligating us to protect other beings, such as animals? (Habermas, 2019, p.248).

Patzig mentions that his attempts to find a solution to the issue of ethical standards defining our obligations as humans toward nature were the most prominent and significant throughout his intellectual journey. This led him to the necessity of establishing contemporary ethical judgments on the principle of bio-protection/vital respect: a principle supporting the organization of protection and moral responsibility for all beings that share vitality with humans in this universe. It also enhances the realm of human ethical obligations with a set of vital and emotional commitments extending beyond humanity to all living beings capable of experiencing pleasure and pain. This principle encompassed all types of ethical justifications (rational, legal, religious, and biological) (Angelika Krebs, 1997, pp.272, 274). Patzig points out that this establishment process requires a proper mechanism to ensure the validity of ethical judgment, represented in the asymmetrical relationship (Patzig & Dasnsw Hardegg, 1986, p.67). The asymmetrical relationship is that communicative process that takes place among the parties engaged in ethical dialogue to consider rights and fulfill duties, but in a non-reciprocal manner (i.e., where an action does not necessarily have a similar reaction of the same kind). It is a form of communication built on vital, societal, and legal justifications, rather than purely utilitarian or rational ones. Therefore, it does not rely solely on pure rationality, where understanding and language play an independent role. For example, refraining from acts of cruelty toward animals and describing such acts as immoral is based on bio-respect, meaning respect for biological formation and the right of animals to live without experiencing pain. This, in turn, preserves our biological integration with nature (Habermas, 2019, p. 248).

In the same context, Habermas comments: "Patzig has abolished the symmetry between rights and duties, which would be a conceptual necessity, and defines the status of duties toward animals in an asymmetrical way" (Habermas, 2019, p. 249).

Patzig did not base communication between individuals and other creatures on mutual recognition of rights and duties. He justified his argument by stating that, as humans, we already have rights toward one another that bind our actions under law, reason, and utility. However, animals—those creatures incapable of defending their rights—require an ethical process to ensure their existence. This motivated Patzig to abolish the alignment of rights between humans and animals, asserting that recognition is a duty of humans toward animals, not vice versa. He stated: “Animals have no rights toward humans, but humans alone have duties toward animals” (Patzig, 1986, p. 77). Thus, the ethical inquiry into the principle of bio-respect is a pressing necessity⁽²⁾.

Accordingly, ethics that classify humans and living beings as capable of life and, at the same time, as beings that suffer and feel pain—thus including the desires and interests of animals alongside our behavior—are considered inclusive ethics. Such ethics can be judged by both reason and experience (Patzig, 1996, p. 102).

In support of his theory, Patzig attempted to create a rapprochement between utilitarian ethics and Kantian duty ethics through a new intermediary concept: preferability (*Préférabilité*), which refers to the preference in choosing among good options. Through this, moral standards binding upon us are no longer confined to human rational identity but extend to a social identity that obliges us to adopt ethics toward animals. This obligation is based on preventing harm or causing pain to any participating beings for the sake of general benefit and good (Patzig, 1986, p. 73).

Preferability reinforces ethical demands for a post-humanist sphere and ensures protection from pain and suffering. It is about respecting and preserving the lives of living beings, with the prevention of killing as the first choice. Through this, Patzig asserts that if animals had the ability to activate this demand, they would strive for it. Therefore, humans are obligated to implement it. We must reconsider laboratory experiments that are governed by protective laws but still permit unethical acts toward animals, as they contradict the vital communicative foundation. Since animals share life and social interactions with us, the priority should be given to physical interactions rather than linguistic ones. Furthermore, bio-protection is a regulation of the natural system of the universe (Patzig, 1986, p. 77).

In this context, Patzig emphasizes that enhancing human responsibility toward nature is not a call to sanctify or deify nature, as such excessive

2. Returning here to Gray's book *Straw Dogs: Thoughts On Humans and Other Animals*, which unintentionally supports Patzig's idea, it emphasizes the necessity of a vital connection between humans and animals through the values of happiness and freedom, surpassing the trait of rationality to correct violent human behaviors causing the moral crisis in Western society during the current century, making natural instinct a fundamental source for value-based actions (Gray, 2002, p.94).

emotional considerations might lead individuals to sacrifices followed by unacceptable developments. However, it should be clarified that the goal of protecting and respecting nature is an important step toward committing to future generations of both humans and living beings, allowing them to live in a healthy and good environment (Patzig, 1996, p. 64).

It should be noted that the act of empathy mentioned earlier does not refer to the typical act of assisting others but rather to its negative meaning—excessive fear that does not align with responsible protection. Within this clarification, Patzig asserts that the positive pattern of empathy involves actions driven by compassion, gratitude, mutual altruism, and the desire to assist, all grounded in respecting the dignity of the other, even if embodied in the personification of nature (Patzig, 1971, p. 43). Patzig concludes his ethical discussion with a contemporary hypothesis:

The limitation of ethical justification to reason imposes a process of alienation on societies, which means enforcing a single way of life and generalizing it to all other lives despite their cultural differences and without considering the disparities in knowledge and economy. This represents a new colonial pattern of the current era, exemplified by the forced export of Western civilization to developing countries (Patzig, 1971, p. 98). He deemed this ethically reprehensible, based on the principle that every society has its own identity from which its ethical justifications emerge, and these justifications integrate globally.

In the same context, it can be inferred that what Patzig presented through this hypothesis is a call to apply the principles of sustainable development, as declared by the United Nations General Assembly UNGA, reflecting the dynamism of Patzig's thought and his attentiveness to the continuous changes of the era.

Based on the foregoing, the ethical stance of humanity can be classified into two directions: the first supports anthropocentrism and thus rejects Patzig's perspective, as it does not consider the essential exceptions of human action and focuses solely on the value dimension of feelings of hope and happiness while avoiding pain and suffering shared by all beings. This current argues that humans, even in their experience of pain and suffering, do so at a higher level than animals because humans are rational beings who comprehend, understand, and possess memories that recognize the distant past and anticipate the future (Quranī, 2017, p. 214).

The second current supports the principle of bio-respect and is represented by contemporary communicative pioneers such as Habermas, Ernst Tugendhat (1930–2023), and Karl-Otto Apel (1922–2017). Notably, Habermas comments in support, stating that Patzig's stance is ethically correct. He argues that by relying on utilitarian ethics and duty ethics, humans have limited their

ethical responsibility to the role of humans as members of one species confronting another, rather than as members of a community. This causes ethical harm. Therefore, contemporary ethical orientations must prioritize the necessary protection of nature as a whole, as everyone shares life together. This highlights the ethical and aesthetic value of participating in vital coexistence (Habermas, 2019, p. 254). Finally, the goal that Patzig aspired to achieve was to document the relationship between all living creatures with different living capacities in order to harmonize the life system on Earth without causing harm or inflicting pain. Perhaps his goal has profound significance in relation to current events supporting the principle of “the end justifies the means.” Regardless of whether the means are harmful, violent, or reinforce principles of fanaticism and oppression, Patzig draws our attention to the necessity of awakening from our deep slumber, which has led to the collapse of the moral system due to humanity’s surrender to self-interests and engagement in them without regard for the existence of the other, who shares with us the right to life and safe coexistence. He even reminds us of the tragedy humanity committed against nature when it exercised its dominance over non-speaking living beings, leading to the deterioration of the ecological system, which posed a significant challenge to current development forces. Perhaps Patzig’s contribution is an attempt to uncover contemporary developmental paths that support ethical peace, giving his theory philosophical importance.

Conclusion

- Patzig’s rejection of the utilitarian nature of ethics stems from his influence by German ideological trends critical of utilitarian ethics, describing it as merely a superficial understanding of human existence and limiting the purpose of human life to the concept of happiness. This can also be observed in Kantian moral theory and the German influence on Habermas’s communicative philosophy. This rejection was not aimed at dismantling Aristotelian moral theory but rather at formulating contemporary ethical standards that guarantee peaceful and safe coexistence for all living beings based on a biological foundation.
- The task of philosophy is to eliminate the confusion between motives and laws to objectively justify diverse moral demands and thereby gain a clear vision of ethical decisions intertwined with life experiences.
- Addressing the moral and value imbalance of contemporary life begins with the foundation of mutual respect between individuals and among individuals and nature.

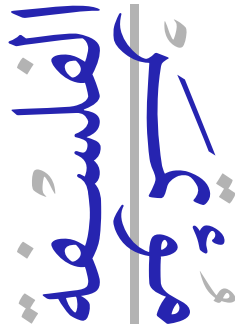
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