META: RESEARCH IN HERMENEUTICS, PHENOMENOLOGY, AND PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY
VOL. XVI, NO. 2 / DECEMBER 2024: 394-413, ISSN 2067-3655, www.metajournal.org

A Dignified Life: A Philosophy of Attention for Authentic Performance

Finn Janning
Geneva Business School – Campus Barcelona

Abstract

This study presents a philosophy of attention that promotes authentic performance. As described here, attention is about training outgoing and ingoing attention skills, which can ultimately connect an individual to others and the world. This ability can help the individual remain focused and receptive to what happens while at the same time accepting their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. The ability to pay attention is crucial to performing and living authentically, regardless of the person's area of expertise. The philosophy of attention presented here is rooted in existential philosophy, flow psychology, mindfulness, and acceptance-based psychology. It aims to help individuals and organizations examine what they can do and how they can actualize their potential more freely and with greater clarity. This results in better performance and increased existential meaningfulness and joy, leading to a more dignified life.

Keywords: Performance, Authentic, Attention, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, flow

Introduction

It is often said that success in sports is not only about physical strength and bodily elasticity but also about the athlete's state of mind—'sport is a mind game.' It is about being in the zone or flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Mumford, 2015).

In this article, I will show that this not only applies to athletes, but the mental part is crucial for everyone who wants to perform at a high level. However, the aim of this article is not solely related to performance but to what can be referred as authentic performance, which leads to existential well-being

and meaning. For an individual to perform authentically and with high intensity, regardless of the nature of the work, two elements are essential: first, attention is essential for our presence and ability to concentrate and get into the experience of being in the zone or flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). Second, freedom presupposes the ability to pay attention. Freedom, as used here, does not refer to nudging, where an individual is encouraged to behave in a certain way (e.g., financial incentives), while they are also given the freedom to choose differently (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). Nudging limits the freedom to choose between already given alternatives. By contrast, freedom, as used here, refers to becoming without a specific end goal (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000). This understanding of freedom correlates with what in mindfulness is called open awareness meditation (Kabat-Zinn, 2013) and emphasizes a shift from a spotlight consciousness—a focused mode of attention, toward a lantern consciousness—an open mode of attention (Gopnik, 2010).

Furthermore, when discussing performance, it is natural to think of competition and the vertical winner–loser mentality that characterizes many aspects of today's society. Competition is more than that. The philosopher Drew Hyland (1978) describes in the essay "Competition and Friendship" that competition initially comes from the Latin word *competitio*, which means to question or strive together. In alignment, performing is not always about winning but an opportunity to gain self-knowledge, whereby one gradually lives more authentically, expresses oneself better, and contributes to the community. The research in this article aligns well with what author and mythologist Joseph Campbell wrote: "When we quit thinking primarily about ourselves and our self-preservation, we undergo a truly heroic transformation of consciousness" (1998,126). Authentic performances bring the individual in touch with life and others.

In this article, I argue for the importance of freedom in our performance and achievements, that is, for living a life worth living. This will be done with the help of psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's *Flow Psychology, Mindfulness and Acceptance-based Psychology*, especially "Acceptance and

Commitment Therapy" (ACT), and more traditional Western philosophies of attention. More specifically, I will show how they can help to:

1. strengthen our attention toward what is happening;
2. accommodate or accept what happened and happens;
3. become aware of our self-creation and make the right and authentic choices; and
4. free ourselves from what keeps us existentially imprisoned.

All of these have an impact on our performance.

1. Method

A phenomenological inquiry is typically described as turning back to the '*Sachen selbst,*' that is, meeting and describing the world without any filter (Heidegger, 1993). Etymologically, phenomenology refers to both something appearing (*phainestai*) and bringing it to light (*phaino*); thus, phenomenology is the method about *that* which appear (Heidegger, 1993). Alternatively, Manen defines phenomenology as "Turning to experience as lived through" (Manen, 2017, xx). Phenomenology is a philosophical discipline and a specific practice used in qualitative research in anthropology, psychology, and psychotherapy. This is a receptive and sensitive way of meeting the world (McLeod, 2022). The guiding approach begins with the assumption that the researcher (or therapist) "knows nothing about the client's experience" (Erskine et al., 1999, 19). Asking questions from a position of "not knowing" is a humble approach where the researcher accepts his or their ignorance (Firestein, 2012). Common questions include the following: What is this experience? How did the meaning of this experience arise? How do we live with these experiences? How does the lived experience present itself to the researcher and the participants? (Manen, 2014; Finlay, 2012).

The participants in this study consisted of three different groups: a group of ten middle and top managers from Denmark (six women and four men), 40 pharmaceutical sellers from Spain (21 men, 19 women), and 15 school teachers and directors from Spain (13 women, 2 men). The format for two

groups was workshops of three complete days, while one group (the schoolteachers) participated in an eight-week training session of two weekly hours. The procedure consisted of presenting the participants to the theory (see the next chapter), during which I mixed traditional mindfulness exercises with individual and group reflections on the problems that they had experienced or emerged during the sessions. Next to teaching and facilitating me, I observed and took notes. I did not intervene based on these suggestions. Subsequently, I conducted simple semi-structured interviews focusing on their "lived experience" referring to the workshop and what emerged. Thus, the lived experience, more specifically, refers to whatever the workshop activated from the past or during the session, stressing the importance of allowing participants to decide what was worth dwelling on further. The process was as follows: 1) turning towards the lived experience, 2) allowing participants to wonder and dwell on what happens, 3) locating or formulating key questions or problems, 4) reflecting alone and/or in groups, and 5) deciding how to move on.

For example, turning to a lived experience could refer to having experienced frustration in a particular work situation and what it was like, especially what it *felt* like. Thus, a wonder about this experience opens or deepens its meaning or significance. What might it mean? According to Heidegger (1993), wonder is an essential part of phenomenological inquiry, asking questions about the obvious or what one takes for granted. The process of wondering strengthens the main problem or question that the participant, alone or together, can reflect. Experience (or data) is not analyzed according to any ideal or set of norms; instead, it is an immanent analysis based solely on what happens and what possibilities it opens (Deleuze, 2002). In that sense, I link phenomenological inquiry with an immanent ethical practice, where the question is not what the individual should or ought to do but what might also be possible. This method correlates with the general theoretical approach and idea of attention training in workshops.

The idea of linking attention, authenticity, and flow comes from French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. In *The Logic of Sense* he writes, "Either ethics makes no sense at all, or this is what it means and has nothing else to say: not to be unworthy of what happens to us" (2004, 169). The idea was that a dignified life equals a life worth living. This is my first thesis. The central questions are as follows: How can we bear in mind what occurs? How can the participants *will* and release what happens to them? Ethics in this context are not about judging but about affective or emotional relations between a collective of minds and bodies, for example, at a workplace. These interconnections can be combined to enhance the ability to perform or inhibit joint agency. It is not relevant whether what happens is in line with individual goals but how an individual can open, perhaps transform, in meetings with collective forces. There is something dignified when trying to match what is happening without judgment. A dignified or worthy life is, therefore, not passive acceptance but emphasizes the active aspect of how a person can come into harmony with life, connect with the world, and grow in new directions. Psychologist Rollo May wrote in *The Courage to Create*:

> Human freedom involves our capacity to pause between the stimulus and response and, in this pause, to choose the one response toward which we wish to throw our weight. The capacity to create ourselves, based on this freedom, is inseparable from consciousness or self-awareness (1994, 100).

Awareness is knowing. For example, becoming aware of thought instead of being lost in one's thoughts; when this happens, a liberating opening occurs in the mind, where a person can focus on what is lighter, freer, and not burdened by objectives. Create new values full of zest for life. "Freedom means letting go of suffering," writes meditation teacher Joseph Goldstein in *Insight Meditation* (2003, 5).

It is my conviction that a dignified life revolves around becoming free. Freedom is a central concept. This is my second thesis. As Simone de Beauvoir writes, "[f]reedom is the source from which all meanings and values spring" (2015, 23). The

overall thesis is that free people perform better than unfree people; they create value because they live with dignity.

2. A Theoretical Sketch

There are several ways to understand the relationship between attention and performance. For example, in an attention economy, attention is considered a limited resource that should be allocated in the best possible way to maximize profit. Attention has become an instrument for this purpose. In the following, attention is not a resource or an instrument but is linked to experience, understood as an investigative and experimental way of living, where the side effect is increased joy in life and more authentic achievements.[1]

2.1. Flow

In *Flow: The Psychology of Happiness* (2002), psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes flow as a committed action in which we are fully present. The best moments are not passive or receptive and write Csikszentmihalyi but occur when our body and mind work at the limits of their performance. "Optimal experience is something that we make happen" (2002, 3). In the article "Play and intrinsic rewards," Csikszentmihalyi defines flow as "a state in which action follows action according to an internal logic … we experience is as a unified flowing from one moment to the next … in which there is little distinction between self and environment; between stimulus and response; or between past, present and future" (1975, 42). Later, in an interview, he defined flow as "being completely involved in an activity for its own sake. The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one, like playing jazz. Your whole being is involved, and you're using your skills to the utmost" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). According to the psychologist, there is a formula for this optimal state: "Flow occurs when both challenges and skills are high and equal to each other. Good flow activity is one offers challenges at several levels of complexity" (1996).

Multiple levels of complexity refer to challenges that can arise owing to changing situations, which become an incentive to explore, test, and develop one's skills. This flow opens the process of self-discovery. No one knows what they are capable of, both physically and mentally, until they try. Flow is an invitation to live on the edge of one's performance within the field where one is currently performing with joy. For the same reason, flow is not a passive experience but a recognition of being part of something, constantly becoming. The individual constantly affirms that, which increases his/her ability to perform, sets the forces of life free. Liberation is connected to the fact that in the flow experience, an individual is not burdened with how he or it must approach the challenges; rather, the learning process is an integral part of the practice.

The end goal is not what primarily matters; instead, it is the immediate feedback associated with doing something valuable such as playing a game.[2] Csikszentmihalyi also mentions chess players, tennis players, and mountain climbers. The latter knows that an incorrect decision is equivalent to a fall. The act itself matters more than obtaining a reward or avoiding punishment. Individuals are free to actualize their unknown potential. An unimagined potential does not mean that we can become whatever we want; rather, we still do not know what can be achieved. No one enters the flow because they want to but solely by devoting themselves to their current activity. "What you look for too determinedly, you do not find. However, he who in his thinking life has first given free rein to their spontaneous source will lack neither ideas nor values," writes Merleau-Ponty (1999, 111).

Flow is stretched between the past and future, where life is never completely edited or created. Similarly, human existence is not provided once or for all. This is constantly becoming the case. However, if the spontaneous movements of life are controlled or pressed into too rigid forms of thought, feeling and behavior—regardless the well-intentioned intentions—the scope for action is minimized. When freedom is minimized, the level of performance decreases, along with the possible meaningfulness and joy of being alive. In the absence

of freedom, no flow was observed. This does not imply that the flow is purely chaotic. By contrast, flow is associated with increased awareness, which depends on the ability to pay attention. Several techniques and approaches can help promote a more mindful lifestyle.

2.2. Mindfulness and Acceptance-Based Psychologies

Mindfulness- and acceptance-based psychologies belong to the third wave of behavioral therapies (Hayes et al, 2006).

The first refers to traditional behavioral therapy that focuses exclusively on shaping behavior (e.g., Skinner). In the second wave, we found that unlike the first wave, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) focused on thoughts, feelings, and choices. Here, the therapist helps the client change dysfunctional thought patterns and emotional behaviors. A classic book by the positive psychologist Martin Seligman, *Learned Optimism* (2006), is an example. Here, he shows how pessimists can learn to become more optimistic using a set of cognitive skills, for example, through the psychologist Ellis's ABCDE model. Adversity sets in motion beliefs that can have negative consequences due to the client's pessimistic outlook; for this reason, the client is encouraged to dispute his or her beliefs until he or she feels existentially *uplifted (energization*). In the third wave of behavioral therapy, mindfulness and ACT were observed. ACT psychologists Hayes and Strosahl (2004) argue in *Practical Guide to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy* is contrary to CBT – that trying to control and change thoughts and feelings is not worthwhile. In contrast, an attempt to change them is a part of the problem. For the same reason, mindfulness and ACT therapists attempt to help clients accept their inner experiences. As with flow, this is not an act of will. Individuals can accept only what they can make room for.

Mindfulness can help individuals to become aware of what is important and existentially rewarding. Mindfulness is characterized by mental clarity that arises from being mindfully aware of the present moment in a kind and nonjudgmental way (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Within ACT, clients are similarly helped to increase their psychological flexibility,

which is described as "the ability to contact the present more fully as a conscious person and to change or maintain behavior when it serves valuable purposes" (Hayes et al., 2006, 7).[3] For example, can mindfulness practice help individuals witness what they feel, think, or experience. Based on this, a person can give up what he or it holds for selfish reasons (e.g., a special identity or narcissistic self-image) and make room for something bigger.

What occurs refers to both the inevitable suffering of life, such as interpersonal breaks, dismissals, illness, and death, and the suffering that arises because we cannot accept the initial inevitable suffering. The formula is as follows: unavoidable suffering + denial = avoidable suffering. Denial can be replaced by the acceptance of self-care and compassion.[4] Within ACT, the focus is more on intentions and values than on objectives and goals. Values are often regarded as immutable principles that are subsequently evaluated, even though they presuppose evaluations. More operationally, values differ from goals in that goals are limited; they end, and the person moves on to the next thing. These values are infinite. They are ways of being that can never be redeemed, but can guide action from one moment to the next. Some ways of being are judgmental, whereas others are positive and inclusive.

Flow is valuable because of its inherent freedom; however, there is no guarantee that people in flow are compassionate and generous. Csikszentmihalyi states

> [i]ndividuals who depart from the norms—heroes, saints, sages, artists, and poets, as well as madmen and criminals—look for different things in life than most others do. The existence of people like these shows that consciousness can be ordered in terms of different goals and intentions. Each of us has this freedom to control our subjective reality (2002, 28).

Consciousness is also linked to freedom. It arises in an encounter with or about something that an individual can take in and function with, whereby the person experiences joy and strength. Alternatively, a person may become drained, frustrated, and sad because something threatens his or their becoming.

Psychological flexibility can help individuals cope more, but also clarify one's limits in terms of what that person can tolerate. When exploring one's limits, it is important not to judge oneself or the circumstances but instead to attentively, curiously, creatively, and compassionately explore the possibilities of new authentic achievements. The authentic does not refer to a particular ideal of existence, but rather to an experimental way of life, where a person continuously gets to know him or herself better to become the person that he or she can become.

2.3. Attention Philosophy

Although many today associate mindfulness with Eastern philosophy, the concept has a long history in Western philosophy. Aristotle writes, for example, in *The Nicomachean Ethics*,

> A man who sees is aware that he is seeing, a man who hears that he is hearing and a man who walks that he is walking; and similarly, in all our other activities there is something that is aware of them, so that if we perceive, we perceive that we are perceiving, and if we think, that we are thinking. To be conscious that we are perceiving or thinking is to be conscious of our existence … To be conscious that one is alive is something pleasant (2004, 228).

Aristotle's awareness is a sensitive form of bodily experience or bodily consciousness, in which attention is directed outwardly and inwardly. This means that what matters is not what a person wants, but what a person can do. No matter how much a person wants something, they can only do what they can currently do and what they are currently capable of. However, what a person can do now is something impermanent in that the human being is in a constant process of becoming (Dweck, 2019).

The Irish philosopher Iris Murdoch (2001) says in *The Sovereignty of Good* that introspective self-reflection is a false picture of a good life. She believed that we could easily preserve some conceptual structures that had previously made the concept of God comprehensible. For example, replacing God's religious idea with the concept of the good. Contrary to Plato's transcendent world of ideas, which refers to an idealized,

abstract, and normative world, Murdoch believes that the good reveals itself to us in our daily encounters. This occurs when we experience a loving gesture or action and various forms of kindness and helpfulness. Or the opposite. Murdoch shows admirable faith in the human ability to assess whether a concrete event is good or less good. "Attention is rewarded with an acknowledgment of reality" she writes (2001, 87). The Irish thinker also pointed out that if we live attentively, we will be able to see who needs extra care, a hug, a reprimand, and so on. Instead of striving to live up to ideals, we become aware of loving and joyful encounters when they occur.

Attention is the receptivity that gradually enables the individual to bear more and become worthy of bearing the event that occurs or happens to us. Murdoch (2001) describes this practice using the term unselfing, which opens our body and mind to others and the world. To transcend oneself and expand one's limitations – becoming freer. Through this attention, we can gain a sense of how selflessness and freedom are connected.

Let us summarize some similarities between flow, mindfulness, ACT, and Murdoch's philosophy of attention.

First, it is an outgoing or outwardly turned practice that differs from much of the contemporary tendency to focus exclusively on oneself (Janning, 2015). The purpose of turning attention outward is that the individual experiences things with all his or their senses as they truly are and not through a narrow egoistic lens that only cares about personal goals, pursuit of status, and possible prestige. "The ego falls away," says Csikszentmihalyi (1996, xx). Murdoch writes we must let go of "the big fat relentless ego" (2001, 51). This ego hinders achievements. For example, due to selfish concerns, an individual submits goals that are not rewarding to him or them. No one gets into flow because of stimulating dreams and beautiful wishes, but only by engaging attentively in what the person is doing here and now. Another important point is that because we live largely inattentively, many people overlook the experiences they have already experienced. We have all experienced moments of joy, self-forgetfulness, and contemplation where time flies, a feeling of "mastering our destiny" writes Csikszentmihalyi (2002, 3).

Attention training is an invitation to turn our attention outwardtoward life and our engagement with the world, and then inwardtoward the thoughts, feelings, and inner experiences that pass through. The more attentively we live, the clearer it becomes for all people to connect. Individual performance has become a collective effort towards improvement. How can these thoughts and ideas be compressed so that they do not remain concepts or theories, but rather concrete bodily experiences of freedom, presence, and commitment?

3. Attention Training and Reflections

The following examples is based on my interview and observation of the participants. In various workshops, I have worked with four dimensions:

1) *Attention*—a both outward-turned and inward-turned practice that emphasizes a nonjudgmental and present presence, as well as a contemplative immersion.

2) *Problematizing* – which is Accepting, unfolding, perspective, nuance, questioning, doubting, and investigating.

3) *Make the decision worth repeating* – which depends on what I do, that is, how I live with the experiences I have made and the problems I have encountered, how I move forward—what do I reach forward to my own and the general future existence of the coming human beings?

4) *Freedom*— The temporary result of the decision, which is transformative in that it lets go of the destructive and makes room for the growth of existential rewards.

This is not a slavish linear practice but rather a set of dimensions that affect each other. The first three interact crosswise, whereas the freedom is an ongoing evaluation. However, most problems arise owing to inattention. Something crucial is being overlooked.

For example, many are busy comparing themselves to teammates, colleagues, or competitors instead of focusing on their own events. What happens to them? Similarly, many participants were distracted. It could be argued that they had interacted with their partner earlier, which blurred their

ability to concentrate during the day. Alternatively, geopolitical incidents can occur elsewhere. In both situations, the participants were mentally different from their bodies. Problems can be concrete incidents that contradict expectations and hopes. An employee who is overlooked in a project or receives less encouragement (e.g., recognition); an employee who receives a lower bonus. The result is often frustration, anger, and bitterness, which makes people forget the space of possibilities between stimuli and response, where they are free to focus on what is important. Training attention can reveal the deeper-seated enjoyment and envy that exist not only among competitors but also between colleagues and teammates. Ignorance, desire for something else, or aversion to what appears or comes to light (Heidegger, 1993). Some problems become more evident when a person imagines that he or she has found the ”solution” to a problem, but on reflection, realizes that the decision is not worth repeating because it was not liberatingor it harmed others, leaving the person with a new problem. Attention is essential, as it brings people into direct contact or touch with the world, whereby they can more easily overcome their own ego. Like all other types of abilities and capacities, the ability to pay attention must be maintained. This can be done with the help of meditation, but also with daily effort; for example, when a person talks to another person, they give each other their full attention. Can you stay focused and present when talking to your daughter, partner, or college member?

Attention enables individuals to register what is occurring. In addition, it makes people aware of what they may not be able to accommodate. However, they could not maintain their concentrations. It is here that problematization can have a clarifying effect in such situations. Why do I not accept what is happening? What does this get to do with me? Is it my ego getting in the way? Or, more concretely, how do I relate to a family member or colleague that I do not like? How do I respond to an attack on my vanity, professionalism, gender or sexuality? How do you fall into and out of job satisfaction or love? How can I improve my daily life? How do I know that the right thing is correct?

The ability to look inwards must be balanced with the ability to look outward. Be clear of the experiences that a person has for him or itself from one moment to another. Attention is also about having sufficient self-awareness to know that one's ego is nothing more than an empty form shaped by his one's receptivity and contact with the world. This opens up a more compassionate approach for oneself and others.

The problematization phase is not about finding a solution as if it already existed on a shelf-down in the basement. A rigid problem-solving approach quickly reduces or "treats life as a problem to be solved rather than a process to be lived" (Hayes, 2019, 10). Instead, the challenge will be to create new ways of performing, working, and living to overcome the problem. Alternatively, they simply try new forms of life. Problems can arise due to a lack of imagination, conceptual errors, ideological obsessions, false assumptions, or a lack of distinction between prescriptive and descriptive languages. Alternatively, perhaps the problem is his, her, or theirs, as the person is unable to relate to what is said to them, after which they want to wipe it out on others, making it their fault that they allowed themselves to be influenced—that is, they are not aware of alternative paths ahead. It often helps clarify the problems faced by a person. The challenge is to accept or view the problem as an independent phenomenon that exists, regardless of the individual. Therefore, the person is not a problem although it does affect them.

A few examples: A female HR manager felt offended when one of her male colleagues complimented her appearance. "You look good." Without condemning the man or herself, she became aware that the problem was not as much in his words as her fear of not being taken seriously. When she thoroughly reviewed her experience with the man, she realized that he had never doubted her professional abilities or leadership. On the contrary. She also recognized that men were generally friendly and complimentary toward all her colleagues, both male and female. There was nothing sexual in the courtesies. She discovered that the problem was connected to the special perspective through which she interpreted the man's words. Gradually, she recognized that her sense of inadequacy was

rooted in the lack of a more pluralistic perspective and psychological flexibility that could help her accept and see value in momentary doubt and uncertainty, without blaming others. Acknowledging this, she felt empowered and encouraged to live a more committed life, in accordance with her values.

Another example concerns a lack of recognition and feelings of injustice, as an employee did not receive what he or it thought they deserved. This feeling triggered anger, frustration, and resignation. Several participants (from all three groups) recognized that part of the problem was connected to the persons' expectations, beliefs, and even fantasies about the future that they themselves had created. The lack of recognition hit in a double way because the person acknowledged that they had not been true to themselves but compromised to please a leader or a particular ideal or goal. The importance of allowing value to guide people's lives has become imminent.

The third example concerns a group of salespeople who suffer from stress and have lost their job satisfaction. The problem was that they no longer managed to be presently aware because their thoughts jumped from a depressed mood about the unfulfilled goals of the past to a fear of the insurmountable goals of the future. I asked them why they were salespeople, and gradually we got closer to the rewarding challenges and intrinsic pleasure they associated with their work. We focused on the present moment and its values while disregarding the goals. Thus, by focusing on doing what is important here and now, they gradually rediscovered the joy of workand, interestingly, from the company's point of view, their sales improved.

The fourth example concerns a group of teachers who became aware of how they unintentionally confused their teenage students by saying, "You must follow your heart" (humanistic psychology), "You should avoid certain thoughts" (cognitive therapy) and "Remember to behave properly" (behavioral psychology). The heightened awareness helped the educators expand their own psychological flexibility and notice how their well-intentioned advice to students pointed in conflicting and confusing directions.

Thus, what is a better way forward?

The third element—the decision—is, in short, about following Nietzsche's idea of eternal repetition. What he suggests is that the question in everything that we do is "[d]o you desire this once more and innumerable times? Would you lie upon your actions as the greatest weight" (1974, 273). Thus, imagine repeatedly living the life you are living right now. This eternal repetition of the drumbeat of life. This idea might seem confusing and boring for many, but why exactly? What does it say about our lives, our working lives if we do not want to repeat most of the things that we do? For Nietzsche, eternal return opens the possibility that what you repeat is something enriched and joyful. What is pleasurable, of course, depends on how you want to live your life, what you can do, and the changing context. However, each moment the person is confronted with the following question: Would you repeat this?

The fourth dimension was type of validation. Decisions that someone does not want to repeat, free, no one. They inhibit and rain people. Some of the reflective questions were as follows: Did your decision make you freer? Did it improve your existence? Were you strengthened existentially? Do you perform better? Do you feel increased zest for life and empowerment?

Becoming dignified or worthy of what happens, therefore, is not about life having to be lived in a certain way but relating to what happened in a certain way, namely, a way that is meaningful and joyous. It is of no use, as Murdoch writes, to tell a person that they should stop loving their old lover. "What is needed is reorientation," she writes—a different way of living or being in the world—"that will provide a different kind of energy." She continues, "to stop loving is not an act of will, but to become aware of something else" (1999, 345).

Attention helps people to become aware of something else. Perhaps another way of responding to what happens is possible and worth trying.

Conclusion

Most of us have experienced something that we find difficult to bear. When a person cannot accept what is

happening, their performance becomes less free and excellent, and they or acts with reduced spontaneity and authenticity. Unfortunately, many try to avoid what they fail to make room for, that is, accepting life difficulties, and fail to affirm what might be worth repeating. The latter part, which might be worth repeating, requires that the person attentively experiences life.

With attention training, people can learn to accept what happens as it occurs, including their own inappropriate behaviors or mistakes. Thus, they create a space for opportunity in which joy can arise. Experiencing these moments of joy can help a person gain courage to act by following what is liberating – what is significant – to his or their values.

A worthy or dignified person does not create a mode of existence in which he or it lives. They live in such a way that they create space.

NOTES

[1] The American psychologist William James (1890, 402) writes that attention is not a passive experience but the opposite: "My experience is what I agree to participate in."

[2] I deliberately read Csikszentmihalyi in alignment with my research focusing more on valued living, not solely goals, which opens for more authentic performance.

[3] ACT focuses on six processes to establish psychological flexibility: Cognitive defusion, Acceptance, Committed action, Values, Present moment and Self-as-context. I will not go into more detail about these, but depending on the difficulties that a client may have in terms of accepting one's own thoughts, feelings, actions or what happens, certain processes can be more liberating to work with than others.

[4] Mindfulness (wisdom) and compassion are the two wings of Buddhism. You can be mindful without being compassionate, but not the other way around. Compassion is an important component of acceptance (see Janning, 2018).

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Finn Janning, PhD, works on the nature of attention and human existence—research interests in practical philosophy, philosophy of attention, and existential counseling. Lecturing at Geneva Business School – Campus Barcelona.

Address:
Finn Janning
Geneva Business School – Campus Barcelona
Carrer de Rivadeneyra, 4, Ciutat Vella
08002 Barcelona, Spain
Email: fjanning@gbsge.com