Part I

Visions of Philosophy
The main aims of this paper are: 1) to present and defend a view of philosophy as the performative art or craft of living (well); and 2) to argue that in contemporary Western societies self-trust is an essential component of a well-lived life. I take this to be one possible account of what philosophy may amount to, rather than the only one that can justifiably lay claim to the title.

This paper consists of three main sections. In the first I contrast a ‘doctrinal’ conception of philosophy as a body of knowledge with an ‘artistic’ conception of philosophy as a craft. I trace the Socratic origins of the latter, and argue that the art of living is a performative art, like dance, rather than a productive art, like shoemaking. In the second section I show that an attitude of self-assured conviction is an essential part of living well. I also argue that self-confidence is a manifestation of intellectual self-trust. In the third section I defend the identification of the art of living with philosophy. Finally, I draw some of the methodological implications of this identification.

1

1

The view that philosophy is a craft or an art can be traced to Greco-Roman roots as far back as Socrates. It finds its main expression in various Hellenistic schools but especially within Stoicism. More recently it has influenced the works of Nietzsche, Wittgenstein,

1 In this paper I use the terms ‘art’ and ‘craft’ interchangeably. I do not understand crafts to be mere skills or know-hows. Instead, they can involve characteristic patterns of desire, emotion, and motivation.
and Foucault. It has often been identified with a conception of philosophy as the art of living. This view stands in contrast to another understanding of philosophy as a body of theories or doctrines. In this section I explain these two contrasting views of philosophy and argue that the art of living is a performative art, like dance, rather than a productive art like making shoes.

**Doctrinal and artistic conceptions of philosophy.** I reserve the term ‘doctrinal’ for the conception of philosophy as a collection of philosophical claims which purport to be true. This is the most popular approach in the contemporary English-speaking scene; it can take one of many forms. It finds its purest expression in Timothy Williamson’s view that philosophy is a science like other sciences and that philosophical knowledge is knowledge of reality, typically of its modal and abstract features (Williamson 2007). But it is also exemplified in Wilfrid Sellars’ conception of philosophy as offering a synoptic view of everything there is, which would enable one to relate the findings of some natural and social sciences to those of others (Sellars 1991). Even Bernard Williams’ conception of philosophy as a humanistic discipline is doctrinal since its task, in his view, is to provide a reflective understanding of our ideas about ourselves, our customs and values so that we can form a true picture of what they are (Williams 2006).

I adopt the term ‘artistic’ for any conception of philosophy as a craft or an art. This was arguably the dominant view in classical antiquity. The approach has its origins in the Socratic analogy of philosophy with various arts and crafts. In a number of Platonic dialogues Socrates is portrayed as enjoining his interlocutors to engage in the craft of taking care of one’s own soul. In *Alcibiades*

---

2 I lack the space to address their views here. I have discussed Wittgenstein’s conception of philosophy as a kind of therapy in (Tanesini 2004).

3 Or more accurately, in order to be faithful to the Greek origin of this conception, philosophy is the activity of trying to acquire the art of living. Excellence would be the preserve of the sage who has achieved wisdom rather than of the philosopher who seeks to learn how to live well. In this paper I shall write as if philosophy were the art itself rather than the training for the acquisition of this art.

4 My overview of the Socratic position is greatly indebted to (Sellars 2011).

5 It should be noted that ancient philosophers usually thought of the soul as the set of abilities such as self-locomotion, perception, or thinking possessed by an organism. As such the soul was not thought of as a substance that would survive the death of the body.
I (hereafter, *Alc. I*) Socrates compares a number of crafts such as shoemaking, horsemanship and navigation. These are skills which assist in taking care of one’s shoes, horses and passengers. In addition to these skills which take care of one’s belongings, there is – Socrates urges – a distinct art for taking care of oneself (*Alc. I: 127e ff.*). Since one is identical with one’s soul rather than one’s body, this art must concern taking care of one’s soul. In the same dialogue but also in the *Gorgias* (hereafter, *Gorg.*), Socrates claims that skills presuppose knowledge of principles. Thus, the shoemaker must know facts about shoes and their manufacture in order to make good shoes. By analogy the art of taking care of oneself presupposes self-knowledge (*Alc. I: 129c*). The ability to provide a rational account, which presupposes the possession of relevant propositional knowledge, is in Socrates’ words the main distinguishing characteristic between those who have a skill and those who possess a knack or a routine (*Gorg.: 465a*). Since knowledge of this sort can be imparted to one’s apprentices, Socrates appears to conclude that crafts can be rationally taught (cf. Irwin 1977: 74).

The art of taking care of one’s soul is the art of taking care of oneself. It is, in other words, the art or craft of living. This approach is further developed by the Stoics who latch onto the Socratic analogy of the art of taking care of one’s soul with the art of taking care of one’s body (medicine). In their view philosophy is the therapy for the diseases of the soul which if successful permits one to live well. It is a therapy which one must practice on oneself.

**Performative and productive arts.** There are at least two different kinds of craft: productive and performative. Productive arts, like shoemaking or medicine, are the crafts of making something; they are practised in order to make excellent products. Expertise in the craft is measured by the quality of the product and the reliability of its production. Shoemakers, for example, produce footwear, whilst doctors produce health (*Charmides: 166a*). The product thus provides an objective measure of success by which one can tell apart those who have the skills, from learners and impostors. One can judge whether a pair of shoes is good by seeing how they fare when

---

6 Here, and throughout this paper, I shall not address the question whether these were the views of the historical Socrates as opposed to the character in Plato’s dialogues.

7 The Platonic source is (*Gorg.: 464c*).
worn. One does not need to be a shoemaker oneself to be able to decide whether the craftsperson is any good at what she does.

Other arts are performative because they are exhibited in performance. Music making is Socrates’ favourite example of a performative art; dance is another example. The characteristic activities of the productive arts have a distinctive structure since they culminate in a terminus or goal whose achievement determines whether the whole process has been successful. For example, the completion of the manufacture of a pair of shoes is the goal of the activity of shoemaking. The performatives involve activities which are often, although perhaps not always, not structured by a terminus. For example, both dancing and music playing can continue indefinitely since they do not need to be performances of existing pieces of music or choreographed ballets. But even when the musician is following a score and thus stops playing when she has come to the end of the piece, the success of the performance is not determined by its ending or by any other single moment during, before or after the performance.

The characteristic activities of productive and performative arts thus have different shapes. The activities which one does well when one is a productive craftsperson have the shape of projects; those which are done well by the skilled performer have the shape of performances. In what follows I explain several of the features that distinguish projects from performances before arguing that life has the shape of a performance rather than a project. I conclude that the art of living, which is the craft of doing well the activity of living, is a performative art.

Projects and performances. The main difference between activities which are projects and those which are performances is that the former but not the latter are wholly constituted by their relations to goals. A project is a complex set of activities carried out over time which has a constitutive goal. For example, writing a paper is a project since it is an activity with various components each of which purports to contribute to achieving the aim. The goal is, thus, a criterion for separating the acts that belong to the project from those which do not. In addition, the correct description of each act that is a component of the project must make a reference to its contribution

---

---
to the achievement of the aim of the project as a whole. Performances do not have this goal-directed structure. An act of performing a given step, for instance, is not always carried out in order to achieve a separate goal. The dancer may improvise but even when she is not, because she is executing choreography, the point of the movement is in its contribution to the whole of which it is a constituent rather than its contribution to a goal. This is not to say that the dancer may not also treat the dance as a project. If she does, she may, for example, have the goal of completing a particularly difficult set of moves. When this happens the same movement may belong to two different activities. As a component of a performance a step is intelligible for its contribution to a more comprehensive whole, as a component of a project the same step has the significance of a means to achieving a goal. In short, when carrying out a performance individual acts are for the sake of the whole performance, but when one engages in a project individual acts are executed in order to achieve a goal.  

Two main differences between projects and performances flow from the fact that the former are structured by means–ends [in order to] relations while the latter by subordinate–superordinate [for the sake of] relations. First, the motivation for engaging in a project is a desire whose satisfaction is brought about by the achievement of the goal which completes the activity. Thus, when the shoemaker has made the shoes she wanted to make she can stop working until she wants to make another pair of shoes. The motivation to perform takes a different shape. There is no end state which counts as the desired outcome of the activity so that once it is achieved the activity stops. Instead, the motivation must be something more akin to love than to desire. Thus, whilst desire stops once it has been satisfied, love does not end when one has obtained what one loves. If I love reading, my love for the activity does not stop when

9 The expressions ‘in order to’ and ‘for the sake of’ are often used in the literature to refer to the same distinction between means and ends [or goals], instrumental and final values [Korsgaard 1983: 170]. Instead I wish to use them to mark two distinct notions. I reserve ‘in order to’ for the relation of means [which have instrumental value] to goals or ends [which have final value]. I use the expression ‘for the sake of’ to mark the connection between parts [whose value is contributory] and wholes [which have final value]. The distinction between an end as a goal of an action and an end as that for the sake of which one acts has been discussed by [Velleman 2006: Ch. 4]. [Blattner 2000] finds similar concerns in the work of Martin Heidegger.
I am doing it. However, if I want an ice-cream, my desire stops when it has been satisfied.\textsuperscript{10}

Second, the value of the activities which are constituents of projects is, \textit{qua} parts of projects, merely that of tools for achieving the goal. For instance, the value of making shoes is that of a means to an end (a good pair of shoes) from which it derives its value. The value of a component of a performance such as a dance, instead, is \textit{qua} constituent of the larger activity, a matter of its contribution to the value of the whole activity. Thus, the part has value because it is part [rather than cause or tool] of a whole to whose value it contributes.\textsuperscript{11} In other words, because projects are structured by means–end relations the value of component activities will be instrumental, whilst given that performances are structured by subordinate–superordinate relations the value of constituent activities will be contributive.

\textbf{The art of living.} In the remainder of this section I argue that the craft of living must be a performative art because (i) living is the activity done well when one manifests this art, and (ii) life is a performance rather than a project. I shall address the question whether it is plausible to claim that philosophy can be identified with this craft in the final section.

Both Socrates and the Stoics, however, seem to have thought of this art as productive. They are likely to have been motivated by two considerations. First, they talked about the art of living as the project of learning how to live well. Second, they thought that expertise in this art must be objectively assessable. Productive arts fulfil this requirement since even those who lack the craft can often judge whether a person can carry out projects to a successful completion. Performative arts instead are opaque to the non-initiated. It is practically impossible for someone who is not herself an expert to appreciate the difference between an excellent and a merely competent performance. This feature of the performative arts may lead one to doubt that there is any such thing as genuine expertise. The Stoics and Socrates feared this conclusion and for this

\textsuperscript{10} Some desires may be persistent because they are impossible to satisfy since they are directed toward unachievable goals.

\textsuperscript{11} Of course, the activity as a whole and its parts may also be valuable as means to further ends such as health or pleasure.
reason they may have been inclined to press the view that the art of living is productive.

There are two plausible candidates as the goal of the art of living conceived as a productive art. These are: some specific state of one’s soul whose achievement guarantees that one’s life goes well, or the well-lived life itself. The Stoics adopted the first of these two positions and proposed that the state of the soul that one must aim at to live well is an attitude of acceptance toward everything that happens to one.

In order to assess the plausibility of the view under discussion it is helpful to consider an analogy with medicine as the productive art concerned with bringing about, and maintaining a healthy state. Health is the goal of therapeutic activities since its achievement individuates the activity, determines its success, satisfies the desire that motivated it, brings it to an end, and confers instrumental value to the activity as a whole and to its components. The goal of the art of living cannot be an attitude, since if it were its achievement would terminate the activity. So if acceptance were the goal of living, once one has acquired this attitude and therefore satisfied the desire to have it, there would be no reason to continue living. One may object that obtaining the attitude is not sufficient as one may also desire to preserve it, so that the project of accepting life cannot ever be completed. But if so, the project would never be successful, since successful projects require that their goal is achieved. Hence, since the well-lived life cannot be a failed project, then its goal cannot be the preservation of an accepting attitude.\(^{12}\)

Perhaps, however, the goal may be to adopt an accepting attitude as long as one lives. Whilst this goal is achievable, if one thinks of life as a project aimed at this goal, the value of one’s current activities wholly depends on one’s future ability to maintain an accepting attitude. Hence, it is only at the moment of death that it might turn out that a life was well-lived (or not). Whilst it is not implausible to claim that the future may be part of what determines whether the present is well-lived, it is implausible to claim that a necessary feature of a well-lived life is the presence of a desire (to

---

\(^{12}\) One may take these considerations to show that a well-lived life is impossible. I think that this conclusion is unwarranted unless all other options have been shown to fail.
adopt an accepting attitude as long as one lives) which must remain unsatisfied until death. These considerations, however, are not telling against the possibility that acceptance may be the goal of the project of learning to live well because it may be a necessary part of a life well-lived without being its goal.

We are thus left with the possibility that the goal of the art of living is simply a life well-lived. In this context I wish to remain neutral about what must be the case for a life to be well-lived. My concern is with a more abstract issue: namely whether an art of living could have a goal that brings it to completion, given that a well-lived life is the most plausible candidate for that role. In order to answer the question we need to bear in mind that the aim of an activity is the end to which the activity is a means so that the activity is carried out in order to achieve the aim. That is, projects are carried out in order to bring into existence a good, which one previously lacked, whose production successfully completes the activity. For instance, the shoemaker who is able to make shoes initiates her shoemaking activity with the goal of producing a new pair of shoes which she did not have before.

Suppose that the art of living were the craft of executing well a project whose aim is obtaining a good (the well-lived life) which one currently lacks. If so, once the goal is achieved and the desire to live well is satisfied, the person would no longer want to live well. Hence, if life were the project whose goal is the well-lived life, one could not live well. Either one would desire to live well because one is currently not living well or, if one’s desire were satisfied one would no longer desire it and therefore not engage in the project of living. The paradox disappears if living well is the object of love rather than desire. If one loves living well, having a well-lived life will offer a motivation for continuing to live. This is because living well is not something one is aiming to achieve (because one does not have it), it is that for the sake of which one lives. That is to say, the value of each activity that is part of living is at least partly a matter of its contribution to a whole which is the well-lived life (cf. Blattner 2000).

13 So I shall not discuss whether a well-lived life must be a happy one, or one in which one’s desires are satisfied, or one that manifests a variety of objective goods.
A comparison with another performative art may be of assistance here. Consider the example of someone who is learning to play the piano. The learner may have a number of projects whose goals are to achieve clear outcomes such as being able to play a given piece without error. Once the learner has acquired some level of expertise, she may play the same piece for the sake of playing. In this instance, playing the piece well is no longer the goal of her playing activity whose achievement completes it. Rather, even though she may also have other motives for playing at any given time, playing well is the end for the sake of which she engages in the activity. She plays because she loves playing. It is her love of playing that motivates her to play and to improve. The success of her playing is not determined by the achievement of a goal. Instead, success depends on the quality of the performance as a whole to which its parts contribute.

These considerations show that if living is an activity which can be done well by those who have mastered the art of living, it must have the structure of a performance since living (well) is that for the sake of which one lives rather than the goal of living. In the next section I turn to the more substantive question about what it may take to live well; for now I wish to address four outstanding questions for the account developed so far. First, one may object that it presupposes that for any activity there is a corresponding craft of doing it well. Second, one may argue that living is not an activity. Third, one may claim that possession of the craft is not a guarantee that one will perform well in every instance. Fourth, one may object that well-lived lives are often shaped by projects.

In response to the first objection, I want to distinguish activities from mere succession of events. We have a succession of events, when one thing merely follows another in time. Activities instead also have some organizational structure since they are either projects or performances. Either way activities can be a success or a failure; whilst successions of events cannot. A project is a success if and only if its goal is achieved. A performance is a success if and only if it embodies that for the sake of which it is undertaken. So both projects and performances can be carried out well or badly. Consequently, for every activity there is a craft which consists in the ability to do it well.  

14 I ignore the possibility that for some activities one may simply acquire the knack of how to do them.
One may accept this response but argue further that life is not an activity but is a mere succession of events. I do not wish to deny that a life that goes extremely badly may degenerate into a mere sequence of events. My contention is rather that living well minimally requires some purposive structure to one’s life. If this is right, life must possess the characteristic structure of activities. Therefore, there must exist an art of living.

I agree with the claim that possession of the relevant art does not guarantee success in the activity. Nothing in the account offered so far suggests otherwise. It may be the case that misfortune conspires and that, as a result, a life goes badly or at least less well than it otherwise would even though the person in question has the relevant skills. I also agree with the view that well-lived lives often involve projects. For all I have said so far, it could even be true that a life goes well if and only if it is made to coincide with a project. In that case, the performance of living for the sake of living would be also organized as a project with a goal such as that of writing philosophy, or of being the person who discovers the cure for cancer, or any other goal that one may think is extremely worthwhile and whose value would imbue one’s activity with meaning.

II

I have argued so far that, according to one plausible conception, philosophy is the art of living. I have also defended the view that since life is a performance rather than a project, the art of living is a performative art. Living well, Socrates claimed, requires taking care of oneself. In this section I show that to look after oneself one must adopt a self-trusting attitude. I also argue that taking care of oneself is not a goal to be pursued in order to live well. Rather one looks after oneself when one treats oneself as an end for the sake of which one lives. Thus, a well-lived life is a performance motivated by love for oneself, rather than a project motivated by the desire to change oneself.

In contemporary Western societies the unreflective yet well-lived life is no longer an option. With the advent of secularism – as

15 I take this claim to be initially plausible. I shall not provide arguments directly to support it here.
the view that human flourishing may be the yardstick by which to measure value (cf. Taylor 2007) – it is inevitable that individuals ask themselves how they should live. Once this question is posed, it needs to be answered if a person is to live well. In this paper I shall not discuss the considerations one may adduce which would count as reasons to live in some way or other. Instead, my focus is on two other requirements that any answer must fulfil to be satisfactory: it must motivate one to act; and it must prevent the question from obsessively recurring. I argue that only a self-assured answer could satisfy these requirements. I reach this conclusion by considering and rejecting two alternatives: certainty and resoluteness of will.

Once I have established that to answer the question of how one should live one must have the confidence of one’s own convictions, I argue that this confidence is the manifestation of intellectual self-trust understood as a cognitive and affective ability. I rely on these considerations to argue further that taking care of oneself requires that one trusts oneself. Hence, a well-lived life is a self-trusting life. Self-trust, however, may be appropriate or a manifestation of arrogance. When it is warranted, a trusting attitude directed toward the self is an expression of self-love understood as a form of self-respect.  

The Socratic question and the original doubt. In Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy (1993) Williams famously raised sceptical doubts about whether ethical theory (and by implication philosophy) could answer the Socratic question about how to live. I concur with Williams’ pessimism that one may be able to answer the question in a manner that generates the required conviction to act solely by reference to theory, insight, or understanding. Knowledge or understanding on their own lack the motivational force that an answer must possess to help one to live well. This pessimism need not infect philosophy itself, however, if one abandons its doctrinal conception.

16 As I indicate below there may be cases in which inflated self-trust is compatible with recognition self-respect. My claim here is that warranted self-trust is a manifestation of this kind of self-respect.

17 The question does not presuppose that to live well one must live morally, in accordance with duty, or live happily. The question only presupposes that some ways of living are better for one than other ways.

18 This comment should not be read as claiming that desires as well as beliefs are required to motivate action. Rather, the argument offered here illustrates how
To live well one must live in a manner which is supported by all those considerations one may adduce in answer to the Socratic question. In addition, one must be able to quell the doubts that have led one to ask the question in the first place. The latter is required because the posing of the question is itself symptomatic of disorientation about what is of value. Hence, one cannot live well if one keeps asking the question about how one should live. For this reason what is required to live well is not merely an answer to the question (once the question has been asked) but an answer that will give peace to the questioning so that it does not endlessly recur.

Similar considerations in my view motivate Williams’ scepticism about the ability of theories to animate ethical thought (Williams 1993: 112). The answer to the Socratic question, once it has arisen, must take the form of conviction. But, as Williams also notes: ‘ethical conviction is not to be identified with knowledge or certainty’ (ibid.: 169).

Certainty, resoluteness, assuredness. There are, generally speaking, three compatible ways of solving doubts: certainty, resoluteness, and assuredness. On occasions, one is in a state of doubt because one lacks the information required to form a firm belief on the issue. In such instances doubt is born out of ignorance; it is addressed by certainty. For instance, I may be in doubt as to whether I am on time for my class. Upon learning that it is 9.30, the doubt disappears. In cases such as this one, knowledge dissipates doubt. Certainty would solve it once and for all.

On other occasions doubt is born of indecision; it is addressed by resoluteness. Suppose I face two slices of cake that are identical in all relevant respects. I want one slice (and one slice only) but I am in doubt about which one to have. No amount of knowledge will make this doubt dissipate. Instead, I must make a decision and follow it through. Finally, doubt may be indicative of a lack of confidence. I may remember clearly locking the front door, and love rather than desire can supply the required motivational force. The comment, however, commits me to some kind of reason internalism which says that any reason to act must bear some relation to some motivational factor. I shall not defend this commitment in this paper.
yet a doubt can take hold of me, forcing me to double or triple check. In this instance knowledge does not quell doubt because it is born out of the incapacity to rely on oneself rather than out of ignorance.

These three ways of solving doubt are not mutually incompatible and some doubts require a combination of knowledge, resoluteness, and assuredness. For example, we usually gather evidence before making a decision. Similarly, assuredness which is not backed by the facts is a symptom of arrogance. Nevertheless, not even certainty can guarantee confidence.

Given that in order to live well one must dissipate the doubt that prompts the Socratic question, it is only if we become clearer whether this doubt is born out of ignorance, indecision, or lack of confidence, that we can make progress toward understanding the kind of answer that would resolve it. In what follows I consider all three options and conclude that the Socratic doubt is primarily generated by a lack of confidence and that therefore it can only be addressed by the cultivation of assuredness.

Replacing ignorance with certainty. A prominent philosophical attitude to the Socratic question takes it to be a doubt that can be answered by way of a theory, insight, or understanding alone. According to this view when one wonders about how one should live, one's questions are generated by a lack of knowledge about various ways of living, and all the possible reasons in favour of or against adopting them. For instance, one may wonder whether one should pursue a rewarding and well-paid career or follow a different path which one finds less interesting but which would make a more significant contribution to the well-being of others. The approach considered here proposes that these doubts are addressed by weighing up all the relevant considerations.

Reasoning, understanding, or insight alone, however, cannot prevent the doubts that motivate the Socratic question from recurring. Suppose that one formulates an answer to the Socratic question by these methods. One will as a result believe one's answer. In addition suppose, per absurdum, that one's answer possesses some kind of epistemic immunity such as infallibility. The answer, therefore, is certain in the sense that it cannot be mistaken. Nevertheless, even certainty cannot guarantee that a person will not lose faith in her
convictions. If she does, the doubt that motivates the Socratic question reappears to torment her.

Replacing indecision with resoluteness. If it is granted that reason, understanding, and theory cannot on their own offer a satisfactory answer to the Socratic question, one may presume that the will can achieve this feat. This option may be particularly tempting if one believes that values are made or created, rather than discovered [Mackie 1977: 106; Nietzsche 1974: §301]. Nietzsche’s views, that nihilism is defeated by adopting an affirming attitude toward life as a whole, illustrate how this is meant to work.

According to this position, one makes one’s life worthwhile by conferring value upon it. If values are created by the will, one can transform every event that happens to one into something valuable merely by willing it to be such. Suffering is one of Nietzsche’s favourite examples in this regard. One may think that suffering is bad, and that is why no one wants to suffer. However, if what we want is good because wanting it (in the right way) makes it good rather than because being good makes it desirable, then provided we want it, even suffering can be good. What makes these exercises of the will effective is their resoluteness. That is, suffering can be good only if we continue to want it, when it happens. If the strength of our will gives way at any point, the values it creates will dissolve with it.

Upon reflection there is something deeply unsatisfactory about any answer to the Socratic question which is based exclusively on a decision. Once it becomes clear that one could have decided to value something else altogether, the arbitrariness of the chosen answer undermines its ability to prevent doubt from recurring. What is required is an answer that carries the force of conviction rather than the stubbornness of a resolute decision. Hence, at least in those

---

19 There is another kind of certainty which is psychological rather than epistemological in character. Understood in this sense certainty is a matter of feeling sure. I take this feeling to be identical to the notion of assuredness or self-confidence which I discuss below.

20 I have discussed these issues in greater detail in [Tanesini 2015] where I have defended the plausibility of attributing these views to Nietzsche. In that paper I provide textual evidence in favour of this interpretation.

21 I hasten to add that Nietzsche’s actual position is more nuanced and defensible than that presented here. See [Tanesini 2015] for an elaboration and an answer to this objection.
societies where reflective scrutiny is inevitable, resoluteness alone cannot supply the motivational force required of any satisfactory answer to the Socratic question.

Replacing self-diffidence with assuredness. The discussion so far has shown that neither certainty nor resolution can dissipate the doubt which prompts the Socratic question. Each of them fails individually; further, there is no reason to think that they will succeed together since resolution is needed precisely when the available evidence falls short of certainty. Hence, I conclude that the doubt that motivates the question about how one should live is generated by a loss of faith or confidence in those convictions that have animated one’s life up to the moment of doubt. One asks the Socratic question again and again because one keeps losing faith in what one previously took to be one’s response. It follows that any satisfactory answer to the question of how one should live must take the shape of a self-assured conviction.  

Self-trust and self-respect. If the claims made above are correct, what is required to answer the Socratic question is confidence or assuredness in one’s judgements and choices. I take this optimistic stance toward one’s own cognitive capacities to be a manifestation of self-trust (Jones 2012). The person who trusts herself thinks that she is reliable. However, belief in the reliability of one’s doxastic capacities is not enough to guarantee that one trusts one’s judgements, even when that belief is warranted. Witness the person who is certain that she has locked the front door, but double checks anyway. In addition, the person who trusts herself adopts an affective stance of feeling secure toward the products of one’s intellectual capacities. As a result the person who has self-trust is disposed to assert in public what she believes (because she is not intimidated); also, she will not endlessly doubt her own views.

---

22 This may explain why some have thought that resolute decisions can survive critical scrutiny. One may realize that one’s answer to the Socratic question is arbitrary but nevertheless embrace it in its arbitrariness. When doing so, however, one exhibits assuredness or self-confidence in one’s decisions.

23 I have however said nothing about how one acquires and then preserves self-trust. I discuss this issue in the final section.

24 Trust and self-trust are relative to domains of discourse or cognitive capacities. Thus, I may trust my perceptions but not my memory. I have generic self-trust when I trust myself on most important things.
Self-trust, therefore, is an intellectual ability with cognitive and affective components which manifests itself as a positive stance towards one’s own cognitive capacities combined with a favourable assessment of their reliability.

Assuredness is not always warranted. There is such a thing as excessive confidence, often born out of arrogance. But when confidence is appropriate it is an expression of the kind of self-trust which is a component of recognition self-respect (Dillon 2007; Tanesini 2016). Unlike evaluative self-respect, which is respect based on the evaluation of one’s admirable features, recognition self-respect is based on the recognition that one is an agent deserving to be treated as such. There are many aspects to what it means to treat an agent as an agent. These include thinking of oneself and others as capable of forming opinions that must be given a fair hearing (whatever that may entail in the given circumstances).

Taking care of oneself as self-respect. I began this paper by noting Socrates’ claim that philosophy is the craft of living. He compares philosophers with cobbler. Shoemakers possess the art of taking care of shoes; philosophers have the craft of taking care of oneself. Socrates, however, presses the analogy too far by treating philosophy as a productive art. Once it is appreciated that it is a performative art, it becomes clear that one does not take care of one’s soul in the way in which the cobbler takes care of shoes. The shoemaker’s care for shoes is a desire to produce good shoes. It is thus a motivational state directed toward the goal which constitutes her activity as a project. The care for one’s soul exhibited by the person who has the art of living is also a motivational state, but it is not a desire directed toward a goal [such as one’s own well-being or achievements]. It is a state that is directed toward one’s soul as an end, as that for the sake of which one lives. Thus, when one takes care of oneself, one relates to one’s soul as a self-existing end, which is to say something which is the object of a motivating attitude that values it as it

I shall assume here that the self is identical with the set of abilities which make up one’s soul. Thus, I use ‘self’ or ‘oneself’ as approximations for the notion of character.

Hence, love of oneself is not to be confused with exclusive concern for one’s own interests.
already is (Velleman 2006: 91). In sum, to take care of oneself is to love one's soul.

The soul of which one takes care is not a substance; it is a set of abilities. In the case of human beings intellectual abilities are among those which are fundamental to the soul. These comprise cognitive capacities but also affective and emotional states. To love one’s soul is to cultivate and appreciate for what they are the abilities that constitute it. Hence, taking care of one’s human soul is predicated on intellectual self-trust which is a manifestation of self-respect.

We are now in a position to offer an account of the art of living (well). A good life is a complex activity which is performed for the sake of the person who lives it. It is shaped by a love of one’s soul. The excellent performer, the person who lives well, is the person who has the skills and motivations required to execute the performance well. The overarching motivation is love of oneself.27 The skills are those required to take care of, or love, one’s distinctive abilities. These skills include self-trust since one cannot look after oneself unless one trusts one’s own judgements and emotions. Self-trust, I have argued, is required to answer questions about how to live in the assured manner that stops doubts from endlessly occurring.

III

Why should someone believe that philosophy is the art of living (well)? The short answer is that there is a tradition extending as far back as Socrates that interprets the tasks of philosophy to be (i) providing answers to the question of how to live, and (ii) supplying training for the skills required to live in accordance with these responses. The long answer concerns the means by which self-trust is first acquired and then secured.

Learning and securing self-trust. The ability to trust oneself is a basis of autonomy and self-reliance. It is, however, an ability which is socially developed. Thus, one acquires it initially by trusting others precisely because one is not yet in a position to trust oneself. One develops a belief in one’s own reliability by

27 There will be others. These may include desires such as the desire that one is healthy. What these other motivations may be depends on one’s specific answer to the question of how to live.
having the products of one’s perception, memory, or reasoning confirmed by individuals in positions of authority over one, such as teachers or parents. One acquires confidence in one’s views by noticing that others have confidence in them. Thus, one learns to trust oneself as a response to the trust that authoritative others place in one.

This trust may be commensurate to our reliability or it may not. If we are not trusted as much as we should, we are unlikely to become self-confident due to underdeveloped self-trust. If too much confidence is placed in us, we will become excessively self-trusting and thus unwarrantedly self-assured. In the first case, we shall be deprived of an ability which is a necessary component of a life well-lived. The second case is harder to assess. Individuals who are arrogantly self-confident may not lead moral lives, but it is not clear that they cannot all things considered live well. Much depends on whether an excess of self-trust and the arrogant confidence which is one of its expressions are compatible with the kind of self-respect and self-love that are necessary to live well.28

Once some amount of self-trust is acquired it needs to be sustained over time. We preserve self-trust by a certain amount of self-reflection.29 Primarily we secure it socially by obtaining an uptake for the demand that others trust us. The claim that we are entitled to be trusted can take several forms. It at least involves expecting others to adopt a positive affective stance toward us, and to treat us as being authoritative assertors (Tanesini 2016).

I have claimed above that self-trust is manifested in a disposition to assert in public what one believes. Public assertion carries commitments to having the suitable epistemic standing with regard to the content of the assertion.30 But it also involves claiming entitlements for oneself including that of being treated as a possible source of warrant. That is to say, by making an assertion, I expect that others will treat my having asserted that thing as a reason to repeat.

---

28 Reasons of space prevent me from addressing the topic here. For a discussion of related issues see (Tanesini 2016).
29 However, as Jones notes (2012: 244), self-trust is a corrective for excessive self-analysis.
30 This may be knowledge or warranted belief. I shall not take a stance on this question here.
the assertion on the grounds of my authority. The recognition of one’s claim to authority does not require that authority is attributed to the claimant in every instance; rather, what must always be acknowledged is the possibility that the claim is authoritative. In a word, speaking as a member of a community requires that one has the authority to speak, at least at times, for the community (Cavell 1979: 18, 28).

Sustaining self-trust is not easy. It requires the cultivation of numerous intellectual and emotional skills. Prominent among these are the dialogical and reasoning skills required to argue for one’s own position and the imaginative skills required to forge new concepts which make novel ways of seeing possible. These have been since its inception the skills associated with philosophical activity because they are the kind of intellectual abilities that serve well a gadfly who, like Socrates, is unafraid to assert authoritatively views that are contrary to current opinion. It should be unsurprising that the same skills are an essential part of the art of living since they are the basis for intellectual self-trust and without it one cannot sustain conviction in one’s answer to the question of how one should live.

In conclusion, granted that it is the art of living, philosophy is constituted by a characteristic motivation which is self-love and by a set of abilities that prominently include self-trust and the emotional, dialectical, and imaginative skills required to sustain it. Hence, there are no specifically philosophical methods but there are philosophical skills some of which philosophers have always used. What philosophers have not always managed to do is to deploy them in conjunction with the right motivation. As a result, they have often treated philosophical activity as a project whose product would be philosophy as doctrine. In this paper I have shown that there exists an alternative conception of the discipline, one which is worthy of being performed.31

31 I would like to thank the editors and an anonymous referee for their insightful comments.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


