

# Chapter 5 Naturalism and Virtue

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# Eudaimonia

- *Eudaimonia comes from Greek words meaning “good” and “spirit.” It is often translated as “happiness,” but this is not an altogether helpful translation. In fact, the English expression “being in good spirits,”*
- *But whatever English equivalent we settle on, the point to stress is that the Greek word carries with it the idea of life in the world as one of active engagement, rather than simply passive experience.*
- an activity is pleasure producing if it is valuable

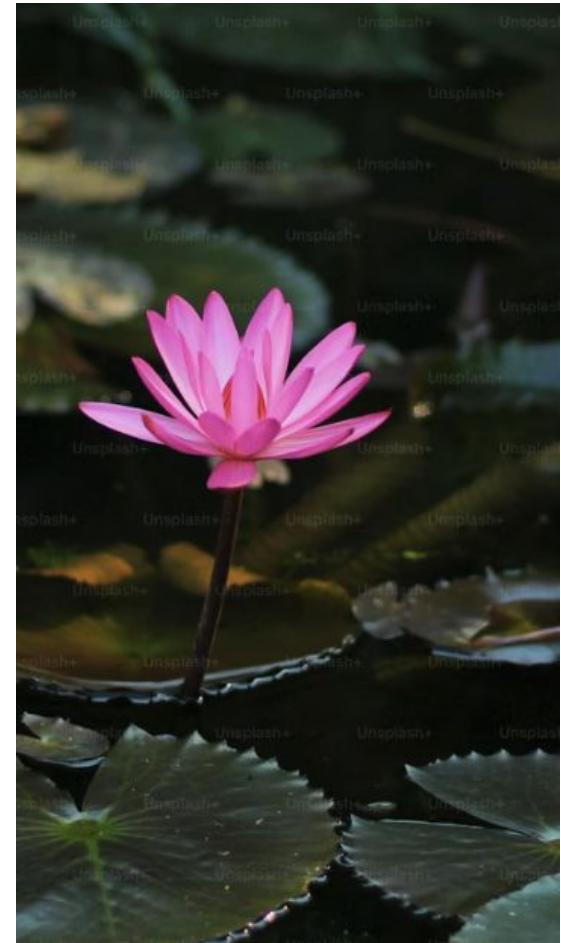
# Well-being

1. Healthy appetites
2. imaginative and productive use of one's mental faculties
3. Good relationships

# Condition

Cactus

Lotus



# Survive & Flourishing

- physical excellence
- natural behavior



# One good and good for

- There is no form of good(one good), only good for
- “Good for” is not subjective, it depends on flourishing.

## 5.2 - Human Nature as Rational Animal

# Definition/Question

Nature: the basic or inherent features of something, especially when seen as characteristic of it.

Rational: based on or in accordance with reason or logic; “having the ability to reason”

What is the good life for a human?

# From the book:

Aristotle's starting point is a claim about what human beings are by nature: Human beings are animals, but unlike other animals, they possess reason.

1. Not always rational
2. the feature that differentiates them from other living beings.

- Humans think,
- Humans make choices based on reasons,
- Humans reflect on what they are doing and why.

→ Human beings are the kind of creatures whose lives are structured and guided by rational capacities.

# Aristotle moves to a functional claim:

If a thing has a distinctive capacity, then its good consists in the successful exercise of that capacity.

For example:

A knife is good if it cuts well.

A pianist is good if they play well.

A horse is good if it runs well.

In the same way, a human being is good if they perform well in what humans characteristically do—the exercise of reason.

# Why the Good Life Is an Activity of the Soul

Aristotle defines the good life as “activity of the soul in accordance with virtue.”

- It concerns excellent use of human rational capacities.

Definition:

Soul = the mind/rational faculty (root of “psychology”), not a spiritual substance.

Virtue = excellence; in accordance with virtue = acting and thinking in the best possible way.

Having a capacity is not the same as using it well

A person may possess intelligence, knowledge, or talent, yet fail to live well if those capacities are not actively exercised.

→ The human good is not about what one has, but about what one does—rational activity sustained over time.

# Why Rational Activity Must Be “in Accordance with Virtue”

For example:

A criminal may plan a robbery with intelligence and foresight.

It's rational activities, but not an example of living well

- Virtue here means excellence—the condition under which a capacity performs its function well rather than defectively.
- Virtue it is the standard of excellence internal to rational activity itself.

→The good life is rational activity done excellently, not merely rational activity as such.

# Takeaway: what's “good life”?

practical wisdom

all-round excellence

balanced, not extreme.

not an external moral rule imposed on rationality

## 5.5 Natural as a Norm

Naturalism seeks to use "nature" as a value judgment standard:

natural = preferable

Do we humans have a natural way to live?

"The sociobiologist's answer is straightforward enough in outline. What is natural is what suits human beings as they have evolved, their 'special genetic adaptations to an environment largely vanished, the world of the Ice-Age hunter-gatherer.' To quote Wilson again."



Human evolution has never stopped.







# Sherpa

Live in the Nepalese Himalayas

Adapted to high altitudes

So high altitude area is their natural place to live?



“*Homo sapiens* is ecologically a very peculiar species. It occupies the widest geographical range and maintains the highest local densities of any of the primates” — E. O. Wilson





# What is natural way?

- Survival of the fittest
  - Only organisms that adapt to their environment can survive.
  - Creatures that are not fit to the environment will be eliminated.
  - The human that lives are not being eliminated
  - They must be fit

**Human can fit almost everywhere.**

*Appealing to nature cannot provide an answer.*

# Takeaway

- Naturalism need to distinguish natural and unnatural, but this is hard
  - Human ecological niches are too "strange".
- “Natural = Preferable” still won’t work even if we blur the standard of natural
  - It would offer too much options.
- Naturalists cannot find the answer from social biology.
  - And they still have more questions to answer.

## 5.6 5.7

### **What is nature?**

the physical constitution or drives of an organism

### **Biology: What do humans adapt to?**

Evolutionary biology suggests humans evolved for hunter-gatherer conditions (high activity, small communities, and survival cooperation)

### **Psychology: What do humans prefer?**

A natural preference for sweets, fats, and junk food.

Humans derive pleasure from the suffering of others.

# Is the “Good for man” Good?

In other words, we treat nature as a standard for good? Is it really good?

Science can tell you: "What human nature is like,"

but it can never tell you: "You must live based on it,"

otherwise you are not a free agent, but a program.

# Zookeeper model

**Animals:** Scientists identify the best conditions for their survival, Keepers devise the perfect living plan. Animals execute it automatically

**Human:** Scientists tell you the optimal life model. The state forces you to live according to it. This turns it into a "human zoo".

Choice

Freedom

# Reject Naturalistic

“rebarbative picture of the virtuous human being as a sort of Good Dog . . . [who] . . . always does what he ought to do spontaneously and with tail-wagging cheerfulness and enthusiasm” (Korsgaard, 2009: 3).

# Existentialism

"Existence precedes essence": means humans are not born with a pre-defined purpose, nature, or definition. Instead, individuals exist first—appearing in the world—and subsequently define their own "essence" (identity, values, and meaning) through their actions and choices.

## Final takeaway

Even if we know what kind of life is most "natural" and most beneficial to humanity, it **cannot become a norm** that we must obey, because humans are essentially beings who can **choose freely**.

## 2.2.8 From Will to Dialectical

### **Will as the Engine of Historical Struggle**

Dialectics: Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis Drives History Forward

Class Struggle: Oppressor vs. Oppressed, Pursuit of a Classless Society

Survival Struggle Drives Evolution

**Will is understood as the force of struggle that propels history forward.**

Thank you