

Nicomachean Ethics

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Eudaimonia

- Eudaimonia is a Greek word literally meaning “being in good spirits”. It was basically Aristotle’s idea of a **“good life”**
- First, a “good life” was one in which the person was an ‘active participant’, rather than a ‘passive recipient’. Being content or in a ‘constant state of pleasure’ (re: hedonism) was not enough for a good life; it involved exercise of one’s mental and physical faculties, interacting with others, and self-actualization.
 - Sitting around and snorting cocaine might be a pleasurable life, but it is not a “good life”.
 - In a non-human example, a captive lion in a cage with constant supply of food (and mates) might live a life free of pain, and even full of pleasure, but that life is not a “good life”, since he is not exercising his mental and physical faculties to the extent a free lion would, and hence would deteriorate.
- This also means that what is “good” differs from animal to animal- and even among the same animal species. So, one way to determine whether something is “good” for someone is to look at their **nature**- their physiological and psychological traits and characteristics. Some of it might be prescriptive to a large number of people based on some common denomination (e.g., species), and some of it might vary based on the individual, but all are predicative- i.e., convey something much more truthful than mere preference [eg].
- **Therefore, in order to understand what is a “good life” for humans, we need to understand human nature.**

Human Nature as Rational Animal

Aristotle's "good life" - linked to ideas of rationality, rational activities

Intellectual rationality vs practical rationality (phronesis)

Intellectual: science, philosophy

- Needs to be guided by "good sense" to truly live well
- Intellect is not a "natural good"

Practical: woodworking, pottery, art, parenting

- Simpler, more social value, "wisdom"
- Valued *higher* by Aristotle

HOWEVER: rationality, practical skills, wisdom are not achievable for all, notably the poor and slaves. Aristotle took this to mean that these groups could not live a good life. (pity? contempt? "it is what it is"?)

Who lives a “good life?”

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Valedictorian from UC Davis● Employed as a Engineer at Amazon● Is a Multi-millionaire● Married | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Graduated from their local community college and assisted with the advancement of cancer research.● Employed as a Security guard at Amazon and always ensure everybody walking in the office is welcomed, respected, and appreciated.● Part of the Lower class but still always find time to donate and support unhoused communities |
|---|--|

“Activity of the soul in accordance with virtue” (p. 49)

Ethics, Ethology, and Evolution

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 - Depending upon the mode of existence of the thing in question, this end will be reached more or less well

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- Oak Tree *Telos*
 - An oak tree is the end or *telos* of every acorn
 - In ideal conditions, an acorn will develop into a tree of a certain shape, size, color...
 - The *telos* of the acorn is found in the sort of picture an oak tree would be depicted in botany books
 - This depiction does not show what one particular oak tree looks like, like a photograph would, but what **any** oak tree **ought** to look like
 - Humanized ideal vs reproductive/evolutionary

Ethics, Ethology, and Evolution

- Aristotle thought that each natural kind, including human kind, has a distinctive and discoverable function
 - i.e. A *telos* specific to that kind, and from that *telos* we can derive the good for that thing
- Once considered the founding father of biology, Aristotelian biology has now been completely superseded
- Modern biology points us to the study of a microbiological structure that will reveal a ***distinctive genome*** rather than pointing us towards the study of individual species with a view to discovering their ***distinctive function***

Ethics, Ethology, and Evolution

- ***Ethology*** - The study of animals in their natural environment
 - A modern take on Aristotelianism
 - There are conditions under which animals cannot thrive and in which their natural behavior may undergo destructive and even self-destructive alteration
 - De Waal's rough conclusion on Ethology: "We are good by nature, and what is natural is what is good for us"

**What is the *telos*, or end,
of humans, and what is a
human's "natural
environment"?**

Is the *telos* of human kind simply following Aristotle's definition of the good life?

"Activity of the soul in accordance with virtue"

Is this the journey or the destination?

It could be said that **the natural environment of humans** changes depending on the circumstances of the human.

It seems much more complex than figuring out the natural environment of animals.

It could be urban cities, or remote villages, and everything that comes with these environments.

Or we can go broader, and say that the natural environment of humans is the Earth itself.

Meeting Notes

1. Eudaimonia (idea of “Good Life”): Dharnish
2. Human Nature - Jasmine
 - a. What doe
 - b. Aristotelian ideal of “good” human life **DISCUSS:**
3. Ethics, Ethology, and Evolution (segway/introductory rather than detailed) **DISCUSS:**
 - a.
 - b.