

Eudaimonia



Aristotle, Happiness, and the Best Life

The Final Good *EN* i 2

- ❖ X is a final good when, and only when x. . .
- ❖ . . .is desired for its own sake.
- ❖ . . .is not desired for the sake of anything else.
- ❖ . . .is such that everything else is desired for its sake.
- ❖ . . .is self-sufficient and complete.

What might that be?

All agree:

Eudaimonia

Let us render this: *happiness*.

Unfortunately, so much is. . .

Perfectly

Platitudinous

(*EN* 1095a17-22)

Two Conceptions of Happiness

- ❖ A Subjective Conception of Happiness:
 - ❖ S is happy *iff* all of S's desires are satisfied.
 - ❖ Happiness just is desire satisfaction.
- ❖ An Objective Conception of Happiness:
 - ❖ S is happy *iff* S flourishes, where flourishing involves actualizing S's essential potential.

Clarifying this Distinction

- ❖ A property Φ is subjective $=_{df}$ Φ is constitutively depends on the psychological attitudes or responses an observer has to some phenomenon.
- ❖ A property Φ is objective $=_{df}$ Φ is not subjective.

Problems for the Subjective View

- ❖ It is entirely possible (because it is actual) to have one's desires satisfied without living the best life possible for a human being.
- ❖ It is equally possible (though less obviously so) that one can be wrong about judgments pertaining to one's own happiness.
 - ❖ That is, one can mistakenly believe that one is happy, or, more controversially even be happy without realizing it.

What Else Happiness is Not

(*EN* 1095a16-1096a4)

- ❖ The Life of Honour: cedes to others control over one's own happiness
- ❖ The Life of Pleasure: fails to distinguish human beings from other animals

The Function Argument (*EN* 1097b29-1098a4)

1. The function of any given kind *x* is determined by isolating *x*'s unique and characteristic activity.
2. The unique and characteristic activity of human beings is reasoning.
3. Hence, the function of human beings is (or centrally involves) reasoning.
4. Exercising a function is an activity—where, in living beings, this will be the actualization of some capacity of the soul.
5. Hence, exercising the human function is an activity of the soul executed in accordance with reason.

Some Features of this Account

- ❖ Happiness (*eudaimonia*) is an activity (*energeia*)
- ❖ The relevant activity is a psychological activity.
- ❖ The relevant psychological activity is or centrally involves reason.
- ❖ The relevant expression of reason will be one done ‘in accordance with virtue’ or ‘expressing virtue’.
 - ❖ Bear in mind: virtue = *aretê* (ἀρετή)

Some Corollaries

- ❖ Neither animals nor children can be happy (*EN* 1099b34-1105a6)
- ❖ Happiness requires time: judgments of happiness are best made after death (*EN* 1100a6-b18)
- ❖ Nothing else, no other form of life is a happy life; none satisfies our criteria for success.
- ❖ If we want to know how to be happy, it follows that we should investigate virtue.