

What it means to live well philosophy essay



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In this essay, I will outline Aristotle's argument for this position, and will offer a critical analysis of this view. As well, I will offer my own reasons for agreeing with Aristotle that happiness (eudaimonia) is the purpose of life and is achieved by reasoning excellently. Happiness can be defined as something entirely different from one person to the next. It can be defined as celebrating a birthday party with your family or watching a funny movie with your friends, but these things do not make us a success at life or a flourishing human being. According to Aristotle, instead of trying to have a good time, we should be trying to have a good life. Instead of seeking the shallow pleasures of ordinary experience, we should be seeking the deep pleasure of self-perfection.

More than often, we all have come across the question, what is the purpose of life? What should I do to live a good life? These are not questions about what we should do to ensure that our life contained the signs of success, such as money, power, or respect. These might be necessary for the successful life, but they don't constitute it. The answer, Aristotle states is that this will happen if they live their lives fully in accordance with the purpose function of a human being. To do this, they must live both rationally and virtuously. A "contented, fulfilled and flourishing life with serenity and lots of activity" about sums it up, however, how to achieve it was a major topic for debate. Could it be fame and public recognition? Aristotle does think that it is important to be well respected by others and to have self-respect, but these cannot be final ends. In any case, it could also be a life of pleasure, but he has firm views about this. He sees pleasures as a good but not the Good. Aristotle points out that powerful men often seem to dedicate their

lives to pleasure, perhaps simply because they can. This sets a bad example, and many others try to emulate them. But this is to live a life suited only to animals and children. For him, pleasure is something that perfects an activity. When we are wrapped up in some useful and productive work we lose ourselves in it, especially if we are doing it well. We cease to notice the passing of time. This, for Aristotle, is real pleasure.

By observing what is unique to persons and what they, in fact, do seek, Aristotle came to the conclusion that the highest good or end for human is eudaimonia. While this word is generally translated as “happiness,” one must be careful to acknowledge that Aristotle’s understanding of “happiness” is rather different from ours. Eudaimonia happiness is not a feeling of euphoria, in fact; it is not a feeling at all. It is rather “activity in accordance with virtue.” Aristotle took it as self-evident that every action aims at achieving some good, and that there must be a supreme good, which is the ultimate goal of human activity. Pleasure, he thinks, is an component in well-being, but does not constitute its essence, and pleasure-seeking should not be made the main aim of life. He reaches his own conception of well-being by viewing human life in the perspective of all life. Plants and animal are also alive and share the functions of nutrition and reproduction with humans. Animals and humans stand on a higher level than plants because they can perceive and move, but the power of perception and movement is in no way confined to humans. Aristotle then asks whether there is any power or function which is typical of human beings alone, and which serves to distinguish mankind from the animal kingdom. He finds this distinctive feature in man’s ability to reason which is shown both in his

response to reason and his exercise of reason. Since the active rational element is peculiar to man, it serves to define his proper function, which is to live actively in accordance with reason. A good man is one who successfully fulfills his function, and so fulfills himself. He does this by living up to the highest excellence of which he is capable, which means that he lives well, and so achieves well-being.

The main points of the discourse are then gathered together in a formal definition of the good for man, which can be defined as: The good for man (well-being or happiness) is an activity of the soul in accordance with its own excellence (that is, in accordance with virtue). The definition is completed by the addition of the phrase "in a complete life" to reinforce the point that a moment of happiness does not constitute well-being. Aristotle has now met the challenge of defining the essence of well-being, but accepts that his definition provides an outline sketch only, and that it needs to be given body by a discussion of the nature of the human excellences or virtues in accordance with which human activity must proceed. But before continuing to this discussion he tests his definition by comparing it with accepted beliefs about human happiness. This is typical of his method. He regards himself as refining rather than rejecting common-sense views. The definition holds up because it finds well-being in the soul rather than in external or bodily goods. It also allows for pleasure as a component in well-being because pleasure is related to activity. But its primary virtue is to stress that activity is the very essence of well-being. This is in line with Olympic practice where the crown is given, not to the most handsome competitor, but to the one who competes and wins.

From Aristotle's point of view, everything that exists has a special purpose, something that it is suited for better than any other thing. Just as the parts of humans have a purpose (the eye to see, the ear to hear, and so forth) humans as a whole must have some special purpose. Fulfilling this purpose, which humans alone can do, would result in fulfillment or happiness. The human purpose, as Aristotle pointed out, is " an activity of the soul in accord with virtue." To live in accord with virtue is to fulfill the unique potential of the human soul; nothing else in the universe has this potential.