

The golden mean humanities essay essay sample



Aristotle's "Golden Mean"

Aristotle considered ethics to be a "practical rather than theoretical study" (Aristotle on Virtue). He taught that virtue has to do with looking for the balance between extremes- the mean between excess and deficiency. The Golden Mean, as it was coined, is intended to help people identify which states of character are virtuous. The virtuous state of character is the appropriate way people feel and react to circumstances as opposed to over reacting or under reacting. He reasoned that as humans we have functions that are specific to humans and that those functions must land in the middle of reason and emotion. In order for there to be happiness in life, good character, or moral virtue, has to be obtained and the only way the soul can be happy is through the Golden Mean.

The mean has three key elements that bring it together to make it "golden." First, the person must be in a state of equilibrium. One's character is at a balanced state and is neither extreme nor deficient. Equilibrium is making the right choices at the right time in the right place. The second element is basing that equilibrium around the individual rather than the whole. "

Aristotle's ethics are not a one-size-fits-all system; what he is looking for is the mean that is good for a particular individual" (New World Encyclopedia).

What makes one person feel fulfilled may not make another feel the same.

Every human is different and should base their mean off of one's own self.

The third element is that every virtue should fall between two vices. Virtue is similar to the mean in the fact that it is the balance between two vices. For example, if excess was on one end of a scale and deficiency on the other and virtue is the balance, moving closer to either vice causes negative

consequences but if a person's character is closer to the middle, the person receives positive feedback.

These three elements together are necessary for a person to live a virtuous, and therefore, happy life. Aristotle does not intend that virtue is placed dead center between two vices, he denotes that virtue is somewhere in the middle. Knowing exactly what the right thing to do is difficult for humans. No one always knows what the correct answer is or what is appropriate in a situation. There is sometimes a struggle in finding the mean. "A general must seek courage, the mean between cowardice and foolhardiness, in order to gain honor. A person who seeks pleasure through eating must find the mean between being a glutton and starvation. A person who seeks knowledge must find the mean between ignorance and seeking knowledge to excess; excess knowledge is not wisdom, but the mind turned to cunning" (New World Encyclopedia). An example of turning to one vice more than the other is being very angry at the fact a family member is murdered. It is appropriate even if the emotions felt are closer to the excess vice rather than to the indifference, or middle. In this case it is virtuous to feel angry. However, if water is spilt on a person's pants, it is virtuous to be closer to indifference.

In life, it is sometimes difficult to find the right equilibrium. It is not easy to be a virtuous person all the time and to make the right decision, especially when it may not be the easiest one. Everyday decisions are made based on emotion and logic. What Aristotle wants people to do is to find the right amount of emotion and the right amount of logic. After reading about the Golden Mean and how it is supposed to bring happiness, I have established <https://assignbuster.com/the-golden-mean-humanities-essay-essay-sample/>

three main ideas to improve my life. Step one is “ setting realistic goals”.

Whenever a goal is set, having the right intention has to be the base.

The goal is not to over power people, but to have the appropriate amount of reason and the right amount of emotion to make the correct decision.

Instead of being completely selfish or completely selfless, finding the balance suggests that you can help yourself while helping others. Helping others brings joy to me, and if I do not necessarily want to do what another person asks, I can think of the joy it brings them when I help. That can help me with keeping the balance in the right place because in the end it benefits my happiness. Step two is “ knowing your limits.” There is only so much energy and emotion a person can give out to others before there is a deficiency. The Golden Mean is meant for balance and not for constantly being on the run (both literally and figuratively). When a person goes to a bar to have a drink, they know how many drinks they can have until they black out. When a project is due, the student knows how many hours he or she can study until they stress out. Pushing yourself too hard can cause a fail in trying to live by the Golden Mean.

If you are inclined to stray, setting realistic and sensible goals will assist you in staying on the path of balance. Reflecting upon your life, or common situations, is another step in achieving the Golden Mean. Being aware of your personal needs is just as significant as taking care of others.

Everyone wants to be successful and make the most of money but having solid family and friend relationships are just as important. If you are not happy, take time to reflect on the reasons why. Most of the time it is because you drifted to an extreme and are feeling the imbalance. As a college

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student living three thousand miles away from home, I find myself feeling imbalanced almost everyday. It is so difficult to focus on studying while making time to Skype with family to keep my solid relationship with them. Without a balance, I would be unhappy. Studying is my occupation right now but without my family relationships, deficiency would over power my balance and that is when emotions surface. I found by keeping a fifty/fifty balance, I am more genuinely happy. Improving one's own life is harder than setting a plan to improve others.

The Golden Mean is like a set of guidelines that makes it a little easier to succeed and live happily. When I am unhappy, the last thing I think of is to sit down and consider what went wrong or what I can do to improve the situation. I am a very stressful person whether people recognize it or not. I am also an extremist and it is “ all or nothing” with me. I blame these deficiencies of my personality on the reasoning behind my constant emotional battle. Learning about Aristotle's theories on the Golden Mean and finding the right virtuous balance opened my eyes to a new way of thinking and a new way of living. Instead of moving towards one extreme, which I do in every situation, I will now sit down and think of what would make everyone happy. I can say from personal experience, straying away from a balance and moving closer to extremes bring negative consequences that push you away from happiness. Aristotle was correct in his belief that a balanced character brings more happiness than being completely selfish or complete selfless.

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