

In his Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle aims to provide a method to deduce what the best good for human beings is. In support of his deduction, he offers his function which is the soul's activity that expresses reason or requires reason (1098a7-8). Each function of a human being is completed effectively when its completion results in the expression of the proper virtue (1098a15). Therefore, Aristotle concludes that the human good turns out to be the soul's activity that expresses virtue. Moreover, it will be in a complete life and not momentarily (1098a18-19). This is Aristotle's ultimate sketch of the nature of the human good. I think Aristotle's function argument is logically sound as it provides a generic best good for every human relative to their activities and choices in life. Hence, this essay will be a means of extending Aristotle's argument as it provides better reasoning than using platitudes of happiness as the best good.

Aristotle starts by adding further clarification to the argument that the best good is the highest end to an action. An end that is chosen for completion by itself and not for any other end is considered unconditionally complete. Aristotle presents that for the consensus, happiness is this unconditionally complete end (1097b1). We are led to the same conclusion from the self-sufficiency argument - the most complete end is self-sufficient and can be chosen as a unitary final to lead to a desirable life (1097b6-7). Happiness is also seen as something unquantifiable, adding to it does not make it more choiceworthy. The conclusion to these arguments thus is that happiness is the highest end to the completion of all conscious rational actions.

That Aristotle concludes happiness is the best good is neither surprising nor unreasonable. Taking war as an example set, the soldiers would want the ends of their actions to

be in direction of being brave and honourable. If the war ends as a victory, these ends would have been completed in pursuit of victory, the victory signifying their happiness. Similarly, for a student completing exams with flying colours, happiness as an end would trump the virtues of being diligent or hard-working. Also, the happiness experienced through victory in the war cannot be quantifiably compared to the happiness experienced from having achieved good grades. For both the subjects in consideration, their highest end is being happy, to which adding more or less as quantifiers would not make a difference. Hence, it is sensible to say that any sane person with considerable freedom in a functioning society would choose happiness by itself, if given the chance, and consequently lead a fulfilling life with a certain extent of family members, friends and other members of the society. Anyone who would not agree with this choice would be part of the minority and not the majority.

While the remark that happiness is the best good is not dubious, it is the definition of what a best good is that is clouded by doubt (1097b23-24). The need to define the function of a human being stems from this doubt. In modern connotations, the idea of defining a function for human beings seems to be irrational. Functions are associated with inanimate things and using one to define the best virtue or happiness for human beings comes across as Aristotle labelling us as tools that have a use, just as a screwdriver's function would be to screw in screws. However, the function Aristotle is referring to is activities that make a human being human. This meaning of the function helps not only Aristotle in finding the function but also us in understanding his process of finding it.

The process of finding the function involves figuring out the aspect of human nature which sets us apart from everything else. We share functions like nutrition and growth with all

life forms. Some other functions like sense perception are shared with brute animals. The only remaining possibility is that the function represents the unique activities that reflect our rational elements – reasoning and choices. Thus, Aristotle ends the search for the function having found it to be the soul’s activity that expresses reason or requires reason (1098a7-8). Aristotle proceeds to make some assumptions. It is now added that the function for humans in the same class, say harpists, is generically the same, that is, the type of function for an amateur harpist and a proficient harpist is essentially the same. The proper function of the harpists, however, differs based on their expertise. The function of the amateur harpist is to play the harp while the function of the proficient harpist is to play it well. Now, taking the function to be a certain kind of life and having already defined the function, it is noted that an excellent man’s function is to do his function finely and well. Each function is completed only when its completion expresses the proper virtue. Therefore, from all the assumptions, Aristotle defines the human good, happiness, to be the soul’s activity that expresses virtue. It is to be noted that the function must be performed well over the course of a human’s entire lifetime as happiness is not experienced in just a single moment (1098a20).

To simplify, the function Aristotle has in mind is each person’s ability to make choices voluntarily that are in conformity with a fine rational principle. It is valid to expect a person blessed with excellent reasoning skills to have better choices and a better understanding of the consequences of said choices. Only when a person is excelling at this process of reasoning will they experience the completion of their function, ultimately leading to the expression of their best good – happiness. On the other hand, a broken car can be used to represent someone whose reasoning is fallible. A broken car is incapable of driving thus preventing the fruition of its

function. It would be a lost cause to expect such a person to ever truly experience happiness as it is only on the completion of their function that they reach the expression of their best virtue. Coming to Aristotle's last point about the function being performed over a long period to achieve complete happiness - the effect of happiness is directly proportional to its duration; an ephemeral joy would not have any meaningful impact on a person's life.

The function and clearer statement of what the best good is enables Aristotle to determine the sketch of the nature of human good. The sketch is an outline drawn out first that is then filled in later by the person it is destined for (1098a22-23). If the sketch is that of excellence, it is easier for anyone to advance and articulate. Time plays its part in the process too, as anything can be added to the outline of human good based on the improvement in one's reasoning.

The excellence here signifies the life conditions of the person for whom the sketch is drawn. Better conditions would probably lead to a healthier and more rational functioning of the person making it easier to attain and maintain happiness. It is also possible that over time, learning from poor decisions would aid in building a finer rational principle. The point to note here is that Aristotle does not force a concrete structure for the sketch of the nature of human good. It is just the initial framework that has the capacity to be modified and since the structure of the sketch is a network of the human good and the journey of the completion of a human's function, this allows flexibility in all of Aristotle's arguments stated throughout providing them with a convincing allure.

To summarize, Aristotle obtains a function wherein each function of a human being is completed effectively when its completion results in the expression of the proper virtue (1098a15). Therefore, Aristotle concludes that the human good turns out to be the soul's activity that expresses virtue. Moreover, it will be in a complete life and not momentarily (1098a18-19). This is Aristotle's ultimate sketch of the nature of the human good.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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