

Looking for Happiness

It is important to remember, what is frequently translated as happiness in Aristotle's writing is different from what we usually mean by happiness. For Aristotle, happiness" really refers to something more like the good life. With this in mind, the connection between the human good of happiness and the human purpose in life makes better sense. Aristotle talks about the real goods that we need in order to have a good life and shows us how to gain the real goods. We are animals by nature with the capacity to question, think, and we know.

To live the good life, human beings must exercise physical and mental in some form. Aristotle calls these real goods: health, vitality, and vigor. We also experience bodily pleasures and pains. He includes the pleasures into the real goods. We can observe people that give up bodily pleasure or tolerate bodily pain for the sake of some other good that seems desirable. For example, someone will stop parting for a period of time in order to save money, so they can go on a vacation. We could believe that is prudent to limit our enjoyment of bodily pleasures to achieve greater goods.

According to Aristotle the sum of external goods is represented by wealth. This wealth is essential to maintain the bodily health, vitality, and pleasure and one could not live happily without it. These are parts of the physical world where the body is fulfilling with physical goods. In the other hand the mental goods are the ones such as knowledge that includes know-how and skill. It is desirable for human beings to create social relations because it will bring mental goodness. Friendship for Aristotle is not part of the external goods. The friendship is a mental need that people obtain as knowledge and skills. He takes the mental good as a good of the soul.

To obtain the real goods for Aristotle concerns something different. This is the one that guides us to develop good morals or good habits which one chooses. For example, people who are skillful at playing soccer or solving arithmetical problems have a good habit because this requires time, energy and a set of goals. A good habit is cultivated that allows a person to perform an excellent action. This action gives the person the ability to avoid the process of making decisions every time. The characteristic for a person to make the right decisions or choose is the essence of character. Therefore a good habit is a skill, which is part of the intellectual virtue that brings the moral virtue and will lead us to happiness. Humans have the ability to make virtuous choices.

Otherwise this process differs for people with disabilities or people from poor countries. I do not agree with Aristotle when he says:

the happy person is a human being, and so will need external prosperity also; for his nature is not self-sufficient for study, but he needs a healthy body, and needs to have food and the other services provided (e.g Ethics 1178b 34-36).

I believe that Aristotle forgot to ask himself, Can humans find happiness in simple things of life? He certainly had a good life and did not work forty hours a week or analyze how people overcame their problems. It was simple for Aristotle to generalize about happiness instead of using deep thoughts concerning people inner behavior. This type of thinking leads to the foundation for our culture into material acquisitions.

The Western culture is constantly surrounded by ads in the media about the latest car, plastic surgery, slim bodies, etc. There are many things that we want to use and satisfied our desires that does not stop. We can have certain desires in our life that could be positive and useful. For example, peace and harmony in the planet can be positive. The desire has to be balance and it goes along with the culture where we live. If you live in a poor village in Colombia and you can afford a car that could bring you problems. The reason is that other neighbor cannot afford a car will bring uncomfortable feelings in the neighborhood. It is different when

you live in an affluent society where a car is just a tool but this can lead to a different issue for who has the better car. This could not be based in mental desire but instead will give you an ephemeral satisfaction that produces negative feelings. In the same way pleasure alone cannot be the foundation of our lives.

In the difficult way of seeking happiness it is possible to find people with tremendous values. Christopher Reeve's life after his accident became inspirational for many people that look for a good life or happiness. Reeve's spinal injury left him paralyzed from the neck-down and this do not stop him to participate in daily activities. I think he learned how to deal with his negative feelings and transforming them into positive. He cultivated the idea where he could do good things for others and himself. He realized that his fame and media coverage had given him a chance to benefit everyone with spinal injury. Other people would think that it is a hellish of life being deprived from good health. If Aristotle was alive he would agree with them.