

A Brief History of Western Philosophy

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3rd lesson

Aristotle and the Idea
of Happiness

1. Prior knowledge
Q&A

What was called Plato's school of philosophy?

- A. The Lyceum
- B. The Academy
- C. The University

What are the platonic forms or ideas?

A. Ideas in our mind

B. General concepts or definitions

C. Constituent of reality

What was it the notion of justice that Sophists supported?

A. Justice is to do what is good

B. Justice is the harmony of every part within a whole

C. Justice is the interests and the rule of the strongest.

What is justice in the individual according to Plato?

A. The harmony between desire, reason and temper (soul's health).

B. The fulfillment of each organ's function within our body

C. The fulfilment of each person's function within a society

What is justice in a society or republic according to Plato?

A. A republic or society is just when an exploited class struggles against the exploiter

B. A republic or society is just when each citizen fulfilled their own function

C. A republic or society is just when citizens joint together to claim their rights and will

2. Aristotle's life and relevance

ARISTOTLE **(384–322 B.C.)**

Aristotle was born in Macedonia, a kingdom north of Greece. Around age 18, he sought out the best education offered in his day and became a student in Plato's Academy in Athens. Aristotle studied and taught there with Plato for 20 years until the latter's death.



After leaving Athens, Aristotle pursued various careers, including tutoring the young Macedonian prince who would later be known as Alexander the Great. Eventually Aristotle returned to Athens and founded his own school and research institute, called the Lyceum. There he taught a wide range of subjects that included biology, physics, medicine, psychology, chemistry, logic, mathematics, philosophy, rhetoric, political science, and literary criticism. He died in 322. B.C., just one year after his pupil.

‘Every man is born an Aristotelian or a Platonist,’ said S. T. Coleridge.

Aristotle's Relevance in Western Philosophy

- ◆ Aristotle together with Plato are doubtless the fathers of European science and culture. The former was called during centuries “the Philosopher”. He was the founder of several disciplines such as Logic (reasoning) or Biology.
- ◆ Since the Renaissance it has been traditional to regard the Academy and the Lyceum as two opposite poles of philosophy. Plato, according to this tradition, was idealistic, Utopian, other-worldly; Aristotle was realistic, utilitarian, commonsensical (thus Coleridge's quotation).
- ◆ In Biology, *The History of Animals* contains detailed, and mainly accurate, observations of the anatomy, diet, and reproductive systems of mammals, birds, reptiles, fish, and crustacea; observations which were quite without precedent and which were not superseded until the seventeenth century, by Linneo and thus by Lamarck and Darwin.

*3. Aristotle's Ethics.
The idea of happiness*

Aristotle's ethics (Nicomachean ethics)

- ◆ Aristotle wrote in every field of knowledge of his days. He wrote about politics, Rhetorics, Literature, Biology, Astronomy, Physics, logic... and Ethics, which is the philosophical branch that study human behaviour and attitudes in relation to what is good or bad, right or wrong.
- ◆ The Nicomachean Ethics (a book allegedly written for his son Nicomachus) distinguishes two types of virtues: moral virtues and intellectual virtues. The former has to do with a sort of ability to behave according to our nature and the latter has to do with the development of our rational (cognitive) capabilities.

Aristotle's ethics (Nicomachean ethics)

- ◆ Virtues, in general, have the mission of leading human beings to the fulfilment of their nature or essence. The fulfilment of human beings' nature is what Aristotle calls happiness.
- ◆ Aristotle gives a definition of virtue as the medium between two extremes (which he calls them vices), and actually gives some examples to serve as a rule:

Confidence in Facing danger

Vice
Rashness

Virtue
Courage

Vice
Cowardice

Truth telling about oneself

Vice
Boastfulness

Virtue
Self-honesty

Vice
Self-deprecation

The idea of happiness (eudaimonia)

- ◆ Happiness is then the goal of human beings' life. It is our telos or end. The final realization of human being's capabilities or self-fulfillment. That is called eudaimonia's theory.
- ◆ Aristotles ethics is a teleology (end) because human beings tend to happiness by their own nature, therefore, they have a natural tendency to virtue, which is the perfection of their capabilities.
- ◆ Since reason (logos) is the essential feature of human beings, then the perfect happines is contemplative and rational activities (intellectual virtue).



Raffaell's fresco The School of Athens.

4. Text on Aristotle's idea of happiness

“If happiness is the supreme good in life, then Aristotle says it is best understood by getting clear on the end or function of human life. When Aristotle refers to the function or end of human life, he is not necessarily referring to some sort of divine purpose. Rather, he is assuming that every type of thing in nature contains a certain essential nature that makes it what it is. Hence, human nature contains a characteristic activity that is essential to our self-fulfillment as human beings” (Lawhead, 2011, 515).

“The best way of arriving at such a definition [of happiness] will probably be to ascertain the function of man. For, as with a flute player, a sculptor, or any artist, or in fact anybody who has a special function or activity, his goodness and excellence seem to lie in his function, so it would seem to be with man, if indeed he has a special function. Can it be said that, while a carpenter and a cobbler have special functions and activities, man, unlike them, is naturally functionless? Or, as the eye, the hand, the foot, and similarly each part of the body has a special function, so may man be regarded as having a special function apart from all these? What, then, can this function be? It is not life; for life is apparently something that man shares with plants; and we are looking for something peculiar to him. We must exclude therefore the life of nutrition and growth. There is next what may be called the life of sensation. But this too, apparently, is shared by man with horses, cattle, and all other animals. There remains what I may call the active life of the rational part of man’s being. Now this rational part is twofold; one part is rational in the sense of being obedient to reason, and the other in the sense of possessing and exercising reason and intelligence.

The active life too may be conceived of in two ways, either as a state of character, or as an activity; but we mean by it the life of activity, as this seems to be the truer form of the conception.

The function of man then is an activity of the soul in accordance with reason, or not apart from reason. Now, the function of a man of a certain kind, and of a man who is good of that kind—for example, of a harpist and a good harpist—are in our view the same in kind. This is true of all people of all kinds without exception, the superior excellence being only an addition to the function; for it is the function of a harpist to play the harp, and of a good harpist to play the harp well. This being so, if we define the function of man as a kind of life, and this life as an activity of the soul or a course of action in accordance with reason, and if the function of a good man is such activity of a good and noble kind, and if everything is well done when it is done in accordance with its proper excellence, it follows that the good of man is an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue, or, if there are more virtues than one, in accordance with the best and most complete virtue. But we must add the words “in a complete life.” .

For as one swallow or one day does not make a spring, so one day or a short time does not make a man blessed or happy. . .
Inasmuch as happiness is an activity of the soul in accordance with perfect virtue, we must now consider virtue, as this will perhaps be the best way of studying happiness. . . . Clearly it is human virtue we have to consider; for the good of which we are in search is, as we said, human good, and the happiness, human happiness. By human virtue or excellence we mean not that of the body, but that of the soul, and by happiness we mean an activity of the soul” (Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*).

*5. Questions for text
comprehension*

1. Why does Aristotle say that humans must have a particular function or purpose?

Answer A

Because humans are at an upper level than other animals, and animals don't have purpose or function, so human beings must have a function or purpose as their distinction from animals.

Answer B

Because if the harpist or sculptor have a function then the function of men must be to become a harpist or sculptor.

Answer C

Because everything in nature has a purpose or function.

2. What function do we have that is uniquely human?

Answer A

The function of man is an activity of our senses, in accordance to our feelings and sensations.

Answer B

The function of man is an activity of the soul in accordance with reason, or not apart from reason.

Answer C

The function of man is an activity of the soul against reason, or not following reason.

3. What then, according to Aristotle, is happiness ?

Answer A

Happiness is an activity of the soul in accordance with our sensations, being sensations the excellence of man's .

Answer B

Happiness is an activity of the soul in accordance with perfect virtue, being perfect virtue the good and proper use of reason. Happiness is then the excellence of man's function.

Answer C

Happiness is a disposition of our character.

Summary

Aristotle's ethics

Aristotle wrote about every discipline and science of his times, among them about ethics, which is the reflection on the human behaviour in relation to what is good to human beings in terms of its nature or purpose. Aristotle wrote to his son the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

The idea of happiness

The idea of happiness defines Aristotle's ethics, for happiness is the fulfillment of human being's purpose (teleology), which is the good use of his/her intellectual capabilities (reason as a faculty). Human being's behaviour accordance to reason is a virtue, and the perfect virtue is contemplation (real end or telos of human being).

Thanks!

Any questions?

See you next week

History of Western Philosophy

*This presentation and the program of the subject
can be found at this website:*

[*https://www.danigareses.wixsite.com/pensarenespanol*](https://www.danigareses.wixsite.com/pensarenespanol)

