

Happiness as an end: a critique of Aristotle's rational eudaemonism

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Abstract

This paper examines Aristotle's concept of happiness as encapsulated in his Nicomachean Ethics. Aristotle argues that happiness is the supreme practical good because it is perfect, final, self-sufficing and complete in itself. For him, happiness is simply defined as rational eudaemonism (an activity of the soul according to reason in contrast with mere sensual pleasure). In view of the foregoing, this paper raises the question of whether happiness is actually an end as Aristotle posits. What is happiness and how can we find it? Our objective is to critically evaluate Aristotle's position on the questions raised here and to see whether we can develop a new moral thesis that can truly reflect our existential realities. Although Aristotle's position gives us a moral leap and is quite commendable in its ethico-epistemological profundity, this paper, however, maintains that happiness is an elusive concept. It argues that if at all anything termed happiness exists in this world, it might only be transient, ephemeral and illusory and cannot be seen as an end in the physical absolute terms when viewed from the standpoint of Plato's metaphysical dualism. The paper also argues that Aristotle did not say enough about what we are supposed to do to attain happiness. He gives detailed descriptions of many of the virtues, moral and intellectual, but with a persistent 'air of indeterminacy'. The paper concludes that moral virtues are a necessary component, but not a sufficient condition for happiness.

Keywords: Happiness, rationality, virtue, means, end

Introduction

Apart from his profound reflection on other branches of philosophy, one core area which drew the attention of Aristotle is the larger and vaguer problems of conduct and character. Interestingly, above all the questions that border on the physical world looms the fundamental ethical question of what is the good life? What is the highest good? Why be good? What is virtue and what does it take to live a virtuous life? What is happiness and how can we find it? Aristotle's answers to these questions constitute what is known as his ethics. The word "ethics" is a derivative of the Greek word *ethos* which means character or custom. The derivative phrase *ta ethika* was employed by Plato and Aristotle in describing their personal studies of Greek values and ideals (Solomon 1984: 3).

Aristotle was primarily concerned with the details of everyday normative ethics of conduct and character, unlike Plato who was more interested in the most meta-ethical questions such as the definition of the Good and the Just (Justice). Probably, there has never been a more comprehensive work on the subject of ethics than that of Aristotle. He wrote two major treatises on ethics, namely the *Nicomachean Ethics*, said to have been edited by and named after his son Nichomachus, and the *Eudemian Ethics* which differs in some significant respects from the former (Solomon 1984:66). The *Nicomachean Ethics* is by far the better known of the two treatises.

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es. Any discussion on the areas of divergence between them is, however, beyond the scope of this paper. For the purposes of clarity, this paper will refer to the *Nicomachean Ethics* as the "Ethics".

Aristotle's treatise on ethics is characterised by a sort of down to earth, common sense approach that captures the "moral intuitions that we bring to philosophy" (Lawhead 2002:80). From his standpoint, ethics is distinctively teleological and constitutes a body of objective knowledge, though not as exact or precise a science as mathematics owing to the peculiarities inherent in human nature. Human beings, for him, just as every other thing in the natural world, have a distinctive moral end to actualise. In the opening page of the *Ethics*, Aristotle posits that "Every practical science has an end. The ultimate end, which is the supreme good" (*Ethics* BK1,1). From this perspective, it is clear that he sees ethics as a practical science of human conduct the function of which is to guide people towards the goal of achieving human excellence. The stated purpose of Aristotle's ethical treatise is to describe "the good for man". It is less involved than many modern ethical treatises in the justification of the values and institutions described. It seemed sufficient, Aristotle thought, to simply describe such values, for their virtues seems to speak for themselves (Solomon 1984:66).

Moreover, ethics and politics are for Aristotle two mutually inclusive but interdependent phases of one line of inquiry. Ethics is an inquiry into how men may best live, and since men cannot live well in solitude (without organised social relations), ethics finds its completion in politics (Lamprecht 1955:61). However, his justification of the institution of slavery as being essential to the just society and the exclusion of women from political life seems to be a blind acceptance of the prejudices of the age and culture he lived.

Happiness as an intrinsic end (the highest good)

Aristotle begins his "Ethics" by frankly refuting Plato's idea of good as basis for ethics because it is disproved by the doctrine of categories. Plato's idea of good, he argues, is "not relevant to ethics, since a transcendent good is unattainable, and useless even as a guide to the attainment of practical goods" (*Ethics* BK1, 1²). He contends that happiness is the supreme practical good because it is perfect, final, self-sufficient and complete in itself. Put in a syllogistic form:

- i. Every practical science has an end
- ii. Ethics is a practical science
- iii. Therefore, ethics must have an end.

Aristotle frankly recognises that the aim of life is not goodness for its own sake, but happiness. He makes the general point that the Good must be the good for man, which in turn means that toward which all human activities ultimately aim. This highest or ultimate good (the *summum bonum*) is identified by Aristotle as "happiness". He used the Greek word *eudaimonia* for the moral end men ought to pursue. Ordinarily, this word is translated into English as "happiness" or "human flourishing" but its meaning is much the same as what Plato meant by the Greek word we translate as "Justice". The word "happiness" has to do with the complete well-being of the mature and excellently developed man (Lamprecht 1955:61). The emphasis, here, is on activity and accomplishment rather than a mere feeling of contentment or satisfaction (Solomon 66). The nature of happiness according to Aristotle is not necessarily that of "the life of enjoyment" "amusement" or "the life of money-making". This means that happiness in the Aristotelian sense is not equivalent to pleasure (which is sensual), though the two words are sometimes used interchangeably in modern English. Pleasures can be sub-divided into good pleasures and bad pleasures respectively. They may be "parts of human happiness or of its antithesis" (Lamprecht 1955:61). Some kind of pleasure may lead to pain while some kind of pain may lead to pleasure on the long run. Pleasure, therefore, is not the ultimate end as happiness. Given the primacy

2. It's a reference to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. We simply refer to it as *Ethics*. Since it was written in separate Books, we abbreviate each as Bk, for example (*Ethics*, Bk1: 258).

Aristotle attached to happiness (an activity according to reason) as the ultimate, moral end men ought to pursue, we may term his ethical position as rational eudaimonism or ethical teleologism respectively.

Two types of goods: extrinsic good or instrumental good / intrinsic good or ultimate good

Aristotle identifies two types of ends human activities are directed. On one hand, therefore some kinds of activities that merely serves as necessary means for the achievement of other and extrinsic in nature. On the other hand are acts that are desirable not for the sake of something else, but are rather desirable in themselves because of their intrinsic worth. These types of ends are called intrinsic or ultimate ends. They are activities which do not aim at any result beyond the mere exercise of the activity. This is felt to be the nature of actions in conformity with virtue; for to do noble and virtuous deeds is a thing desirable for its own sake. Since happiness lacks nothing and is self-sufficient and something desirable in itself, it is therefore an intrinsic end.

The only problem with the foregoing is that there is no consensus among people as to what kind of life is most happy. Aristotle examines some conceptions of good life namely pleasure (amusement, life of enjoyment), life of money-making, success and honour and rejected them. He, however, concedes that it is not possible to lead the good life completely without them for they are necessary conditions for actualizing the ultimate good (Uduigwonen 2001:131).

Happiness as an end

Happiness, Aristotle maintains, is activity chosen for its own sake, but it must be activity manifesting virtue or excellence, not merely pursued for amusement (*Ethics BK 10, 258*). The peculiar excellence of man that makes him biologically unique among other earthly beings is life of reason. It is by this that he surpasses and rules all other forms of life; and as the growth of this faculty has given him supremacy over other however beings, Aristotle presumed that its development will give him fulfilment and happiness. Therefore, what is happiness for man is not only what is natural to him, but what is unique to him as well. Invariably, the good for man (or *eudaimonia*) must be the life of reason. But whereas many might think the life of reason (contemplation) is a sedentary academic life, Aristotle submits that it is also the active life, the life "rational activity", not a retreat from life (Solomon 1984:67). Thus, one of the central concepts of Aristotle's *Ethics* – the concept of virtue – is defined simply as "rational activity, activity in accordance with a rational principle" (*Ethics BK1, 7*). Therefore, happiness does not consist in pastimes and amusements but in activities in accordance with virtue. But if happiness consists in activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable that it should be activity in accordance with the highest virtue; and this will be the virtue of the best part of us (reason). It is the activity of this rational part of us "in accordance with the virtue proper to it that constitutes perfect happiness" (*Ethics BK 1, 7*). This is a life such as we might conceive the gods to lead, "being relatively the divinest part of us", and hence, men become most god-like when they practise the life of contemplation in which happiness consists.

Rationality as the highest virtue

For Aristotle, happiness consists in activity which accords with the highest virtue - which is reason, and this rationality is inherent in human nature, unlike lower animals. What sets us apart from everything else in the world is our rationality. Our ultimate good, he argues, consists in the excellent use of our rational powers (Landau 2012: 261). Aristotle modified somewhat Plato's analysis of human nature and consequently, Plato's list of virtues. He pointed out that human nature has many irrational elements (the appetites, passions, emotions) and also a rational principle. The irrational (or rather non-rational) elements of human nature are in part beyond the power of reason to control and are in part subject to control by reason (Lamprecht 1955: 62).

Aristotle identified three parts of human nature considered as the raw material for transformation in accord with the highest good or happiness, namely:

- i. the irrational part which is not subject to rational control
- ii. the irrational part which is subject to rational control
- iii. the rational part.

Corresponding to the above outlined three parts of human nature will be three kinds of excellence and three ways by which happiness is achieved (if all it comes).

- i. Corresponding to the irrational part which is not subject to control by reason is *natural excellence*. This is the product of luck or good fortune. It is not properly to be called virtue because those who do not have it cannot be blamed for their unfortunate condition. For example, the nature excellence of beauty in contrast with ugly or the tall with the short.
- ii. Corresponding to the irrational part which is subject to control by reason is moral virtue or moral excellence (Lamprecht 1955:63). Moral virtue is a habit of right action (a fixed disposition) formed by acting rightly in conformity with right principle furnished by reason. Aristotle argued the "none of the moral virtues is engendered in us by nature, no natural property can be altered by habit" for (*Ethics* Bk 11, 35). For instance, it is the nature of a stone to move downwards, and it cannot be trained to move upwards, even though you should try to do so by throwing it up into the air ten thousand times. Similarly, fire cannot be trained to move downwards. Nothing else that naturally behaves in one way can be trained into a habit of behaving in another way. Therefore, moral excellence or goodness of character is engendered in us neither by nature nor yet in violation of nature, "nature gives us the capacity to receive them, and this capacity is brought to maturity by habit" (*Ethics* Bk 11, 35). This means that experiencing happiness involves both thinking and doing. One must rationally judge what are the right principles to follow and then discipline his/her appetites, feelings and emotions in a habitual manner to those rules. What Aristotle called moral virtue is equivalent to what Plato called temperance, but Aristotle's treatment of the matter is much more pluralistic (Lamprecht 1955: 63). We shall come back to this in his doctrine of the moral mean.
- iii. Corresponding to the rational part of human nature is the third type of excellence called *intellectual virtue or excellence of intelligence*. This is achieved through teaching and sustained reflection. Intellectual virtue has many forms according to the subject-matter with which reflection is occupied (Lamprecht 1955: 64).

In all, Aristotle believed that contemplative activities (thinking, learning, striving to understand and know) rather than pleasures and other external things are the key source of happiness for humans (Barcalow 1994:71). This is to say that the highest good for humans is a life of contemplation, a life guided by reason. Other external goods like "good birth, satisfactory children, beauty" and good friends contribute to happiness but they are secondary.

The doctrine of the golden mean: the key to happiness

Like Plato, Aristotle defines a good human character in terms of moderation, justice and courage which are deemed virtuous by him (Kolak 1998: 193). He opines that virtue or moral excellence depends on clear judgement, self-control (temperance), symmetry of desire and artistry of means. The word "excellence" is probably the fittest translation of the Greek *arête*, usually mistranslated virtue. The Greek *arete* is the Roman *virtus* (Latin); both implying a masculine sort of excellence (Ares, god of war; vir, a male). Classical antiquity conceived virtue in terms of man, just as medieval theology conceived it in terms of woman (Durant 1961:60). Aristotle holds that

moral virtue consists of cultivating habits which will spontaneously incline us to take the middle course of action (Stumpf 2003: 94).

Human beings have many impulses and desires, each of which begs for satisfaction but none of which, Aristotle suggests, should be permitted, to have ascendancy over the other. The path way to moral virtue or excellence, therefore, is the middle way or the golden mean. This is to say that moral virtue is realised at the point where we hit the mean (the moral bull eye). The qualities of character can be arranged in triads, in each of which the first and last qualities will be extremes (deficiency or excess) and vices, and the middle point quality a virtue or moral excellence. Virtue, therefore, is impaired by excess or deficiency in action.

Table of virtues and vices			
Class of action or feeling (Activity)	Vice (Excess)	Virtue (Mean)	Vice (Deficiency)
Fear and confidence	Rashness	Courage	Cowardice
Pleasure and pain	Profligacy	Temperance	Insensitivity
Giving and getting small amounts of money	Prodigality	Liberality	Meanness
Giving and getting large amounts of money	Vulgarity	Magnificence (Generosity)	Paltriness (stinginess)
Anger	Irascibility	Gentleness	Spiritlessness
Truthfulness about one's merits	Boastfulness	Truthfulness	Self-depreciation
Pleasantness in social amusement	Buffoonery	Wittiness	Boorishness
Pleasantness in social conduct	Obsequiousness	Friendliness	Surliness
Shame	Bashfulness	Modesty	Shamelessness
Pleasure in others misfortune	Envy	Righteous indignation	Malice
Reward	Sloth	Ambition	Greed

The Aristotelian mean described above, however, is not absolute, like the mathematical mean, an exact average of two precisely calculable extremes, since ethics is not an exact science. The moral mean fluctuates with the collateral circumstances of each situation, and discovers itself only to mature and flexible reason (Durant 1961: 61). Moral virtue is a habit of choosing the relative mean in actions and emotions. The virtues are engendered in us neither by nature nor yet in violation of nature. According to Aristotle, nature gives us the capacity to receive them, and this capacity is brought to maturity by habit. The faculties given us by nature are bestowed on us first in a potential form and we exhibit their actual exercise afterwards. We learn an art or craft by doing certain things; men become builders by building houses, harpers by playing on the harp. Similarly, we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts (Ethics Bk 8:31).

The above table implies that achieving the golden mean depends solely on training and practice that is long enough to eventuate in the formation of strong habits (the young and immature are to be guided). Consequently, by consistently acting in virtuous ways, we acquire habits of virtue. The possession of well-established habits is what we mean by character but character is inherently good or bad depending on the nature of the habits. Character is, therefore, the result of habituation – a long and consistent period of moral training. A man of

virtue or good character is one who acts directly, consistently and reliably in accord with his established habits. One can only be considered virtuous if he acts consistently (not a hit and run manner) in accordance with the golden mean over a considerable stretches of time, perhaps in the light of the entire course of his life (Lamprecht 63-64). In Aristotle's words:

... this activity must occupy a complete lifetime; for one swallow does not make a spring; nor does one fine day; and similarly one day or a brief period of happiness does not make a man supremely blessed and happy (Ethics Bk 8:13).

It is obvious that the doctrine of the moral mean is the formulation of a characteristic attitude which appears in almost every system of Greek philosophy (Composta 1988:34). For example Plato had it in mind when he called virtue harmonious action; Socrates when he identified virtue with knowledge. The seven Wise Men had established the tradition of moderation by engraving, on the temple of Apollo at Delphi, the motto *meden agan*; - nothing in excess. Perhaps, as Nietzsche claims in his work *The Birth of Tragedy*, all these were attempts of the Greeks to put in check their own propensity to violence and impulsiveness of character. To be more precise, they reflected the Greek notion that passions are not of themselves vices, but the raw material of both vice and virtue, according as they function in excess and disproportion, or in measure and harmony (Lamprecht 1955: 62).

Happiness and friendship

The golden mean, Aristotle said, is not all of the secret of happiness. We must equally have a fair share of worldly goods, for poverty makes an individual stingy and grasping. Possessions, on the other hand, give one that freedom from care and greed which is the source of aristocratic ease and charm. The noblest of these external aids to happiness is friendship (Durant 1961: 62).

Aristotle clearly states that "friendship implies virtue; and is valuable as a means to the good life, as natural, as the bond of society, and as morally noble" (Ethics, BK 8, 203). Happiness is multiplied by being shared and is more important than justice: for "when men are friends, justice is unnecessary; but when men are just, friendship is still a boon". "A friend is one soul in two bodies".

Friendship, Aristotle argued, is not only indispensable as a means, but also noble in itself. Friends whose affection is based on utility do not love each other in themselves, but in so far as some benefit accrues to them from each other. Similarly, those whose friendship is based on pleasure see it as a means, for we enjoy their company not because of what they are in themselves, but because of utility.

Hence, in a friendship based on utility or pleasure men love their friends for their own good or pleasure, as someone useful or agreeable. Friendship of this nature merely serves an instrumental purpose and not for its intrinsic worth or value. Such kind of relationship is based on an accident in so far as the friend is not loved for being what he is, but as affording some benefit or pleasure as the case may be. Consequently, friendship of this kind is fluid and can easily be disengaged in the event of the parties involved changing and ceasing to be pleasant or useful to each other as earlier enjoyed.

Because utility is not a permanent quality, friendship built on it changes from time to time. When the motive or purpose of such friendship has been satisfied being ephemeral, the relationship itself loses its valid ground for existence and is dissolved, having existed merely as a means to that end. Friendships of utility, according to Aristotle, seem to occur most frequently between people of old age who prefer to pursue profit that pleasure and also between those in the prime of life and young people whose object in life is gain (*Ethics*, 207-208).

The perfect form of friendship, he argues, is that between the good, and those who resemble each other in virtue, "for these friends wish each alike the others good in respect of their goodness, and they are good in themselves" (208). It is those who wish the good of their friends for their friends' sake who are friends in the fullest sense, since they love each other for

themselves and not accidentally. Hence the friendship of these lasts as long as they continue to be good, given that virtue is a permanent quality. "Each is good relative to his friend as well as absolutely, since the good are both good absolutely and profitable to each other" (Ethics Bk 8, 209). Such kind of friendship, he opined, is naturally permanent, since it combines in itself all the attributes that friends ought to possess. Such virtuous friendship is of course rare, because such men are few.

The nature of virtue and taxonomy of virtues

In addition to our discussion on Aristotle's doctrine of the Golden Mean, it would suffice us to take a closer look at the nature of virtue, the taxonomy of virtues, and the relationship between virtues and inclinations. In Aristotle's view, virtues are excellences of character, trained behavioural dispositions that result in habitual acts. Virtues are those excellences of character that make up the good life and sets us apart from animals. Virtue ethics is not only about actions but about emotions, character, and moral habit. As Taylor puts it, it is an ethics of aspiration rather than an ethics of duty (1985:5). It requires us to aspire to be ideal persons (Pojmam 1999:163). A traditional term for a good person is "virtuous", but for a bad person, the term "vicious" is used. This reflects the idea that a good person has good moral qualities referred to as 'virtues' while a bad person inclines towards "vices" (Barcalow 1994: 92). A virtue is a character trait, not a mere habit, or tendency/inclination to act in certain ways. It is a virtuous character that defines a person and not just his/her mere habits. Some people are habitually inclined to performing certain good acts like being generous and courageous but may lack virtue because they do not really understand why it is appropriate to act in such a way. Virtues goes with knowledge and wisdom, (as in Socratic/Platonic tradition), about what is needful and important, and why. On the other hand, inclinations are defined as certain patterns of behaviour we engage in, but which we may not thoughtfully do, or accomplished through the exercise of our rational powers. In addition to rationally and routinely acting right, the virtuous person also has a distinctive set of moral perceptions, thoughts, and motives (Landau 2012: 258-259). For example, a generous person will, definitely, perceive, think, feel, and act differently from a stingy person. His/her motive for giving will also be different. We can offer similar accounts of all of the other virtues. Courage, for example, demands that we correctly perceive various threats and dangers, control our fear in a reasonable way, be motivated by a noble end, and act accordingly. Though Aristotle views courage primarily in the context of citizen's discharge of his civic and military obligations, this virtue, like all others, is relevant in a number ways to our contemporary existential situations.

Virtuous people are defined not just by their actions but also by their inner life. This principle compares with Kant's concept of the "Goodwill". According to Kant, if a man does what is right simply because he likes doing that kind of act (for instance, being generous), that is, if his inclinations led him in that direction, or because doing so serves his self-interest, there would be nothing morally admirable (or virtuous) about him (Kant 1967:214). A virtuous agent perceives, thinks, feels and acts differently from a person who is vicious. As Landau puts it, "People are virtuous only when their understanding and their emotions are well integrated. A virtuous person who understands the right thing to do will also be strongly motivated to do it, without regret or reluctance, for all the right reasons" (Landau 2012: 258). From Aristotle's standpoint, as well as from that of the modern virtue ethical tradition, the foregoing is what clearly differentiates the truly virtuous from the merely "continent" - that is, a person who manages to do right things, but with little or no pleasure or justifiable reason, and only does so by suppressing very strong contrary desires. In this regard, Aristotle states that "Virtuous conduct gives pleasure to the lover of virtue" (Ethics Bk 2: 33). Conversely, pleasure without virtue is not worth pursuing because it is vicious.

On the taxonomy of virtues, it is important to state that traditionally, virtues have been divided into two types, namely: moral virtues and non-moral virtues. The criterion for this demarcation stems from whether they are intuitive or tied to moral principles (Louden 1992: 6).

Moral virtues include; honesty, benevolence, nonmalevolence, fairness, kindness, conscientiousness, gratitude, and so forth. The second type of virtues, that is, non-moral virtues include; courage, optimism, rationality, self-control, patience, endurance, industry, musical talent, cleanliness, wit, and so forth (Pojman 1999: 163). This notwithstanding, the exact classification of various virtues is quite controvertible. Hence, we may not have a water-tight compartmentalization of these virtues because they sometimes overlap. Courage, for instance, is sometimes placed in the "moral" category. Similarly, kindness (as opposed to impartial benevolence), and self-control might fit into both categories. Virtues that are tagged "moral", are more closely linked with what has been considered essential for the moral life and incompatible with the immoral life (Pojman 1999:163).

Aristotle's virtue ethics and contemporary moral theories

The issue which Aristotle appears to conflate is the contemporary demarcation between normative ethics and metaethics. In normative ethics, we are concerned with norms of good conduct (that is, moral acts involving substantive moral judgements), whereby we judge actions as good or bad, right or wrong, virtuous or vicious, obligatory or impermissible, and so forth (Thompson 1976:29). It has to do with the traditional way of evaluating actions based on laid down rules, norms, mores or moral laws within a given society (Ozumba 2001: 74). The second level of ethical consideration has to do with the fact that, in ethical discourses, we make use of concepts which beg for clarification. This second dimension, which bothers on linguistic analysis, is the major preoccupation of contemporary ethics. To some extent, Aristotle's doctrine of the Golden Mean is analytic because of the rational thinking and weighing of options involved in moral decision making by agents.

However, Aristotle's virtue ethics (aretaic ethics), is teleological because it focuses on the end result of our actions (happiness). Moral principles or duties, here, are derived from the virtues which are the dominant moral considerations. This view is supported by Philippa Foot, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Richard Taylor. Aristotle's virtue ethics pre-dates the deontic view which, at contemporary times, focuses on action guiding principles which it considers as the essence of morality. Unlike, Aristotle's virtue ethics, deontologic ethics sees virtues as being derivable from principles, which are instrumental in performing right actions. According to this view, each virtue has a corresponding principle that generates it. This position can be found in the works of William Frankena, Bernard Gert, Alan Gewirth, John Rawls and Geoffrey Warnock. The third position is the complementarity school, which holds that both Aristotle's virtue (aretaic) ethics and Kant's duty (deontic) ethics are important, complementary and are necessary components for an adequate or complete ethical system. Those who hold this view include, Robert Louden, Walter Schaller, and Gregory Trianosky (see Pojman 1999: 166-167).

In contemporary times, virtue ethics has reemerged as a major ethical theory owing to the growing dissatisfaction with the 'principle' governed (action centred) ethical systems. A number of contemporary philosophers have advanced the idea of a return to Aristotle's ethics of virtue. They suggest that modern moral philosophy is "bankrupt", and that, it needs to be salvaged from the its bankruptcy (Rachels 1999:176). The foremost person to advance this radical idea was G. E. M. Anscombe in her article entitled: "Modern Moral Philosophy", which was published in 1958. In that article, she suggests that the modern moral philosophy is misguided because it rests on the incoherent notion of a "law" without a lawgiver. Anscombe posits that the very concepts of duty, obligation, rightness and wrongness, on which modern moral philosophy have focused attention, are connected to this incoherent notion. In view of this, she opines that philosophers should cease from thinking about such moral principles as duty, obligation, and rightness, and return to ethics of virtue as conceptualized by Aristotle (Rachels 1999:177). Apart from Anscombe, other moral philosophers such as Philippa Foot, Alasdair MacIntyre, Bernard Mayo, Edmund Pincoffs and Richard Taylor have in their respective works (see references), equally

expressed their dissatisfaction with the promises of the mainstream of the modern ethical tradition and argues for a return to a virtue based ethical system (Pojman 1999:159). Such deficiencies found in the 'principle' or 'rule-governed' ethics such as the overemphasis on the principle of autonomy (as in Kant), the absence of motivational component, and over dependence on rules without reference to their origin are seen to be addressed by virtue ethics.

Despite the calls for a return to ethics of virtue, there are some fundamental problems that are inherent in the theory. The greatest of them is the claim that right actions must be understood by reference to virtue. In other words, an action is right if and only if it conforms to virtue. Ordinarily, it should have been the other way round. This seems to be a misplacement of order because it is quite difficult to justify why virtue should enjoy such priority. This vulnerable point we find in virtue ethics is similar to the problem with the Divine command Theory which holds that what makes an action right is the fact that it is commanded by the 'gods', because such commands are what creates our duty. Virtue ethics, thus, shares a basic structure and a basic weakness with the Divine command theory.

In addition to the foregoing, this paper shares the view that what counts as virtue changes over time and from place to place, and in different circumstances and situations (Pojman 1999:167). The contemporary situationist ethical theory of Joseph Fletcher is a good example (see Fletcher 1966). Whereas, Aristotle regards pride as a virtue, Christian ethics sees it as a terrible vice. Again, whereas Marxists see acquisitiveness as a vice, Capitalists regards it as a virtue (Pence 1984: 282). In his work, *The Prince*, Machiavelli speaks of need for virtue, especially for new princes who wish to establish and maintain wholly new states. The 'virtue' (*virtu* in Italian) which Machiavelli introduces, obviously, contradicts most of our traditionally cherished ideals of virtue. For example, he encourages craftiness, stinginess, lying and brutality as mean of acquiring and retaining political power. This is an effrontery and a big challenge to Aristotle's ethics of virtue. We shall examine other problems associated with Aristotle's virtue ethics in the next section.

A critical appraisal of Aristotle's virtue ethics

Beyond every reasonable doubt, Aristotle stands out as one of the greatest moral philosophers the world has ever known. His ethics of virtue, no doubt, represents an exciting and practical moral tradition in antiquity which has continued to generate contemporary ethical debates. Aristotle's emphasis on the importance and indispensability of moral character which is virtue driven is quite commendable. This may have informed the calls in contemporary times for a return to Aristotle's eudaimonistic, virtue ethical tradition as we have already discussed in the preceding section.

However, one of the perennial problems associated with Aristotle's virtue ethics is that it provides no guidance on how to resolve ethical dilemmas (Louden 1984: 311-320). In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle did not say enough about what we are supposed to do. He gives detailed descriptions of many of the virtues, moral and intellectual, but with a persistent 'air of indeterminacy'. Aristotle gives an outline of pairs of contrary vices that contrast with each of the virtues, but says very little about where or how to draw the dividing lines and where or how to fix the golden mean (Mackie 1977:186). The work does not contain any additional help, but is merely self contained truism which lacks external clue that drives moral actions. Aristotle's virtue ethics is like telling someone to act as he should act. In other words, "Do what a good person would do" (Pojman 1999: 168). This implies that if a person knows how to act he will not need anyone to counsel or guide him on how to do so. In this circumstance, there are no moral role Models, or *exemplar* model, or an ideal type. How, then, do we decide who becomes our role model in a situation where different people endorse different candidates? Obviously, this situation will lead to ethical pluralism which reduces 'virtue' to something of personal choice. In other words, moral standards will differ from people to people, culture to culture. This would

mean that a virtuous action can only be defined from a relative perspective and there would be no consensus on what is a virtuous act. The necessary concomitant is the problem of virtue relativism. Some of the things Aristotle regards as virtues may count as vices and vice-versa for some people and in some places today, for example, pride, liberality and gentleness.

Further, Aristotle posits that "Virtue is however concerned with emotions and actions ..." (*Ethics* Bk 3:53). The epistemological problem here lies with knowing what emotions and actions that are the right virtues. Is there any objective way of knowing who a virtuous person is? Are there specific or objective principles of determining a virtuous emotion and action?. This appears unaddressed by Aristotle. Frankena, apparently referring to this problem, argues that "Virtues without principles are blind". He is simply saying that virtues need a framework, or action-guiding principles to direct it.

Moreover, this paper specifically, challenges Aristotle's thesis that happiness is an end (in every realm of existence). Given that Aristotle was basically concerned with the details of every day normative ethics – how people ought to behave or conduct themselves in society, he failed to carry the concept of happiness beyond the physical, transient world. Aristotle focused, primarily, on practical human interest, and consequently, restricted his idea of happiness to what he described as "the function of man". He believed that "happiness is the supreme practical good" (*Ethics* Bk 1, 1), and thus, overlooked some metaphysical dimensions of happiness.

At this juncture, it is quite germane to point out that Aristotle followed Plato in such basic conceptions of his ethical theory more closely than in any other aspect of his philosophical speculations (Lamprecht 1955: 61). However, Aristotle was not consistent in following the platonic tradition to a logical conclusion. If we accept Plato's idea of the immortality of the soul and Aristotle's view that happiness is the activity of the soul according to reason, it follows then, that the concept of happiness transcends the physical existential happiness to which Aristotle confined it.

In being more consistent with the platonic tradition, this paper posits that happiness, in the physical realm, may not absolutely be an end since it can only serve some temporal physical ends and nothing more. For those who accept that the soul of man is immortal, it is logical to say that our physical existential experiences cannot give us lasting happiness in the practical sense as Aristotle claimed, because of their ephemerality. At best we can only enjoy temporal happiness, if such exists, in the physical realm as a means to an end. The reason is that ultimate and absolute happiness may not be possible in a world where both good and evil are mutually inclusive. Moreover, it is obvious that those who lack the requisite mental capacities articulated by Aristotle may not achieve happiness in their life time. Happiness, therefore, as a transcendent good, can only be an end in the ideal world where the soul is free from the constraints and contaminations of the physical world.

The possibility of a third dimension: an eclectic approach

Beyond the positions of Plato and Aristotle on the issue of happiness and what actually constitute the highest good, there is the possibility of a third dimensional moral approach. This approach is eclectic and it is based on the view that the highest good for humans does not consist in the realization of a particular intrinsic good to the exclusion of other possibilities. Happiness is a multi-dimensional and multi-faceted concept which can be viewed from different idealistic, realistic and pluralistic perspectives. Virtues such as pleasure, knowledge, justice, freedom and moderation are all possible constituents of the highest good. Consequently, to narrow down our *summum bonum* to the pursuit of happiness alone as Aristotle did, or to narrow it down to justice and the knowledge of the forms as Plato did, will be too restrictive. For example, Joseph Fletcher considers love is the highest good. To some other people, such as Jean Paul Sartre, freedom is the highest good and that is what happiness means to them. Dostoevsky's 'underground man' was willing to give up everything, not only success and

pleasure but even his health, just in order to realize his 'most advantageous advantage', his freedom (Solomon 1997:296).

As we have seen so far from Aristotle, the rational eudaimonist ranks activities according to reason as the highest attainable good. This position sees happiness as an intrinsic end, in an exclusive sense. However, this view only represents an aspect of reality. All other goods considered as intrinsic by some other philosophers, such as freedom, justice, knowledge, success and love should also be considered as ends worthy of pursuit in their own respects. Human beings are not only pleasure seekers, they are also knowledge seekers, power seekers, freedom seekers, love seekers, and so on. A person's *eudaimonia* is rational, if it consists in the seeking of knowledge; insofar as he/she wills, his/her *eudaimonia* consists in the cultivation of virtue; insofar as he/she is feeling; his/her *eudaimonia* consists in the experience of pleasure. Our highest good is to realize so far as possible every intrinsic good, in such balance and proportion as our natural endowments and circumstances may permit (Halverson 1967: 280).

Our argument here is that, human beings are multidimensional entities, having diverse needs and aspirations. Some goods are considered intrinsically valuable while others are instrumental depending on circumstances and situations. To treat one of the various intrinsic goods as the only summum bonum will be parochial and unfair. For example, happiness is impossible without love and freedom. We may as well consider these as ultimate values in themselves. Human experiences differ, so do our values and beliefs. Moral eclectics, thus, argue, that all these factors should be considered while assigning values to goods, either as means or end.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have explored and evaluated Aristotle's concept of happiness in all its ramifications. His realism informed his rejection of transcendent good (happiness being the highest good) as something attainable. This paper raises objection to Aristotle's confinement of happiness to a "practical good" without regard to man's metaphysical make-up. In this circumstance, we conclude that his idea of happiness does not make it an absolute end since the soul transcends the physical realm. We have also argued that one or two dimensional approaches to the issue of happiness and the question of the highest good (summum bonus), as in Plato and Aristotle is quite inadequate. To this end, we have explored the possibility of a third dimension, which is eclectic in nature. It is argued that happiness may not stand alone as the ultimate end without other intrinsically valuable goods such as love and freedom, which also may be considered as end in themselves.

We have also done a critique of Aristotle's ethics of virtue in its basic form. It has been argued that moral virtues are a necessary component, but not a sufficient condition for happiness. Some external circumstances beyond a person's control could prevent even those capable of developing moral dispositions from reaching the goal of happiness. A person, in addition to having virtuous character, needs to be principled, wise, healthy and wealthy (Pojman 1999:164). It has also been pointed out that Aristotle's virtue ethics lacks guiding principles for determining how to act.

However, despite the criticisms we have advanced against Aristotle's concept of happiness as an end, his virtue ethics remains one of the most articulate, far-reaching and influential system of moral thought ever put together by any philosopher.

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