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The Purpose of Happiness

What is the problem with the word Happiness? People don't always know what happiness means. Another is that there are so many different definitions of happiness. Humans instinctually seek what many have termed as happiness. It's something that people are driven to obtain. But what is happiness? We will explore the very definition of happiness in this paper.

Aristotle relays his views on happiness and purpose through two Greek concepts: Telos, and Eudaimonia. Telos refers to one of the four causes proposed by Aristotle, that being the final cause. The final cause would, by today's terms, be defined as why something exists, specifically the fulfillment of a thing's purpose.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle says "Every art and every inquiry, and likewise every action and choice, seems to aim at some good." What Aristotle means by this is that every human action has a good as its end goal. And that end goal is what Aristotle calls a Telos.

Aristotle argues that humans have a Telos, a specific one that is at the center of all their activity, which Aristotle believed to be happiness. It is like a tree: Telos is the central trunk, with the activities that bring happiness branching out from it as the leaves and branches. Eudaimonia, translated as happiness, is closely related to the ideas of virtue and the Greek concept of arete, or as modern people may interpret it, excellence. Aristotle's happiness is not just any activity, but a certain quality of that activity is what brings happiness. Eudaimonia then represents the highest human good through flourishing, achieved through the goal of actively living an intellectually and morally virtuous life.

Why virtue? A virtue is a repeated activity that cements character. Bravery, for example is the repeated choice to face your fears. Being brave a single time does not make a man brave, but the repetition and consistency does. It becomes easier for the man to do brave acts, as the state of character makes the brave action pleasant. Virtue is about producing excellent human action.

It is vital to note the distinction between the two types of virtue: Moral virtues are developed through habit, while intellectual virtues are developed through teaching. Further, virtue is not ideally something that is maximized in a material way but rather maximized in a spiritual way. It is the result of finding the middle ground between a deficiency or an excess in a person's character.

Aristotle distinguishes Eudaimonia from hedonistic pleasure, as while living a good life is indeed enjoyable, the true happiness of it is not nearly as fleeting quick gratification, which traps people in a hedonic cycle of seeking pleasure without finding the true fulfillment of happiness. In

essence, Aristotle believed that by being virtuous, a person could achieve their purpose, which is true happiness, and that would lead them to a state of blissful existence here on earth.

In contrast to Aristotle's views on happiness, there lies Kant. Kant, unlike Aristotle, believed that happiness is too vague and otherwise subjective to determine the best path towards reaching it. Rather, Kant believed that we have a born right to seek happiness in our own ways, with the caveat that how one does so does not impede on the freedom of another.

Kant defines happiness as "general wellbeing and contentment with one's condition". It was not a state of being, but rather than an activity. "Happiness has to do with the conservation of the creature." Conservation in this case pertains to the satisfaction of base desires, such as hunger, thirst, and the desire to be free of pain.

Reason can be opposed to conservation. Reason drives us to act for higher good, while conservation often drives us to act for our own good. For example, say a mother and her child are hungry, and there is only enough bread to feed one or the other. Conservation demands the mother feed herself, while reason requires her to feed her child.

This is why Kant believed that happiness is not the highest good. Rather, acting on good duty-bound will is the highest calling. He believed that duty, rather than happiness, is the goal of human life, by striving to obey duty and personal maxims and morally upright. Duty and morality, for Kant, was the ideal guiding force for human behavior, rather than the pursuit of pleasure.

Aristotle and Kant's views on happiness appear diametrically opposed to one another, what with Aristotle prioritizing happiness and Kant favoring duty. But there is room for a middle ground. For my position on the matter of human happiness and purpose, I've drawn from Johann Fichte's dialectics of Thesis, Antithesis, and Synthesis. Aristotle's views are the thesis, Kant's the Antithesis, and my own views are the Synthesis.

In life, one must have both a sense of virtuous moral duty, and enough room for a human to pursue that which makes them happy. As with many things, it's a balancing act, much like Aristotle's deficiencies and excesses when it came to his list of virtues. To achieve true happiness, one must avoid excess and deficiency of character in equal measure.

My views are thus: The highest good in life is the combination of virtuous moral character and self-fulfillment: Virtue is the key to unlocking the door of happiness. This leads to human flourishing as a goal, but one must accept reality in turn: This world can be harsh and unfair, with many things simply decided by fortunes out of one's own control, and the limitations therein.

Happiness is true fulfillment arising from content in one's well-being in life, something gained through the pursuit of freedom and rationality, rather than the simple, fleeting, and shallow nature of pleasure alone. Furthermore, one is duty-bound to not just focus on the happiness and virtuousness of oneself, but rather on seeking to guide others towards virtue, and in turn true happiness.