

The Problem With "Flourishing"

Post by "Cassius" of May 4, 2015 at 8:01 AM

"Flourishing" is a code word that it appears that Aristotelians like to use instead of "pursuit of pleasure" or some variation of pleasure. In my observation, "flourishing" - to the extent you can pin down a definition, is meant by the Aristotelian to include the goal of virtue that they believe is equally a goal of life with pleasure. I need to pin down some examples and/or discussion of this in order to establish the point, and I don't have those lined up. But I am confident the point is correct. In the end, this is a subset of the wider issue that Aristotle failed to ground his ethics in pleasure. While Aristotle denied Plato's contention that the good existed as an ideal form in another dimension, he simply moved the location of these ideal forms to *this* world and considered them to be "essentials" that exist in this dimension. The result is largely the same as Plato.

I will update this as I can find cites. In the meantime:

- **[Essentialism - an article by Richard Dawkins](#)**: "Essentialism—what I've called "the tyranny of the discontinuous mind"—stems from Plato, with his characteristically Greek geometer's view of things. For Plato, a circle, or a right triangle, were ideal forms, definable mathematically but never realised in practice. A circle drawn in the sand was an imperfect approximation to the ideal Platonic circle hanging in some abstract space. That works for geometric shapes like circles, but essentialism has been applied to living things and Ernst Mayr blamed this for humanity's late discovery of evolution—as late as the nineteenth century. If, like Aristotle, you treat all flesh-and-blood rabbits as imperfect approximations to an ideal Platonic rabbit, it won't occur to you that rabbits might have evolved from a non-rabbit ancestor, and might evolve into a non-rabbit descendant. If you think, following the dictionary definition of essentialism, that the essence of rabbitness is "prior to" the existence of rabbits (whatever "prior to" might mean, and that's a nonsense in itself) evolution is not an idea that will spring readily to your mind, and you may resist when somebody else suggests it. Paleontologists will argue passionately about whether a particular fossil is, say, Australopithecus or Homo. But any evolutionist knows there must have existed individuals who were exactly intermediate. It's essentialist folly to insist on the necessity of shoehorning your fossil into one genus or the other. There never was an Australopithecus mother who gave birth to a Homo child, for every child ever born belonged to the same species as its mother. The whole system of labelling species with discontinuous names is geared to a time slice, the present, in which ancestors have been conveniently expunged from our awareness (and "ring species" tactfully ignored). If by some miracle every ancestor were preserved as a fossil, discontinuous naming would be impossible. Creationists are misguidedly fond of citing "gaps" as embarrassing for evolutionists, but gaps are a fortuitous boon for taxonomists who, with good reason, want to give species discrete names. Quarrelling about whether a fossil is "really"

Australopithecus or Homo is like quarrelling over whether George should be called "tall". He's five foot ten, doesn't that tell you what you need to know?

- **Wikipedia Reference: Eudaimonia** (Greek: [εὐδαιμονία](#) [eudaimonía:]), sometimes [anglicized](#) as **eudaemonia** or **eudemonia** /ju:di'moʊniə/, is a Greek word commonly translated as [happiness](#) or [welfare](#); however, "human flourishing" has been proposed as a more accurate translation.[1] Etymologically, it consists of the words "eu" ("good") and "[daimōn](#)" ("spirit"). It is a central concept in [Aristotelian ethics](#) and [political philosophy](#), along with the terms "[aretē](#)", most often translated as "[virtue](#)" or "excellence", and "[phronesis](#)", often translated as "practical or ethical wisdom".[2] In Aristotle's works, eudaimonia was (based on older Greek tradition) used as the term for the highest human good, and so it is the aim of practical philosophy, including [ethics](#) and [political philosophy](#), to consider (and also experience) what it really is, and how it can be achieved.
- **The Three Key Ideas From Aristotle That Will Help You Flourish.** "Eudaimonia is Greek and translates literally to "having good demons." Many authors translate it as "happiness," but I don't think that's the best translation or way to understand it. "Well-being" and "flourishing" are closer to what Aristotle means, and I think that of the two, "flourishing" captures the full range of the way he uses the word. And someone who is flourishing is living The Good Life. According to Aristotle, all humans seek to flourish. It's the proper and desired end of all of our actions. Flourishing, however, is a functional definition. And to understand something's function, you have to understand its nature. Keep in mind that Aristotle, unlike Plato, was an empiricist – that is, he was trying to describe what he was seeing, rather than stating what he thought it should be. In Aristotle's schema, there are four aspects of human nature, and he is often quoted as saying "Man is a political creature." Aristotle's meaning is much richer than the way it's translated, though, because he means that "man is a rational creature who lives in poleis (societies)." ("Poleis" is the plural of "polis," from which we get the root "poli" that's used in so many words like polite, political, police, etc. that have to do with how we interact in groups.)"
- **Notes on Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics:** "There are several ways in which Aristotle approaches the question of what happiness consists in. First, he notes that flourishing for plants and animals consists in their functioning well according to their natures. So one question we should ask is this: What is the proper or peculiar function of a human being? Aristotle thinks it obvious that our proper function consists in reasoning and in acting in accord with reason. This is the heart of the doctrine of virtue, both moral and intellectual. So on this line of reasoning we are led to the conclusion that the possession and exercise of moral and intellectual virtue is the essential element in our living well. A second approach is to survey the goods which we find ourself desiring, since happiness presumably consists in the attainment of some good or set of goods such that to have them in the right way is to be living well. One division of goods is into (i) external goods (wealth, fame, honor, power, friends), (ii) goods of the body (life, health, good looks, physical strength, athletic ability, dexterity, etc.), and goods of the soul (virtue, life-projects, knowledge and education, artistic creativity and appreciation, recreation, friendship, etc.). The problem then is to delineate the ways in which such goods are

related to happiness. Aristotle's view is that (a) certain goods (e.g., life and health) are necessary preconditions for happiness and that (b) others (wealth, friends, fame, honor) are embellishments that promote or fill out a good life for a virtuous person, but that (c) it is the possession and exercise of virtue which is the core constitutive element of happiness. The virtuous person alone can attain happiness and the virtuous person can never be miserable in the deepest sense, even in the face of misfortune which keeps him from being happy or blessed. So happiness combines an element over which we have greater control (virtue) with elements over which we have lesser control (health, wealth, friends, etc.).

- **Aristotle, Human Flourishing, And the Limited State**: "Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) is the most significant thinker and the most accomplished individual who has ever lived. Every person currently living in Western civilization owes an enormous debt to Aristotle who is the fountainhead behind every achievement of science, technology, political theory, and aesthetics (especially Romantic art) in today's world. Aristotle's philosophy has underpinned the achievements of the Renaissance and of all scientific advances and technological progress to this very day."
- **The Concept of A Flourishing Life in Aristotle's Politics and Nichomachean Ethics**: "In Politics, Aristotle argues that to lead a flourishing life, it is imperative that all free men embrace their responsibility in the political system, thereby protecting the interests of their personal lives, social class, and community, as well as instilling virtue in oneself through civil servitude and leadership."