

Happiness in Nicomachean Ethics

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Abstract

In the following work, I will try to trace, in general lines, the way in which the matter of happiness is perceived in The Nicomachean Ethics. At the same time, I will also touch on the subject of the perspectives that emerge and reflect from the considered work. For that matter, I will follow the way in which Aristotle has enunciated the matter, so that then call into requisition various perspectives in order to emphasize that happiness can't be pursued or methodically conceived. Even though the matter is methodically transposed and traced, the simple browsing makes it emerge from the directions established in the initial program. What I am here pleading for is that the work doesn't have an amphibological structure, not because it respects by itself certain norms demanded by the logics' common sense, but because it couldn't be conceived in exclusively logic terms. If we follow Aristotle's ethic, we will see, without difficulty, that the work's purpose is practical. From where we can easily indicate that the need to methodically articulate the ethic's program is no longer necessary by itself.

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1. The theory of purposes

Any art, activity or even human aspiration has tended through its very essence for better. From here the idea that any activity must have a goal, a purpose; for example, the purpose of medical investigations would be health, in the case of the army - victory, of the welfare economy. And then, if there are a lot of doctrines, sciences with a multitude of goals to achieve, some smaller and less important than their sales space, then they will all end up converting to one last goal - that being the good. That is why it is worth thinking about it and being put at the center of any epistemic analysis, and not only: "So if what is done has some end that we want for its own sake, and everything else we want is for the sake of this end; and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (because this would lead to an infinite progression, making our desire fruitless and vain), then clearly this will be the good, indeed the chief good." (Aristotle, 2004, p.4) And what science could be trusted in doing so? The political one - because most of the goals in a society are gathered and absorbed in politics, more precisely by appealing to the law, to the administrative apparatus:" Since political science employs the other sciences, and also lays down laws about what we should do and refrain from, its end will include the ends of the others, and will therefore be the human good." (Aristotle, 2004, p.4)

The state therefore becomes a kind of manager of the community, but also of the individual good. More precisely, of the human good. But how the state can make the difference between a personal good and an impersonal one that is great, and not desirable and attractive as the individual good is, remains to be seen! Because the good of the community, as it appears here, is supreme, and all of the other aspirations are nothing else but goals in viewing of the final good, the foremost good. But even if certain activities are precise, with well-defined purposes, the structure of good, if we can call it like that, is not easy to grasp, which further strengthens the idea that good is maintained not only by nature, but even more so, by conventions, by directions that cannot be calculated and analyzed exclusively methodically: "The spheres of what is noble and what is just, which political science examines, admit of a good deal of diversity and variation, so that they seem to exist only by convention and not by nature." (Aristotle, 2004, p. 5) And this is because the good, as it was understood by some, had and proved to have serious consequences, even if its role had to be firm and noble. Here, Aristotle even states that some were brought to their knees by courage, and others were

destroyed by wealth. So, great attention is required to the generalizations that are made on the basis of other generalizations, reaching a kind of final solution regarding what is good and what is bad. However, one thing must be highlighted. He who leans on the good must be prepared not to be overwhelmed by feelings. Political science cannot be thought of and implemented by a novice, by a man driven by passion - even if the tendency can be eclectic, combining action, passion with definite and firm reason.

2. The ultimate purpose - happiness

If we go deeper and look at all of the implications, then we will see that happiness (eudaimonia) is the ultimate goal, the ultimate purpose: "So: To flourish (and prosper) is our ultimate goal. It (means living a life that) meets all our needs. It's the goal of everything we do." (Aristotle, EE1097b20) At the level of the masses, happiness is mundane, it is closely linked to daily life, to certain benefits in relation to certain costs, strictly punctual things. For the sophisticated ones, happiness would be the intellectual activity, the goal or the way in which the world they live in can be conceived and thought. Some might say that this is the condition by which other good things become possible. At this level, Aristotle does not seem to go into detail. But as Anthony Kenny (1995) says the equivalent of happiness would be the act of doing good and behaving well.

However, the analysis of the good must start from the subject; In a way, it must find his own foundation. Then the good should be thought by starting from principles or from those things that lead to principles? Aristotle does not hesitate and starts from the assumption that everything that can be known, fulfilling somewhat epistemic requirements, must find its basis at the border between direct and mediated knowledge (mediated knowledge (by deduction - formal syllogistic structure) / direct knowledge (by sensitive intuition or intellectual intuition - nous).

But what about happiness? Can be found a strainer to filter all the conceptions regarding this problematic term? In the following, I will draw a path to elucidate some of the problems related to the condition of happiness. First, we have commentators who say that happiness is a compositum, a bridge between the goals outlined above. At the same time, a necessary condition for fulfilling the vital functions in the society. Therefore, happiness is intertwined with ethics, but it is not in essence identifying with it. We are actually dealing with a norm, with different degrees of perceiving happiness, not with strict, exclusive forms specific to "happiness".

Consequently, as it appears in this context of interpretation, happiness is rather related to a certain monitorization. You can't

perceive truly the essence of happiness if you do not go through certain gradual, punctual stages of your daily life. That's how it seems at this point. (Mureşan, 2011) And at the same time, you can't talk about happiness if it hasn't reached a final point, from where a clear line can be drawn. We could say that Aristotle cannot go beyond the method. (Mureşan, 2007) For a thing to be complete, it must first of all have an end. And happiness, if we try to comprehend it, to take it out of the state of unhiding, as phenomenologists would say (Kontos, 2002) must have, to lead to an end point. This perspective of happiness is not much different from the accounting approach: "Finally, Aristotle accepts Solon's dictum calls no man eudaimon until he is dead, not because it is only when dead that he can be eudaimon – that would be absurd (1100a 13, 1100a 34) - but because when one judges someone eudaimon that is a judgement about his whole life, and his whole life can only be known when it has ended." (Bostock, 2000, p. 12).

Another grid of interpretation would be reduced to the concept of "fulfilled life". At least that's the way it is for Gerard J. Hughes. He considers the term eudaimonia to be problematic, and the only way to approach it would be to perceive the concept in terms of relevance to a fulfilled life. And then a new problem arises - How do we know how to recognize a fulfilled life? Well, neither can the author give a reasonable answer: „We simply do not know what fulfilled life is. Indeed, the examples which Aristotle has just considered might suggest that it is a mistake to suppose that fulfilment can be just one thing, like pleasure, or reputation, or money.” (Hughes, 2001, p. 27) But even if we do not have a clear position, it suggests that life cannot be fulfilled if it does not agree with a certain virtue. Which also involves an activity. For, virtue cannot be staged if it is not accompanied by a certain activity. However, many commentators like Gerard J. Hughes have pointed out that Aristotle's ethical theory of happiness ultimately settles down to selfishness. If a multitude of doctrines converge towards an ultimate goal, and that is directly related to the mundane purpose, the purpose of the city, and therefore of the individual, then we are certainly dealing with a subject-centered analysis (Toner, 2006). We have another interpretation of happiness: "According to the interpretation I have been defending, Aristotle equates happiness with perfect virtuous activity of the rational soul, and with that good alone. More precisely, perfect happiness consists in excellent theoretical activity, and secondary happiness consists in excellent practical activity. The two lives devoted to these two ends contain many other intrinsic goods besides virtuous activity, but none of these subordinate ends is itself a component of happiness. Human goals are thus arranged in a

hierarchy, and happiness is identified not with the whole of that hierarchy but with its pinnacle." (Kraut, 1989, p. 268) Here, happiness appears in a certain hierarchical order, but focuses on two types of view. Actually, we have the concept of happiness, but it must be seen in terms of its practical resonance. And at the same time, through its rational relevance. And happiness would then be seen in the light of a hierarchy that derives from the purposes of the two goals, practical, rational. To the extent that this is reflected, happiness is not precisely identified with some of the goals. It would be, thought in these terms, the purpose of a whole, the support of human activities. However, we also have other options, various commentators stating that happiness is an intellectual activity: „The maximization of contemplative activity, Aristotle thinks, is therefore subject to the constraint that it can be maximized only through actions that are consistent with the various virtues." (Pakaluk, 2005, p. 325.) The upper part, the supreme good, would then be reduced to problems of a metaphysical nature. Which may be absurd, - according to Aristotle - is that the supreme good sustains the sequence of activities, but does not identify itself literally with any purpose derived from them. Certainly, philosophical activity plays an important role in the growth of the individual, it represents, if you will, a higher weight, but it is not, in essence, enough to state strongly that happiness is strictly capacity and love of wisdom. This would be the exclusivist approach, as has been commented on over the years.

Looking back, after listing so many interpretations, we can draw the line. First of all, all those who say that happiness is thought purely methodical, must keep in mind that the answer about happiness should have been unanimously accepted. If happiness is drawn purely methodically, following well-structured schemes, then the answer to happiness should be accurate too - which is not happening. As we have shown above, happiness has been interpreted in various ways, from a fulfilled life to superior activities. Even Aristotle, in dealing with the problem, tries to show very clearly that, pursuing the same goal, you can take it in different directions. Which may sound a little messy, but if you go beyond metaphor, you get to the heart of the matter.

Another thing that comes to strengthen my assumed position here. The method, however how well structured would be, cannot be essentially susceptible just for objectivity. In every logical construction there are fragments of subjectivity. Relativity is a component part of the system. Whatever we try to look at, we will come just to this statement. And then, all of the commentators who try to extract the essence of Aristotle's discourse forget exactly this thing - the

possibility that the statements to be antagonistic, free from epistemic content, but loaded with practical, mundane and finally real content.

It is normal to have head-to-head statements, as long as Nicomachean Ethics is a work of practical purpose. If it had remained in the plan of the exact sciences, then we could have spoken of an anomaly of the argument. But as long as the work makes the transition to politics, we can no longer have epistemic claims, of exact, precise support, of some axioms that do not even exist. Of course, Aristotle uses a lot of arguments, methods to support the inaugural speech as coherently as possible, but the final goal, practically, overturns the way we look at the work and forces us to go beyond the norm, to try to understand the good in terms of its factual implications, in the order of the daily life. Henceforth it follows that my answer to happiness can only be stated in terms of overcoming it. It represents that all of the present throughout is a way of leaving the door open to possible philosophical confrontations. So, happiness, as it appears in the context I thought, is related to activity. If the individual has no part of activity, then he cannot "exercise" his virtue. So, to harvest the fruits of his own activity. This means that pleasure cannot be perceived if it is not first set in motion by activity, and then by direct connection with virtue, to be perfected.

3. Conclusion

Let's take the example of a pianist. We can say about him that he is virtuous, that he never misses a note, that his music is perfect. But we can't know how many hours he spent repeating, how much he struggled, how much he tried to honor his status. In other words, for the pianist to be virtuous, he must, first of all, be a pianist, so he must have an activity. Secondly, he must master all the grips, the implications of his activity, so to find the right environment, to have a gift, a sense, so to be virtuous. Third, he must feel pleasure. And how can the pleasure be obtained? Very simple. From his activity intertwined with virtue, pleasure also appears. In this case, pleasure can appear when we are dealing with appreciation. Obviously, the pianist's appreciation is closely related to his activity, and hence, to his virtue. A man cannot be virtuous in his sleep, to paraphrase Aristotle. When he stated this, he was in fact saying that virtue can be virtue without calling to a confirmation. In the case of the pianist, the audience, those who appreciate him, all those around his activity, and not only, become responsible for his virtuosity. That is why, in the tenth book, Aristotle appeals to pleasure. Every activity must be

crowned with pleasure, and then with success. In my opinion, the happiness in this book cannot be perceived outside the activity or the movement. I believe that, in *The Nicomachean Ethics*, happiness does not simply arise, but depends on the way of forcing the individual, on the way he chooses to position himself, and this would be the act. Without action, happiness would no longer be happiness. A fulfilled man cannot sit on a chair forever.

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