Refining the Concept of Eudaimonia

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Abstract: There have been different views about " happiness " since ancient Greek times. By combining subjectivism and objectivism, in his philosophical work "Nicomachean Ethics," Aristotle tried to tackle the science of happiness. His work led to the creation of Eudaimonia, which roughly translates to "happiness." However, some of his principles inevitably resulted in controversy. This paper will analyze two philosophers' views on ultimate happiness and the difference between their views and Aristotelian claims. Richard Kraut and Laura Sizer are two prominent figures who have dedicated their lives to reviewing Aristotelian works. Richard Kraut criticized Aristotle's doctrine for being overwhelmingly rigid and with a distorted objective, while Laura Sizer tried to reconcile both the objectivist and subjectivist ideals embedded into the concept of Eudaimonia using affect theory. Then, the paper will demonstrate my thoughts on these two authors' claims in Aristotle's concept of eudaimon. Finally, the paper will conclude with my definition of "eudaimonia."

Keywords: Aristotle, eudaimonia, virtue ethics, Nicomachean Ethics

1. Introduction

In this essay, the author will examine Aristotle's virtue ethics and how the concept of eudaimonia has evolved throughout history. This paper will focus mainly on two famous authors, Richard Kraut and Laura Sizer. The following paper will closely examine Aristotle's idea of eudaimonia from the book of Nicomachean Ethics. Moreover, it will analyze Kraut and Sizer's views on "eudaimonia" and provide a revised perspective on it. Global happiness will be emphasized. It promotes to merge the difference between subjectivism and objectivism. Finally, it will translate eudaimonia into "super happiness."

2. Discussion

2.1. First Part: Kraut on Aristotle

When defining "eudaimonia," Kraut suggests that we should never translate the word into any of the following: happiness, flourishing, or well-being. He argued that these translations oversimplified Aristotle's original concept[1]. In his writing, Kraut states," We could, of course, leave eudaimonia untranslated and let its meaning be gathered from the statements Aristotle makes about." [1]. Kraut believes the English language lacks the complexity to translate Aristotle's ironic term correctly. Like Kraut, this paper will   also adopt a practical approach to analyze the meaning

of eudaimonia.The analysis of this paper will consider specific situations and different points of view. The author will first summarize some views presented by Kraut from the perspective of the subjectivism of morality, and then, I will complement Kraut's theories with my analysis.

To begin with, Kraut argues that translating eudaimonia to 'happiness' is inappropriate since it means more than simply a state of mind, it has to regard some objective standard about the individuals[1]. According to contemporary virtue ethics, he argues that if a person owns eudaimonia, he is a eudaimon[1]. Kraut, an excellent example of a eudaimon, is a philosopher who enjoys constant intellectual and moral activities[1]. Then, he exercises the great good of human beings working towards the greater good while also pursuing his interests. Thus, even when external goods, such as honor, are deprived, he will still be happy. Aristotle disagrees with Kraut's example of a eudaimon stating that "those who say that the victim on the rack or the man who falls into great misfortunes is happy if he is good, are, whether they mean to or not, talking nonsense" (EN, VII.13, 1153bl9-21). Aristotle's point is that the misfortune of life can lead to preventing eudaimonia (EN, I.8 1099a31-1099b7 and EN, I.9, 1100a5-9).

From my perspective, a person can be happy without reaching a state of eudaimonia. Following this logic, the distinction between these two concepts is much more apparent. To be specific, the subjective attitude of a moral agent can play a vital role in their acquisition of eudaimonia. Different situations deemed unlucky, such as someone being deprived of their honor or the right to engage in politics (EN, I.8, 1099bl1-5), can shift a personal preference on the external good. Therefore, an individual's internal interest in achieving happiness is more important than the external good. Thus, referring to the above example, the philosopher may prefer to achieve the ultimate inner good of thinking philosophically than insisting on protesting his deprived external good.

There are many ways to reach this conclusion, including the atmosphere of the external environment and the difference between first-order desire and second-order desire.

It should be noted that the external environment inevitably prevents an individual from achieving eudaimonia. The bad sociological background creates an unfair and unjust system, leading to an evil society. For example, the negative impact of World Churches of the Creator on society has been analyzed[2]. For example, consider the infamous Nazi Germany and its attempt to eradicate the world's Jewish population.

The truth is that when the mania of Nazis was spreading like wildfire, people of all kinds who resisted the Nazis were killed[3]. In this scenario, the internal good is much easier to acquire, and the external good is difficult to achieve; even virtuous people fail to complete and realize their dream. In this situation, the most efficient way would be for philosophers to abandon the idea of regaining their political rights. Their happiness would then be attributed to the most achievable: inner good. In this case, the people would abandon eudaimonia as the paramount virtue because Aristotle defines it as honor and political rights. Instead, they turn to another kind of happiness that is not inferior; they focus on improving themselves. This is not only good for people who practice philosophical thinking themselves but for the whole society and humanity. In my opinion, when an individual makes a decision, he or she is expressing his or her idea of human good. Throughout an individual's life, he or she is redefining the goodness of humankind. Here, I agree with Sartre that all the actions an individual may take to create himself or herself as wish, at the same time, create an image of a person such as he or she believes ought to be[4]. Consequently, the attempt of nursing a broken heart and hoping to escape from the suffering of reality with philosophical thinking applies to every unfortunate person. This attempt can even open the eyes of the Nazi rulers to different philosophical ideas to change their desire for genocide.

A Second-order desire can control a first-order desire. A first-order desire is defined by Harry Frankfurt in his Freedom of Will and Concept of a Person as a "desire to do or not to do one or another" [5]. Consequently, I argue that the desire to justify one's behavior and become famous is

simply first-order. It is not as essential to happiness compared to second-order desires [6]. This desire probably originated from Aristotle's insight at his time and the openness of the Greeks. Because Athens has its democracy and everyone citizen has the right to vote, it does not mean that engaging in politics is an instinctive behavior. We can use Frankfurt's firs order desires and second-order desires to analyze Aristotle's emphasis on the right to vote. Instinctive means that we are born to must vote. However, unlike Aristotle, I argue that the right to vote is not a basic need for humans. I am not saying that the right to vote is not important; it is meaningful, but it is not essential. In this case, the second-order desire would be to reject the desire to vote. The desire to vote cannot provide happiness if we know that our saying does not matter. Alternatively, we can choose not to vote if we know that the majority will not favor us.

There are so many countries with a democracy that favors only the majority in the contemporary world. If democracy is reducible to a decision mechanism based on a voting rule, and if that voting rule is fundamentally defective as a decision mechanism, democracy is inherently problematic as a political system, as critics have long contended[7]. Moreover, consider a society where citizens' voices are largely disrespected and omitted because the government does not listen to them. This distant feeling arising from the daily world makes us question the real meaning of "engaging in politics." On the contrary, philosophical training can benefit us.

Thus, "thinking" itself is happiness. Here, I agree with Christopher Shields when he writes, "Aristotle's claim, to be precise, is not that engaging in rational activity, thus construed, makes us happy. Instead, engaging in this activity is what it is to be satisfied.[8]" Aristotle once claimed that the virtuous individual does not only act virtuously, but he also realizes his decision, decides for his best profit, and does so firmly (EN, II.4, 1105a30-34). Kraut also suggests Aristotle prefers them to everything else (EN, I.10, 1100b19-20), and realizes he is a good person (EN, IX.9, 1170b4-9). In my opinion, both Kraut's and Aristotle's perspectives make sense. In short, my belief matches Irwin's Review of The Fragility of Goodness by M. Nussbaum, where he writes, "sometimes their plans are frustrated by external events beyond their control" [9]. Some of the external virtues, such as being involved in politics, are based on fortune and should not be considered as important as internal virtue.

2.2. Second Part: Sizer on Aristotle

Sizer debated the distinctions between subjective and objective standards and their role in happiness [4]. To begin with, Sizer suggested that there are differences between local and global happiness and their contributions to well-being. The first refers to events, and the latter concerns more influential goods.

As for the analysis on Aristotle, Sizer pointed out that his doctrines are both axiologically and ontologically objective. For axiological aspects, Aristotle has the implied meaning of the "flouring" of the whole of humankind. This can be seen in this excerpt: "Happiness is by virtue…which will be the virtue of the best thing." "The best is… to understand what is fine and divine, by being itself either divine or the most divine element in us." (EN, X.7, 1177a, 12-17)

When discussing subjectivism and objectivism, Sizer used the experiment of Nozick's Experience Machine. Nozick used this to suggest that belief or feeling itself cannot satisfy one's desires and goals, but satisfaction is related to the real world[10]. Nozick then explains, "what we want, and value is an actual connection with reality"[11]. This gave Sizer the idea that happiness combines subjective and objective concepts. The author then uses the affect theory to explain the two doctrines' roles.

The Experience Machine proposes a tricky question for some claims that happiness is a kind of state that is disconnected from the objective world.   Sizer then discussed happiness: is it an emotion, a mood, or something else?

I believe happiness has the characteristics of both emotion and mood. This combination shows that maybe the difference between the two kinds of classification is not as significant as we think. First, I will examine the elements of emotion in happiness.

Local happiness shares characteristics of emotion; it accompanies certain feelings, clearly similar to other "basic feelings": enjoyment, anger, fear, sadness, surprise, and disgust [12]. This is not only limited to local happiness but definitely to global happiness. The emotion comes with happiness simultaneously. Here, I refer to Aristotle's claim about the types of "hepetai." "A thing may be accompanied by another in three ways, either simultaneously, subsequently, or potentially" Specifically, pleasure is accompanied simultaneously by happiness and virtuous behaviors. As a result, happy emotions can be achieved as long as people do good things with good intentions and total awareness. When people help their neighbors walk their dogs, they feel enjoyed and proud of themselves as they walk through the street. It is in this process that accomplishing this task makes them feel happy.

Moreover, as global happiness is described to be influential throughout one's whole life and can be passed down to his or her siblings, then the emotion can be achieved for an even longer time. Although emotion may be less obvious and intense, it still accompanies happiness never to disappear. So as long as peopel are constantly living a virtuous life with happiness, they will feel the emotion of being pleasant and proud. As a result, happiness behaves in some of the traits of emotion.

I agree with Sizer that emotion and happiness can be linked together with the theory of the broaden-and-build model. It is argued that positive emotions broaden an individual's momentary thought-action repertoire, and it can then motivate us to strengthen our social bonds. Finally, this can prompt us to strive for what we want and achieve local happiness[4]. It also mediates the gap between subjectivism and objectivism because this local happiness arises from the feedback loop between mind and body[4].

Happiness also presents some traits of mood. Sizer pointed out that global happiness can be understood by mood, which is similar to emotion but is objectless[4].

2.3. Third Part: My Definition of Eudaimonia

I argue that eudaimonia should have both objective and subjective parts. So, it is similar to happiness in some way. As for happiness, it has both local and global contexts, but they have different proportions in making happiness. I believe that local happiness forms the majority component in happiness. Local happiness can refer to helping others, eating ice cream, complaining to others, and playing sports, which make us happy. This local happiness gives us the reason to behave in specific ways and make certain decisions. On the other hand, subjective happiness requires a good mood and emotion, yet the latter is the majority in happiness. As emotion is connected with objects and specific things in the world, it is the company of local happiness.

On the contrary, eudaimonia focuses more on global happiness and mood. Eudaimonia should be considered on a life-long scale. Life indeed consists of many small things and decisions. However, the overall objective is happiness throughout life. Therefore, the perfect situation is that a person can find the wisdom inside him and live in a perfect world. This happiness does not need to be emotional; it can be related to mood. The mood is objective so that a person with eudaimonia should be happy with his life and not for certain small things. Global happiness also influences other people around you since it is influential. If you are happy, then people around you are also happy or becoming better off.

As a result, eudaimonia consists of all of the requirements for happiness. As I used the infamous example of Nazis, the relationship between eudaimonia and happiness is certain. Eudaimonia is ideal and theoretical, while happiness is imperfect and practical. In real life, we all face different

kinds of limitations that can never allow us to achieve eudaimonia; some become so serious that even critical elements of eudaimonia are bounded. For example, for a German citizen, he has no choice but to be forced to support the Nazis to eradicate Jews. As a result, the right to voice his opinions and engage in politics does not exist. It was also hard for people to develop social connections with friends. If these vital elements of eudaimonia are not available, then is happiness available? Although it is hard, it can be. People can have philosophical activities and find hope in dark times. This can bring them happiness, which is relatively easy compared to their situations.

Consequently, eudaimonia is defined as "perfect happiness" or "super happiness." Eudaimonia is thought to be like happiness, but clearly, it is harsher to complete. The difference between these two happiness levels is the net result of both the social background and the personal gift of the abnormal human nature of a saint. Firstly, it requires the external world to be perfectly ideal for agents' decisions to be influential. If the external environment is not as ideal, then it is hard for agents to fully achieve any critical elements of eudaimonia relating to the external world, including the right to be involved in politics and meaningful friendships. Secondly, it demands people to have the first-ordered desire to be happy to involve in political decisions and social interactions. It is not a skill we are born with. Consider a country where people are ruled by a king for a long period of time; their life is rich and luxurious; they are not eliminated to give their opinions about the government. Nevertheless, just as the living standard is as good as the other countries, no one wants to change, so the political decision is not an intrinsic desire. However, a saint must be interested in dealing with public issues and be dedicated.

There is a consensus that people need to behave virtuously to gain a good life, whether this is referring to happiness or eudaimonia. Nevertheless, to what extent should these virtues be performed is undetermined. Consequently, there are qualities of happiness that are overlapped with eudaimonia, but to what extent it overlaps is controversial. If happiness emphasizes more on subjective standards than objective standards, is objectivism also necessary in eudaimonia? Moreover, even the qualities of happiness itself are controversial. For happiness, what is more important, the global happiness or the local happiness? However, what is ensured is that happiness is similar to eudaimonia, and it can be determined that eudaimonia should be the sum of all kinds of different versions of happiness. It should be translated as "super happiness" to improve our practical life as we keep seeking for true eudaimonia.

3.   Conclusion

This paper analyzes two philosophers' views on ultimate happiness and the difference between their views and Aristotelian claims. This paper also demonstrates my thoughts on their claims in different scenarios. In this paper, I also give my definition of eudaimonia, which combines every argument I made to these debates. As a result, my definition of eudaimonia is "perfect happiness." Furthermore, the essay states that eudaimonia has both objective and subjective aspects. It also resembles happiness with both local and global context, and the latter has a more profound meaning to eudaimonia. Last but not least, mood and emotion are also essential elements in eudaimonia, and emotion has a more significant impact.

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