

Aristotle and Tabensky: Your residual questions

Note: If you liked Aristotle, there is much, much more in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. Famously, he was Plato's student for 20 years.

We need to explicate some terms:
happiness, virtue, good/goodness, excellence, eudaimonia

Abhi: Aristotle says to achieve the mean, but how can anyone know what that is or looks like? Tabensky argues that circumstances (the external) must be ideal in order to achieve or even pursue eudaimonia. Is this true? Or can it come entirely or mostly from within?

Several of you: Building off of Abhi's second question, many of you really pushed back on the need for ideal external circumstances. Thus, what conditions are, in fact, necessary in order to flourish? To what extent are we dependent on our circumstances, in other words?

Sarah: Given Aristotle's and Tabensky's definitions of happiness, what is its opposite? Contentment? Apathy? Laziness? We know it isn't sadness, because that would be to fall into the trap of affectation and emotion. This invites us to consider Hamlet's ruminations on "reality."

Why, then, 'tis none to you; for there is nothing
either good or bad, **but thinking makes it so**: to me
it is a prison. (*He's referring to the world, to Denmark*)

O God, **I could be bounded in a nut shell and count
myself a king of infinite space**, were it not that I
have bad dreams. (*Malcolm X is coming.*)

Sarah also wonders about the proper role of emotions and feelings. Aristotle includes feelings, but his priority is on reason, which is one of the features of man that most impresses Hamlet:

What a piece of work is a man! **how noble in reason!**
how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how
express and admirable! in action how like an angel!
in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the
world! the paragon of animals!

We should discuss or at least begin thinking about how our most essential elements work together and work at odds with each other:

MIND | SOUL | "HEART" | BRAIN | WILL

Sterling: If Aristotle valorizes reason so highly, what is the right role of feeling, of our gut instincts, of spontaneity? What is the right role of struggle? How much struggle is “good,” or enough?

Kelsee: Legacy. How we are remembered might help determine whether, in fact, the life lived and ended was “good.”

You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
That are but mutes or audience to this act,
Had I but time--as this fell sergeant, death,
Is strict in his arrest--O, I could tell you--
But let it be. Horatio, I am dead;
Thou livest; **report me and my cause aright**
To the unsatisfied.

and, finally, last words:

Give me the cup: let go; by heaven, I'll have't.
O good Horatio, what a wounded name,
Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
To tell my story.

To what extent should legacy, one's posthumous “story” be considered when judging or determining whether a life is or was “good”?

Moraima directly applied Aristotle to Hamlet and found Hamlet wanting because he dedicated himself to taking revenge rather than virtuously pursuing eudaimonia, or those circumstances and activities and pursuits in which he could flourish and be all Hamlet could be and had been designed to become.

Madeliene: What are some examples of activities or pursuits that can promote well-being and flourishing? A life of eudaimonia? What are some examples of activities and pursuits that purport to be “good” but aren't, and how might these pursuits or activities be redeemed? (Madeliene's example of exercise.)

Annabell had a related question: What is success, really?

Several of you, including Annabell, Moraima, Maayan, Maria: If one is “good” enough, virtuous enough to have achieved happiness, to flourish, to live the eudaimon life, what next? If that happiness is normalized, becomes the new normal, is the person actually doomed, because the only place to go from

there is down? Is that life destined to lose some of its “goodness”? Let’s talk about the role of growth, development, virtues. And let’s talk about the dangers of stasis.

Peyton wants to know whether we can identify happiness in the moment, or whether this sort of knowledge comes only by reflection, with the passage of time. Can we measure our own happiness? (Ooh, an idea: An index of measures, or a dashboard for pursuing the good life, happiness, flourishing and eudaimonia. What would this index be? What are the right measures? Something we can see and even use. Is this possible?)

Sage: Most people are ignorant of all of this, just blindly stumbling through their lives largely without meaning or purpose, settling for mediocrity and completely lacking mindfulness. Why? Why is intentionally seeking a life of purpose and virtue so incredibly rare?

Morgan: Would Aristotle agree with Csik’s ideas about psychic energy and the role of it in seeking a good life? (Ooh, another idea: A play or at least a scene or entire act in which these great thinkers are in a pub, arguing, debating, getting riled up sharing their takes on the good life. Reminiscent of the new movie, A Night in Miami (fictionalized meeting of Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, Jim Brown, and Sam Cooke in a room at the Hampton House in February 1964, celebrating Ali’s surprise title win over Sonny Liston) or Steve Martin’s Picasso at the Lapin Agile, which assembles the great painter, Albert Einstein, and Elvis in a run-down tavern in Montmartre, Paris. This could work. We could experiment with this even this week. Need two actors, and me.)

Raven: Is eudaimonia even possible for college students? (She describes the life of many if not most Berry students running around so super busy, stacking the resume. Who even has time for the good life?) Why is the relationship between virtue and happiness so important?

Riley prompted another final project idea: ceramics, painting, purely expressive arts and creations