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## A Critical Analysis: Is Aristotle's Understanding of Eudaimonia Credible?

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**ABSTRACT:** *The essential thought of Eudaimonia prescribes for an intellectual platform in Greek philosophy towards the ultimate happiness in human life; hence, it necessarily intends to emphasise a vast array of moral components such as voluntary actions, internal goods and external goods, capacities and cognitive functions, practical reason, as well as mindfulness or sensory awareness. In addition to these prominent features of Eudaimonia, it certainly demonstrates a few contextual meanings: satisfaction, inner contentment, well-being, and wholesome. In fact, it has commonly been assumed that there appears to be a significant ground for the eternal essence of human life, too. Then, this analytical article explores to what extent the Aristotelian attitude of Eudaimonia could be credible? With regards to this debatable issue, I will, arguably, discuss very limited findings in terms of theoretical and pragmatic applicability of Eudaimonia: the central thesis of Eudaimonia, the analysis of De Anima, the discourse of the mean alongside the role of phronesis. However, due to practical constraints, this paper cannot provide a comprehensive overview of Aristotle's understanding of Eudaimonia.*

**KEYWORDS:** critical analysis, aristotle's understanding, eudaimonia credible

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### INTRODUCTION

The Aristotelian concept of Eudaimonia historically plays a pivotal role in morality in response to Plato and Thucydides on the Peloponnesian war. It seems that there have been a variety of controversial claims in favour of practical wisdom, justice, virtues, rationality, as well as social life (Russell, 1946). In addition, Eudaimonia tends to show predominant features of ethical properties such as metaphysics, philosophy of mind or soul, epistemology, and so forth. The particular term of 'Eudaimonia' denotes a wide range of connotations: happiness; a feeling of contentment; delight; pleasure, and ultimately, a fulfilled or worthwhile life (Hughes, 2013, pp.22-23; Hutchinson, 1995, p.200). Accordingly, it appears that there are numerous sorts of implications around this philosophical perspective. Therefore, the central thesis of this article I would argue is that the Aristotelian account of Eudaimonia is credible. Then, this critical discussion has been organised to defend the compelling idea as in the following way: first, I will explain the central claims of Eudaimonia, next, the critique of De Anima, and finally, the doctrine of the mean along with the role of practical reason.

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## Contents

### The central claims of Eudaimonia

The Fundamental thought of Eudaimonia certainly defines the human life goal as happiness or complacency (Höffe, 2003). In accordance with Greek etymology, Eudaimonia is descended from a couple of words: *'eu'* denotes *'well'* and *'daimonia'* states *'a kind of guiding spirit'* (Hughes, 2013, p. 23). In fact, the following interpretation is intended to flourish several character traits such as virtue, excellence, skill, and being good in terms of personal fulfilment. Furthermore, as Hutchinson (1995) explains, Eudemian ethics, notably, consisted of significant ways to build up a prosperous life, which is blissful, successful, as well as good fortunate. Hence, it is likely that eudaimonia indicates many ethical substances of human life towards the best or ultimate satisfaction.

Primarily, there are multiple ways to achieve the best life of human beings or Eudaimonia: nature, learning, training or habituation, fortune, being favoured by God, as well as some association with all these matters. According to May (2011), it is probable that Aristotle has demonstrated a sort of philosophical imperialism as concerns the above philosophical activities for the absolute pleasure of human life. Moreover, it seems that Eudaimonia cannot merely be achieved by one component; then, perhaps, it could cooperate with the other elements, too. For instance, only nature, fortune, and favour of God are unable to attain the fulfilled life for human beings. Nevertheless, it could be possible when it goes with learning alongside training. In particular, Aristotle facilitates voluntary actions as the preliminary determinant of human welfare amongst them (Broadie, 1993). Thus, it attempts to emphasise that Eudaimonia has a vast array of alternative ways that could be attainable such as biological heritage, mitigating collective action, political dispensation, and so forth.

Furthermore, there is a crucial significance with learning and training in respect of Eudaimonia. In fact, it appears that the intellectual component has a vital role in there so knowledge and practical wisdom, or virtues could assist to attain the supreme bliss of life (Höffe, 2010). In addition, as Hughes (2013, pp. 24-25) puts forward, there are three rudimentary necessities for the happiest life of mankind:

- A. Money
- B. Pleasures
- C. Being well thought

There is, apparently, a succinct relation with faculties of learning and training strategies in favour of intellectual mechanism. It is, therefore, clear that Eudaimonia more specifically refers to personal action, which is approachable rather than others.

Moreover, signifying the worthwhile extent of best goods that are achievable by voluntary action is a remarkable claim on Eudaimonia. In response to this, goods are not solely favoured for themselves, but the sake of other selves. Similarly, as Höffe (2003, pp.131-132) asserts that happiness originates from practical reason, *'phronesis'* or prudence along with cognitive action; then, it might have to be collaborative with theoretical and pragmatic aspects of each individual action (Höffe, 2010). Likewise, it is a prevalent view that the notion of voluntary action is more substantial as essential prerequisites of the cheerful life; then, it is likely that

voluntary action is often accommodated to achieve the happiest life more effectively in terms of the constitutive elements of Eudaimonia.

In spite of this, there is a noticeable difference between internal goods and external goods in regard to Eudaimonia. Accordingly, it is widely believed that goods are able identified in a couple of ways as concerns soul: end goods and best goods (Ackrill and Judson, 1992).

A. End goods: they seem to be external to the soul - owing to external matters, they are entirely not in human control - external goods tends to be subordinated to internal goods (e.g., wealth, good bodily conditions: perfect looks, strength, health, success or fame, honour, culture, good fortune, political power

B. Best goods: they appear to be internal to the soul - owing to the internal matters, they are states, conditions, as well as powers of the soul - there are only three properties on Eudaimonia: wisdom, virtue, pleasure

Thus, mainly, the above pair of goods would indicate that although they are consistently different, they often bring out the best life for humans whilst unifying the internal and external goods together.

In addition, there is another predominant feature of Eudaimonia that Aristotle did not prefer to prioritise the goods like Plato. It is, seemingly, that the internal properties (wisdom, virtue, and pleasure) had a pivotal trend to referring to the soul. Correspondingly, Broadie (1993) deliberately illustrates that practical rationality and moral soundness have a broader connection in this regard:

A. Wisdom: it refers to natural understanding of the life of philosophy or rhythm of mind.

B. Virtue: it concerns the aspirational aspect of the human soul along with honourable life.

C. Pleasure: it considers the appetitive component of the soul as well as hedonistic life.

More importantly, Plato and most Greek Hellenistics, the Epicureans, Stoics, and Sceptics would have necessarily wanted to categorise or prioritise these sorts of goods by means of soul. In contrast, Aristotle did not agree with this taxonomy of downgrading supreme goods in life (Hughes, 2013). Then, the Aristotelian view on Eudaimonia has manifested that wisdom, virtue together with pleasure precisely comes as a total package; it is plausible to associate with credible prospects of Eudemian ethics such as theory of soul, account of the intellectual virtues (*phronesis*), account of voluntary action, account of the virtues of the character, doctrine of the mean, as well as account of justice (Ackrill and Judson, 1992). For these reasons, in brief, Eudaimonia did not allow separate identities of goods, so it was an intensive ground for the absolute happiness in one life.

### **The critique of De Anima**

The manifestation of De Anima seeks to emphasise psychological aspects and theoretical background in human nature by means of Eudaimonia. In fact, as Hughes (2013, p.35) states, the historical term, 'De Anima' is linguistically derived from Latin in the integral treatise of 'On the Soul'. According to him, the human physical body and psychic soul are not divisible as well as not separable entities. Then, this position goes on to further argue that Eudaimonia could reflect the essence of human life by means of virtue and mental well-being (Heintzelman,

2018). In contrast, some researchers have been contended that owing to self-determination theory, psychological concept of Eudaimonia is merely not a specific state of subjective/psychic experience and hedonistic type of happiness (Bartlett and Collins, 2012; Ryan, Curren, and Desi, 2013 cited in Ryan and Martela, 2016); hence, this general treatise appears to be oriented in psychology along with biology whilst systematically referring to theory of mind/soul. Therefore, it is thought that Aristotelian view on Eudaimonia demonstrates a sort of dualistic organism distinguishing animate and inanimate components of living things.

Despite this, the most prominent facet of the human psyche is the thought of function. In response to this, human organisms are often connected with function and play a pivotal role in a wide range of constitutive activities. Additionally, Hughes (2013, p.36) illustrates that 'The word for 'function' is *ergon*. The ordinary meanings of *ergon* are 'deed', 'job' or 'work'. Here, Aristotle uses it to mean 'how something is supposed to work''. In fact, this definition has been broadened to relate with the Aristotle account of theory of soul; it intends to determine that the corporation of human soul and work could maintain the organism of human life. For instance, the *ergon* or deed of ear is able to be a fundamental organism as well as gather information properly. Moreover, this could perform or precede the act excellently in terms of human goods and activity of soul; indeed, it seems that this tends to consist of 'arete', which connotes the excellence of function alongside human goals ('telos') (Hughes, 2013, p.37). Correspondingly, Korsgaard (2008) suggests, it could, presumably, draw the essential faces of metaphysical and psychological dispositions towards holistic happiness in life. Thus, it is apparent that the function argument of the human soul is a substantial claim in respect of fulfilled human life.

Furthermore, another noteworthy prospect of the theory of soul is that the human mind attempts to align with a different strain of capacities. Accordingly, Aristotle's account of *De Anima* arguably declares a variety of strengths of life with regards to different genres of psychic levels (Ackrill and Judson, 1992).

- A. Plants (psyche): nutrition, growth, reproduction (life functions)
- B. Animals (psyche): nutrition, growth, reproduction - sensation/perception, movement or locomotion (life functions)
- C. Human beings (psyche): nutrition, growth, reproduction - sensation/perception, movement or locomotion - intellect/reason/understanding (life functions)

It is obvious that this has, assumingly, highlighted the superiority of human beings among the continuum of plants and animals. Particularly, in Eudemian ethics, human beings are identified as rational beings as they have the vast majority of capacity in favour of intellect or reason. Similarly, some scholars have also observed that the eminent asset of reason is often associated with the natural world along with human beings. (Grech, 2010, pp.9-10). Hence, it becomes clear that Aristotle's stance on soul or psyche is further not a material element; indeed, it could be a non-reductionist form of materialism. Then, substantive implicature is that Aristotelian doctrine of mind/soul is the fundamental form of the human body as well as activity of the brain, which is an essential requisite for Eudaimonia.

Likewise, Aristotle has recognised a specific volume of cognitive functions in terms of human psyche and well-being in life. In fact, this taxonomy could design the most significant characteristics of the human mind in relation with Eudaimonia or supreme life. As Ackrill and Judson (1992) scrutinises these particular elements of the human psyche, it is possible to perceive a sort of alternative terminal to the Eudemian hypothesis in the following way.

A. Sensation: sensation is assumed as an immediate circumstance of external stimulation with reference to mind; there are five organs such as the eye for colour, the ear for sound, the nose for smell or odours, tongue for taste, as well as skin for hot or cold and rough or smooth.

B. Perception: perception is the substantial way of identifying, organising, and interpreting sensory information; hence, this appears to be the Mind-World Identity thesis in Eudemian ethics.

C. Memory: memory is a vital cognitive faculty since all forms of knowledge originate from somatic exposure; then, it seems to have been encoded and next, repeated data or information.

D. Imagination: imagination tends to produce novel ideas, sensation together with objects; in fact, it is likely to be infinite as there is no specific limit or benchmark. More interestingly, imagination has a crucial skill to foresee, predict, and assume how things could be, might be, and will be.

E. Intellect: The intellect capacity has a prominent role to play from particulars gained in perception to the ultimate grade of universal. Additionally, it could assist to realise and conceptualise the objective world in terms of cognitive function; in fact, in order to be a rational animal, this has a rudimentary task of human life (Grech, 2010).

Thus far, it is abundantly clear that Aristotle's understanding on Eudaimonia would necessarily intend to involve biological grounds and psychological faculties (Hughes, 2013). For these reasons, it is probable that there seems to be an inanimate correlation with the fulfilled human life and cognitive functions of the human psyche.

### **The doctrine of the mean and the role of practical reason**

The principle of the mean and practical wisdom substantively strives to make a profound contribution to Eudaimonia in respect of moral virtues. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that virtue attempts to make best action or best good with regards to accurate reasoning (Ackrill and Judson, 1992). In addition, moral virtues could be recognised as a dramatic inclination of the main three appearances in human soul or mind such as rationality or intellect, aspirational faculty alongside appetitive and arational aspects; it is widely believed that all these species of human soul constantly refer to mean as well as practical reason or wisdom (phronesis). Correspondingly, intellectual virtue has a credible ground to play a dominant role to identify good and bad action distinctively (Nyabul and Situma, 2014); indeed, reasoning could be the most appropriate tool for such a moral judgement. Then, the theory of mean precisely advocates an effective method of characterising the state; inclination; attitude of human action; in fact, it seems obvious that the doctrine of mean could help to avoid the dualistic ways of doers' action, which were extreme: excess (too much of anything) and defect (too little of anything) (Ackrill and Judson, 1992). Therefore, virtuous activity, the mean, and practical reason are possibly interconnected to bring out the ultimate happiness for life.

Furthermore, there is a Eudemonic relation with the concept of mindfulness in regard to practical reasoning and the thought of the mean. Phronesis or wisdom would necessarily

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propose the intrinsic capacity of recognising good and bad action in the realm of human life (*Ibid.*). Subsequently, the mean is supposed to be the middle state of human action against the pair of dogmatic extremes. Similarly, the concept of mindfulness also tends to manipulate the particular attention or concentration of human mind towards the right moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994 cited in Burke and Hawkins, 2012, p. 37); it often facilitates to stay in the present whilst not being curious about the future as well as worried about the past. This could imply that mindfulness can guide to the ground of middleness of human feelings, emotions, and thoughts, which is systematically analogous to practical reason. Thus, practical reason and sense of awareness seems to have a significant relevance in order to achieve the highest well-being in life.

Likewise, the grand account of practical reason and the mean is theoretically connected with thoughts of calmness and peacefulness in favour of Eudaimonia. In accordance with the Aristotelian view on truths, there are a couple of truths: universal or eternal truth and necessary or theoretical truth (Ackrill and Judson, 1992). Then, it is apparent that there should be a calm, silent, serene, as well as peaceful mind or soul understanding any sort of truth nature; otherwise, owing to many psychological disorders like violence, turbulence, anxiety, and stress, there might be no possibility to realise the reality in world, come to the self-actualisation, and eventually, gain the ultimate happiness in life. Hence, it has commonly been assumed that peace and silence of mind have a major part of human life in terms of internal well-being and contentment. It is, therefore, clear that some entailments of the human mind intimately go with wisdom and the theory of the mean towards the Eudemonic destination.

Moreover, another dominant feature of practical reason together with the mean is that the sense of knowledge substantially differs from wisdom or phronesis. It seems that theoretical knowledge (episteme) about universal propositions often associates with informative understanding of collective data series. This position goes on to further argue that knowledge could explain a variety of forms related with knowledge such as epistemology, metaphysics, logic, mathematics, aesthetics, and so forth. On the other hand, phronesis or practical wisdom seeks to realise the nature of human life and achieve the sublime state of happiness. Additionally, it also guides to establish the human soul in mindfulness and awareness; then, it will constantly facilitate the continuum of self-regulation, intrinsic aspirations, virtuous enhancement, and self-satisfaction in a good life (Nyabul and Situma, 2014). Furthermore, this attempts to explore the actual entanglements or solutions for real human sufferings as well as problems, for instance, birth, being ill or diseased, decay, death, frustration, etc. In brief, it is evident that the Aristotelian view on practical wisdom seems to be slightly different from the general notion of knowledge in favour of Eudaimonia.

### **Evaluation**

In my view, the function (ergon) argument of Eudaimonia has been a debatable account of Eudaimonia. Some scholars have contended that the concept of Eudaimonia seems to be a fallacy as regards the notion of human function, which is supposed to be a 'dubious teleological principle' or an 'illegitimate teleological reasoning' (Korsgaard, 2008, p.133). This assumption further argues that it is able to perform either good or bad in any capacity of human functions; hence, there is no individual room for nutrition, growth, perception, and intellect or rationality. In contrast, the Aristotelian thoughts on Eudaimonia are intended to reveal a wide range of

human life in favour of best life along with theoretical claims of a virtuous life; in fact, this is apparent that Eudaimonia does not consist of only functions of well-being in life, but a variety of virtuous aspects in practical reason (phronesis) towards the self-actualisation. It is, therefore, obvious that Aristotle's understanding of Eudemonic concepts has room for a number of moral qualities over the function argument.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the purpose of this article was to examine to what extent Aristotelian conviction of Eudaimonia is to be credible. Consequently, I have come through the multiplicity of supporting arguments to defend the thesis such as human life goals and happiness, intellectual significance with learning and training, voluntary actions, crucial difference between internal goods and external goods, the thought of capacities and cognitive functions, practical reason, mindfulness, alongside the doctrine of mean. Notwithstanding these reasoned propositions, I would suggest that Aristotle's Eudemonic stance seems to be possible as well as consistent in terms of theoretical view and pragmatic approach. However, in spite of these opinions, there are a few theoretical implications, which are a bit vague and obscure by means of scientific overlook; it is, therefore, a definite need for further studying scientific analysis of the concept of Eudaimonia.



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