

WHAT VALUES DID ARISTOTLE THINK WE SHOULD BY TO LIVE THE GENUINELY GOOD LIFE?

384 - 322 B.C.E.

Pupil of Plato's but not above criticising him, somewhat obliquely.

Nicomachean Ethics is the classic statement of his ethics

believed to have been edited by son Nichomachus after his death

from lecture notes: and careful, sensible, exploratory, tentative

Aristotle a more down to earth thinker than Plato:

'our goal here isn't just about knowing, it's about doing'

sought to provide common sense account of human nature and the good life.

Made a principle of respecting and starting from ordinary opinions and beliefs:

saving the **endoxa**.

So starts on a topic saying 'This is what most people think' and, then, respectfully, critiques it.

Powerful sense of structure and of a super brain working calmly and exhaustively through all the options.

Another form of dialogue; between 'ordinary people' and Aristotle

What you get from this and Plato's dialogues is an acting out of the belief that reasoned argument through dialogue is a necessary route to understanding, aka 'The Truth', and the quest for the truth is – constitutes – Philosophy.

Reminds me of Sophie Grace on Hegel's dialectic: thesis / antithesis > synthesis.

Dialectic (viewing issues from multiple perspectives to arrive at the most economical and reasonable reconciliation of seemingly contradictory information and positions.) is arguably what Philosophy does:

Either within a particular work of Philosophy or within Beeby's 'epistemic community'

That isn't primarily what Science does.

Or poetry.

Even in Philosophy, has sometimes been lost in the canon of 'great thinkers' and 'great thoughts'.

But, this argument, testing out and dialogue is arguably Philosophy's particular gift

Authoritative statements preclude it, and of course Socrates, per Plato, rarely adopts authoritative positions and often stresses that he doesn't know.

So we are part of the argument.

So philosophy is an ongoing – never ending -argument between clever people on important things

Though Aristotle challenges ordinary principles, beliefs and his perspective has been called elitist.

In discussing 'the good', A starts from **Pythagoras'** (say 200 years earlier) classification of men:

- Those of low tastes ('always the majority') who think greatest good is pleasure
- Businessmen who think its wealth
- Gentlemen who think it's honour

Actually, he says, pleasure, wealth and honour are all instrumental, secondary.

Wealth buys you things,

Honour provides the respect people crave so they can reassure themselves they're good men.

In fact, we want the primary or ultimate good which applies to all men, the end in itself, It's the central reason why we do everything and it meets all our needs:

'it makes your life not just a desirable one, but a life from which nothing is missing.'
Doesn't just make your life complete, but your family and friends and fellow citizens
'because 'people are by nature social beings'

And the central reason why we do things isn't the platonic form.

In a word, It's 'eudaimonia'

can be translated as 'happiness; actually means 'flourishing of the soul', kind of pleasurable, complete unfolding and realisation.

Consistent with his view of nature as set out in 'Physics':

'For A, nature is the world made up of things that have natures. What is it to have a nature? It is to be a thing which has a source internal to itself of changing and being changed. We can understand what a lion is only by looking at lions themselves and at how they interact with their environment and other species'. Annas. Ongoing process.

Whereas material objects like a shield we can understand only by something external to itself: e.g. the human who made it.

And consider Darwin.

So, A then goes over it again in more detail.

What is the *key* function of a *human* being?

Teleology: explanation of phenomena in terms of the purpose they serve rather than e.g. the cause(s) of their existence.

- Not to feed or reproduce or grow: plants do that
- Not to perceive and feel: animals do that
- But to do things that exercise the soul's rational and partly rational elements

And, for good human beings, to do those things well.

'the key good for human beings turns out to be the activity of the soul that *expresses* our goodness...'

So life lived according to one's essence (which includes anger, capable of great power and good effect)

[However, anger and other emotions to be held in check by Reason.]

See Aristotle 'On the Art of Poetry': tragedy provokes pity and fear ('pity for the undeserving sufferer and fear for the man like ourselves') 'bringing about the purgation of such emotions'.

And over a complete life, whereby by doing good things we become a good person.

An imp't feature of the good life is concern for others.

Famously examines friendship which may be:

- For pleasure
- For mutual benefit (both instrumental), or
- 'complete and perfect friendship' where people want 'what's good for one another because ... they're good people'

Perfect friendships are rare 'because there aren't many people like that. Plus it takes time and closeness. As the saying goes people can't get to know one another until they've 'gone through a pile of salt together.'

2 final points:

- The intellect more than anything else is the man. , so the life of the intellect is best: especially as expressed in contemplation: speculative enquiry into eternal truths.
- You need sufficient wealth to devote yourself to thinking for thinking's sake.
- And it helps to be older. 'lectures on moral ... questions aren't suitable for the young. Young people have no experience of the actions of life. And that's what the arguments will be based on. ... Plus young people tend to act purely on their emotions. So, for them, taking the course will be a waste of time. They won't get anything out of it.'

Some more definitions

Metaphysics:

Branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of existence, being, and the world.

Arguably, metaphysics is the foundation of philosophy:

Aristotle calls it "first philosophy" (or sometimes just "wisdom"), and says it is the subject that deals with "first causes and the principles of things".

It asks questions like: "What is the nature of reality?", "How does the world exist, and what is its origin or source of creation?", "Does the world exist outside the mind?", "Is there a God?"

'Meta' from Greek meaning 'More comprehensive', 'transcending'.

Epistemology:

Study of the nature and scope of knowledge and justified belief.

It analyses the nature of knowledge and how it relates to similar notions such as truth, belief and justification (showing something to be right or reasonable).

Also deals with how we produce knowledge, as well as scepticism about different knowledge claims.

Asks questions like: "What is knowledge?", "How is knowledge acquired?", "What do people know?", "What is its structure, and what are its limits?", "What makes justified beliefs justified?", "How we are to understand the concept of justification?".

Ethics:

Thinking and theorising about what is good and bad, and how people should live.

Logic:

The study of reasoning, and the stages and principles by which you can follow premises to reach a sound conclusion.

It attempts to distinguish good reasoning from bad reasoning.

Cosmology:

Science of the origin and development of the Universe

Naturalism:

Based on the idea that only natural (not supernatural) laws and forces operate in the universe

Empiricist:

Based on the theory that all knowledge comes from experience derived from the senses

Ontology:

A set of concepts and categories in a subject area showing their individual properties and how they relate to each other