

The Relationship between Virtue and Happiness in< Nicomachean Ethics>

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ABSTRACT. Aristotle's interpretation of happiness takes teleology as the logical starting point and points out that happiness is the ultimate goal of all actions. On the basis of functional argumentations, happiness is defined as the realization of virtue conforming to the soul, and it is repeatedly emphasized that happiness does not lie in the possession of virtue, but in the realization of virtue.

KEYWORDS: Happiness, Virtue, The external good, Rational

1. Introduction

In the process of exploring “happiness”, Aristotle took teleology as the logical starting point, connected “good” with “purpose”, and pointed out that people's practical activities are all aimed at good, and the purpose is diversified, and the good is also diversified. Happiness is the final end of all action, and it is the only perfect good which is always desirable for its own sake and never for anything else. Therefore, starting from the function of human beings, the exploration of happiness begins.

2. Virtue and Happiness

The so-called virtue is the quality that makes things or people in a perfect state and makes them perform their functions perfectly. Every virtue keeps things in a good state, and makes them perform their functions well. Furthermore, virtue is the quality that makes a person both excellent and functional. According to the soul dichotomy, Aristotle also divided virtue into two parts - moral virtue (also known as ethical virtue) and intellectual virtue.

The harmony of the human soul lies in the unity of the rational part and the irrational part of the soul. According to Aristotle, people with good qualities, namely virtue, have the potential conditions leading to happiness. On the other hand, without virtue, a man cannot be truly happy, even if he is rich and famous.

3. Happiness is the Realization of the Good

Virtue is not only an excellent quality of human beings, but also an excellent state in which human activities are given full play. The “goodness” of man, that is, the goodness of man, is the realization of the soul according to its virtue. The goodness of man is happiness. So far, Aristotle gives a clear definition of happiness through the functional argument of man. “The meaning of the actualization activity is the activity of 'actively' acquiring the rational power of man through its application”^[1]. Aristotle emphasized that happiness lies not in the possession of virtue, but in the actualization of virtue, for the state of possession is different from the actualization. People have the ability to acquire virtue, which is potential; It is a reality that virtue is acquired through study and effort; Then the acquired virtue becomes the new potential, and the realization of virtue becomes the new reality, namely, happiness.

4. Happiness and External Goodness

What is external goodness? Aristotle says in Chapter 8 of the first book of the Nicomachean Ethics that the good has been divided into three categories, some called external and others called spiritual and physical. This classification of the good apparently predates Aristotle. “The goodness of the soul, which refers to temperance, courage, justice and other virtues”^[2], Physical goodness refers to physical goodness such as health and strength, as well as fitness. The external good is the friend and wealth and status that lies outside the good of man. In fact,

Aristotle himself divided the good from various angles and was not quite sure, so his understanding of the external good was correspondingly different.

For Aristotle, the external good works in two main ways. On the one hand, external goodness is an indispensable means to happiness; It is easy to understand that it is difficult to do what we want to do in our daily life without some external good, such as wealth, friends and political power. On the other hand, external goodness is a complement to happiness.

5. Conclusion

Aristotelian happiness is the ultimate goal of life, different from the specific goals of honor, wealth, and friends. These specific purposes, we choose them for their own sake, but ultimately for the sake of happiness. To achieve happiness, a person needs a lifetime of continuous efforts to achieve these worthwhile good.

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