

## Aristotle's Way – Edith Hall

### *Notes and Takeaways*

- Aristotle was an ancient thinker who lived from 384 to 322 BCE
- He lived in Athens, Lesbos, Assos, Atarneus, Pella, Mieza, other parts of Macedonia, and ultimately Chalkis where he died in 322 BCE
- He personally taught Alexander the Great, and served as the intellectual mind for Phillip II (Alexander's father)
- He moved to Athens at age 17 and studied under Plato
- His father Nicomachus was a doctor and taught Aristotle much about the human form
- He teaches that Hedonism and strictly seeking pleasure all the time is flawed in that it can corrupt all men
  - Instead he promotes pleasure as a part of the journey to happiness, but not the end all be all
  - Aristotle believed that happiness was not god sent and that gods did not involve themselves in human affairs
- Aristotle felt that happiness could be analyzed, like the subject matter of any other branch of knowledge
- Aristotle felt that happiness could be widespread throughout society since because he felt it could be attained from some level of study and effort
- Thinking in a way as Aristotle means using our understanding of human nature in order to live in the best way possible
  - This means that nature itself and not a concept beyond nature (such as gods) were the fundamental basis for analysis of affairs and decisions
    - This analysis consist of inner analysis, communal society, love, death, and other pragmatic thoughts involving life
- Aristotle put human experience at the center of all his thought
- Aristotle insists that creating happiness is not a matter of fanatically applying big rules and principles, but of engaging with the texture of life [Believe this to be key]
- People who are never impatient don't get things done; people who never take risks live limited lives, people who evade the truth and do not express pain or joy at all are psychologically emotionally stunted
- Aristotle did not believe in the Marcus Aurelius, Seneca and Epictetus teaching of stoicism
  - He believed this view on life did not encourage the same joy in life
  - He felt true stoicism did not leave enough room for humanness and hope
- Aristotle believed that humans are nothing more than the most advanced animal, and what separates us from the rest of the others is practical action and thought
- Aristotle believed in enjoying life with taste and drink and engaging in all the bounty of society
- Aristotle believed that all opinions must *always be open to revision*

- He directly applied this to the state and said “it is impossible that the structure of the state can have been framed correctly for all time in relations to all its details”
- He believed in keeping the body fit and strong he too kept his mind sharp
  - “Only ideas gained through walking have any worth at all”
- He felt that god was an answer many were looking for and needed
  - “Nobody can live with death before his eyes if he thinks that oblivion lies at the end”
  - Aristotle felt that humans seek an answer and for many, the comfort of god or gods are a way for people to explain the atrocities of life, and specifically death
- Aristotle did not believe in god, but stated he did not know what to put in His place
  - The author interjects with her own story “I still longed to be a good person, live a constructive life, and ideally leave the planet in a better place than I had arrived in it”
- Aristotle’s first focus: Happiness
  - **“The ultimate goal of human life is, simply happiness which means finding purpose in order to realize potential and working on behaviors to become the best version of yourself”**
  - Whether the best version of yourself is a loving father/mother, pious worshiper, husband/wife, friend, public servant, leader, finding the meaning for yourself and working towards what you define as that best version
- Aristotle was not a utilitarian (seek to maximize the happiness of the greatest number) he believed each person finds happiness in different ways and everyone should experience their journey on their “own path”
- He felt that life itself was having an “active mind”
  - Aristotle was convinced that most people received their pleasure from learning things [Agree]
  - He believed that achieving higher level thinking and learning only was accomplished through *self-conscious habit*
- He believed that specifics are key and need to be focused on; generality will never get anyone anywhere
- Aristotle believed that people should be self-sufficient
  - Aristotle believed it impossible to be self-sufficient without financial independence
  - He felt only without economic support from anyone else are individuals truly able to think for themselves because they are not required to pander to anyone else’s whims
  - Being able to live well requires to act as an *independent agent* in a moral sense and not be obligated to any other
- Aristotle believed that anyone had the power to take responsibility for their own happiness and decide to live well
- Aristotle’s second focus: potential
- All living things are in the process of continuous change and development
  - He recognized that some months take months, some years, and others even decades
- Aristotle felt that an unplanned life is less worth living
- Aristotle felt that life is a form of activity and each person exercises his activity upon those objects with those faculties which he likes the most

- Aristotle believed that the greatest likely experts are those who practice common sense and have accumulated experience on the topic
- Aristotle's third focus: decision
- Life is completely unfair and fate is not providential
  - Bad people will succeed and good people will suffer
- Certain people are able to harness good fortune from diligent work and constantly learning and advancing their mind
  - This all comes down to taking responsibility for your own life
  - Must choose purposive choice that *rests* with yourself
- A man should not be judged by what he does, but by what he does it for
- Aristotle recommends founding goals that are tough but achievable and within your own abilities
  - Always consult and listen to expert advisors in the area you have interest
  - The man who follows good advice is himself good
- Aristotle believed that relationships with loved ones outweighs moral scruples
- **Time spent worrying about things which you cannot change is a waste**
- Aristotle's fourth focus: communication
- To make others understand the speaker must make his own character right and put his listeners in the right frame of mind
- Good cheer buoyancy and affability are invaluable
- Great humor is also essential
  - Banter is welcomed if done tastefully
- Aristotle fifth focus: self-knowledge
- The path to happiness comes through taking on the project of becoming a *great-souled man* of being magnanimous (courageous, self-sufficient)
- It is imperative to avoid judging yourself harshly or descending into self-castigation
- Anger can sometimes be virtuous and legitimate
  - The best form of anger is that of the quick-tempered who displays it openly and is then done with it
- Bitterness is the most troublesome form of bad temper
  - Admit your anger to yourself and the actual perpetrator and don't harbor it
- Aristotle was okay with revenge as long as it was conducive to happiness and the only way a wrong may be righted is with revenge [Don't necessarily agree with this]
- People who slight you or your friends are almost always motivated by envy
  - Slight can take three forms, contempt, spite and insolence
  - Those who criticize others constantly have a problem with respecting themselves
- Aristotle does not regard wealth itself as special
  - He believes the only way to use wealth well is through generosity
- A truly generous person is always liable to the *vice* of giving away their money and time irresponsibly to the extent that it
- Aristotle's sixth focus: intentions

- It is great practice to never write or say anything to anyone you would never be comfortable if it was made public
- A person living well will always tell the truth when something significant is at stake, when it is not as important (swapping stories with friends) he is not adamant that truth must always persist
- Aristotle's seventh focus: love
- Adultery is unacceptable because it erodes trust with the person you care about most
- **Friendship is one of the most indispensable requirements of life**
- Hold a vision of the future with your spouse, talk about the goals and what you want to accomplish together
- You can always spot a bad person because they will choose material gain over a friend's welfare
- He explains that bad things happen to people for two reasons
  - Human error
  - Random accident
- He felt that most stress comes from unfairness of luck or chance in human life
- Aristotle thinks it is proper that fathers love their children more than they are loved by them
- Aristotle's eight focus: community
- Regulation of property ownership causes discontent in a community
- People look after things because they enjoy the sense of private ownership and because things have value to them
- Humans are but animals with a few distinctive characteristics
- Aristotle's ninth focus: leisure
- Aristotle insisted that leisure was far more important than work and that people often misuse and waste leisure if they are not educated in constructive pastimes
  - He uses the Spartan culture in peace time as an example, they only were ever trained for war, and when boredom set in they began eroding their society
- He would find it wrong that when people ask "what do you do?" in this day and age people always respond with their work or title; he would want people to respond with their greatest leisure hobby
- Aristotle believed that only in leisure could full human potential be realized
  - Leisure is therefore wasted if not used purposefully
- He was very aware that people are generally not social prepared for making good choices about how to spend their leisure
  - In his view, teaching people how to spend this time in thought in growth is how to build a strong individual
- Compulsive working around the clock harms physical and mental health
- More free time makes more self-education more achievable
- He believed exercise was key to the growth of a person
- Aristotle's tenth focus: mortality
- Thinking about happiness inevitably causes one to think about death
- Aristotle believed that "death is the most terrible of all things, for it is the end"

- Aristotle undoubtedly saw death as final as most agnostics would today
- He believed that understanding life and happiness meant thinking about a pervasive sense that acknowledgement of mortality and confrontation with full implications can be used effectively to help us live and die well
- Aristotle would tell people to use memories in a disciplined methodical way to cope with aging and the loss of loved ones
- There is a big difference between remembering something randomly and deliberately recollecting
  - It is the latter that separates humans from all other species
- Aristotle believed that God is actualized thought, or thought in action, which we humans can temporarily enjoy
  - It is the same as pure happiness or pleasure
- Aristotle believed that believing in an afterlife should not be discouraged even though he himself did not believe, he felt anything that brings comfort and happiness when people are suffering should be acknowledged
- Change is constant and the Aristotlian will constantly work to grow and change to pursue ultimate happiness