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## *The Function Argument*

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### *Outline of Lecture*

- I. Eudaimonia
  - A. As a choice worthy life
  - B. As a life structured by the “best good”
- II. The Function Argument
  - A. Virtues and functions
  - B. Characteristic activities
  - C. The human function as rational activity
- III. Ethical virtues and rational activity
  - A. Virtue as a state of character
  - B. Virtue as “concerned with choice”

### *A (version of) Function Argument*

1. For anything that has a function or a characteristic activity, the good of the thing resides in its function.
2. Human beings have a function.
3. The function of human beings must be to perform whatever activity is the distinctively human activity.
4. The distinctive activity of human beings is an activity of soul which follows or implies a rational principle.
5. The function of human beings is to engage in this activity.
6. Thus, thus the human good is excellent activity of soul requiring reason.

*Aristotle's definition of Happiness:* Happiness is activity of that part of the soul which follows or implies a rational principle, in accordance with virtue (and if there is more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete) throughout a complete life of at least moderate good fortune.

### *Quotations*

1. We do not say, then, that someone is happy during the time he is dead, and Solon's point is not this absurd one, but rather that when a human being has died, we can safely pronounce that he was blessed before he died, on the assumption that he is now finally beyond evils and misfortunes. But this claim is also disputable, For if a living person has good or evil of which he is not aware, a dead person also, it seems, has good or evil, if, for instance, he receives honors or dishonors, and his children, and descendants in general, do well or suffer misfortune [NE 1100a15].
2. Youth is not a suitable student for political science, for he lacks experience of the actions in life, which are the subject of premises of our arguments. Moreover, since he tends to follow his feelings, his study will be futile and useless, for the end of political science is actions, not knowledge. It does no matter whether he is young in years or immature in character, since the deficiency does not depend on age, but results from following his feelings in his life and in a given pursuit.
3. ...argument and teaching we may suspect are not powerful with all men, but the soul of the student must first have been cultivated by means of habits for noble joy and noble hatred. The character, then must somehow be there largely with a kinship to excellence, loving what is noble and hating what is base.

4. Every craft and every line of inquiry, and likewise every action and decision, seems to seek some good; that is why some people were right to describe the good as that everything seeks. But the ends that are sought appear to differ; some are activities and others are products apart from activities, Wherever there are ends apart from the actions, the products are by nature better than the activities.
5. Suppose, then, that the things achievable by action have some end that we wish for because of itself, and because of which we wish for other things, and that we do not choose everything because of something else—for if we do, it will go on without limit, so that desire will prove to be empty and futile. Clearly, this end will be the good, that is to say, the best good [NE 1094a18-23].

Then surely knowledge of this good also carries great weight in determining the best way of life; if we know it, we are more likely, like archers who have a target to aim at, to hit the right mark [NE 1094a18-25].

6. Everyone who is able to live according to his own choosing sets up some goal for the good life—honor or reputation, or riches, or intellectual cultivation—by looking to which he will perform all of his actions (since not to organize one’s life with a view to some end is a sign of great stupidity. Hence, we must above all, determine for ourselves, neither precipitately nor frivolously, in which of the things that belong to us good living consists [EE 1214b6-14].
7. It should be said, then, that every virtue causes its possessors to be in a good state and to perform their functions well. The virtue of the eyes, for instance makes the eyes and their functioning excellent, because it makes us see well...If this is true in every case, the virtue of a human being will likewise be the state that makes a human being good and makes him perform his function well [NE 1106a].
10. Then do the carpenter and the leather worker have their functions and action, but has a human being no function. Is he by nature idle, without any function? Or just as eye, hand, foot, and in general, every bodily part apparently has its function, may we likewise ascribe to a human being some function apart from all of these?
11. ...each state of character has its own distinctive view of what is fine and pleasant. Presumably, then, the excellent person is far superior because he sees what is true in each case, being himself a sort of standard and measure. In the many, however, pleasure would seem to cause deception, since it appears good when it is not. Certainly they choose what is pleasant because they assume it is good, and avoid pain because they assume it is evil.

### **Bibliography**

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