UNIT-4: ARISTOTLE'S CONCEPT OF HAPPINESS

UNIT STRUCTURE

4.1: Learning Objectives

4.2: Introduction

4.3: Aristotle's Concept of Happiness

4.4: Happiness is the highest end of life

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4.1: LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After going through this unit you will be able to

- Know what is Aristotle's Concept of Happiness
- Know what is the highest end of life
- Know the differences between voluntary and non-voluntary action.
- Know the relationship between happiness and the freedom of will
- Define Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia

4.2: INTRODUCTION

Happiness is the concept, which can be regarded to be the concerned of all ethics. Almost all the ancient thinkers or ethicists tried to claim that the ideals they portrayed the ingredients of a happy life. It is found that in some kinds of ethics like utilitarianism, it is mentioned that an action is regarded to be moral or immoral on the basis of observing the fact that the degrees of happiness created by that act. In the contemporary ethics also, the importance of happiness cannot be ignored. Aristotle has an important viewpoint regarding the concept of happiness. For him, happiness is the

highest virtue of life. In this unit we will particularly discuss about the Aristotle's concept of happiness.

4.3: ARISTOTLE'S CONCEPT OF HAPPINESS

According to Aristotle, like all other things of the world, man is a combination of form and matter. Now here one question can be asked, "What is the matter of man?" It is said by Aristotle that a matter of a man includes actually, what is the corporeal religion, living things and specially animals. That is why; the form of a man moulds and transforms in man his physio-chemical activities, vegetative, sex and the senses in man. According to Socrates, this form is nothing but 'reason'. Reason is a distinctive feature of a man. Therefore the highest end of man is to become his highest being or the attainment of goodness or a life of virtue, that is context of goodness. Aristotle vaguely tells it that the highest thing that a man contemplates is 'goodness of God'. In fact this can be regarded to be the highest end of man. Now another question arises here, i.e. what the highest end is, which a man can attain, and then the answer will be nothing but happiness.

4.4: HAPPINESS IS THE HIGHEST END OF LIFE

Now one question is found to be aroused here. It is seen that the pleasure is the satisfaction of passion and appetites. Then is it the case that pleasure is the highest end of life? But its answer is nothing but 'no'.

For Aristotle appetites and passion are the matter of ethical life and they have to be regulated by the form, which is for man is 'reason'. That is why pleasure cannot be the end of man. On the other hand, form is the activity which uses to actualize matter towards its highest becoming or end. But appetites and passion are said to be passive potentiality or feeling. So feeling cannot be the highest end of rational man. Hence, pleasure can never be the ultimate end of man's moral life. From the above explanation, it can be said that hedonism is something, which is totally rejected by Aristotle. According to Aristotle man is a living body and a man has to live with his appetites for food, mate, and fear etc. As these particular things are

indispensable activity, so a man should include them in his day to day rational activity. According to Aristotle feeling cannot be the guide of life, but it can be followed as a necessary consequence or accompaniment of man's rational life. In this way pleasure has become a moral pursuit of the entire rational human's life.

According to Aristotle, the pursuit of the highest rational end of man means nothing but to control of one's passion and appetites by reason. This particular act is known as diagnostic. Again it is also seen that Aristotle does not deny the place of personal good as riches, friends, good fortune, health etc. Actually they are auxiliary means for a moral life. Therefore, Aristotle denies cynicism. Cynicism is a mode of thinking which believes that people are generally selfish and dishonest. However, external good fortune is not constitutive, but merely a help for moral life.

The essential of a moral life is the control of appetites and passion by reason and this has to be constantly exercised. This habitual control of appetites and passion by reason is known as virtue. In due course, virtue creates a good disposition and character. This character is an inward organization of settled habit of will which pertains to a good moral life. Hence, neither appetite has to be extirpated, as asceticism wrongly does not maintain, nor, appetites have to be satisfied, as hedonism holds. But appetite should be regulated by reason. This regulation of appetites by reason has to be carried out by moderation and tact. In other words, moderation means an insight into the reasonable desires. It means neither the excess nor the denial of appetites has to be allowed. This is known as the principle of golden mean. Ofcourse this arithmetical term 'mean' that in each case there is some quantitative 'mean'. In each case one has to decide for oneself the mean of rational choice. For example, courage is a mean between bashfulness and shamelessness and so on. This regulation by rule of adopting a mean is greatly assisted by the cultivation of virtue, i.e., by the settled habit of will in the choice of the mean by a rule which a wise man in his practical life would adopt.

4.5: HAPPINESS AND FREEDOM OF WILL

Aristotle in this context has also given emphasis on justice. For Aristotle justice does not come under individual ethics, but it comes under state. According to Aristotle justice is something, which can be attained with the help of two processes, they are distributive and corrective. The distributive justice means reward or right activity and the corrective justice can be attained with the help of punishing wrong actions. According to Aristotle that is why only voluntary and not in-voluntary actions can be regarded to be moral. In-voluntary actions are actually spontaneous action. As for example if a mosquito bites us, we automatically use to slap it, or when itching will be started, our hand will automatically go to that place. These actions are called in-voluntary actions. We do not have any control over this kind of actions. So morality does not have anything to do with this kind of action. But so far as voluntary actions are concerned it derives from the agents' own mind. It means what we do; it is totally controlled by my mind or desire. That means voluntary actions always associate with reason of a human brain. In this context Aristotle brings the concept of freedom of will. For Aristotle freedom of will means freedom of choice. There are two uses of choice. That is, either choice can be used as a mean or it can be used as an end. It means choice is the thing, for which action can be done. Here Ross says that Aristotle has actually meant the choice as a mean and not as an end. To attain the end only, 'choice' is used as a mean. According to Aristotle the main end of any human being is the attainment of the ultimate end in life. That ultimate end in life is nothing but the 'goodness' or the 'goodness of God'. Aristotle has said that choice is the mean to attain this end. But another question can arise here? What kind of choice will be the main mean to attain the end? In this regard, Aristotle has maintained that human beings have one peculiar quality, which is not possessed by other rational animal of the world, i.e., the quality called 'rationality'. All of us have the power to use reason. So in order to determine our choice, we should use this rational capacity of us as a tool to determine the right of choice. Hence according to Aristotle, 'choice' is nothing but the choice of 'means'

for the attainment of the highest end in man. So far as Aristotle is concerned, it is found that, he is a great supporter of freedom of will. Aristotle claims that those actions, which can be regarded to be virtuous, are not only voluntary, but also in accordance with rational choice of a human being. That is why, so far as the question of virtue and vice are concerned, according to Aristotle, they are within the power of man. It can be said that moral action or virtuous action of necessity is something, which cannot be regarded to be a performance of man. Because of this reason, Aristotle harshly criticised Socrates for saying that nobody does wrong voluntarily. For Aristotle both virtue and vice are the outcome of free choice. Again Aristotle further criticises for stating that man is only rational. Because, according to Aristotle with rationality man has some animal instincts too. So in this regard Aristotle says that naturally at times, knowing the right course of action a man is overpowered by his passion by means of rational choice.

4.6: ARISTOTLE'S CONCEPT OF EUDAIMONIA

According to Aristotle, eudaimonia is the chief good for every man. The term 'eudaimonia' is basically a Greek, word, which consists of two terms, 'eu', which means 'good' and 'dainon', which means 'spirit'. Eudaimonia is generally translated as happiness. This is considered by Aristotle to be the 'self sufficient', 'final' and the greatest end of life. It is also said by Aristotle that this stage of eudaimonia is not a psychological state. It is actually a condition of well being or faring well. But it is also said by him that there is a connection between being happy and having one's life go well. It is already said that man is not only a biological entity, as animatic qualities are possessed by all the lower animals of the world too. Aristotle said that the rational element of every human being is the unique quality. In the book, 'Nicomachean Ethics', Aristotle maintains that the activity of soul exhibiting excellence, and if there be more than one excellence, and if there be more than one excellence, in accordance with the best and the most complete.

4.7: CONCLUSION

It is said by Aristotle that goodness of God is the end of a human being and so far as one's moral life is concerned, it can be said that 'happiness' and only 'happiness' is the end of moral life. It is also said by Aristotle that perfect happiness lies in the best activity of a human being, which is also regarded to be contemplative. In fact the idea of best activity comes from the fact that virtuous activities aim at the goodness of God. So in those activities, where we will attain the goodness of God, the element of happiness will also be there. And this happiness, according to Aristotle is the pure and perfect happiness. According to Aristotle, the action or the act, from where pure happiness will come out can also be regarded to be the most virtuous act, as only virtuous act can produce pure happiness and that is the goodwill o God too.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: Man is the combination of what?

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Q2: What is the distinctive feature of man?

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Q3: What are regarded to be the passive potentiality or feeling?

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Q4: According to Aristotle, what cannot be the guide of life?

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Q5: For Aristotle, what cannot be the guide of life?

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Q6: What kind of ethics is regarded to be moral?

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Q7: What is freedom of will means for Aristotle?

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Q8: What is the chief good for every man?

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Q9: In what aspect Aristotle criticises Socrates for saying that nobody does wrong voluntarily

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Q10: When from the voluntary action derives?

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Q11: What does Aristotle mean by the pursuit of the highest rational end of man?

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Q12: What is distributive justice?

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Q13: How can corrective justice be attained?

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4.8: LET US SUM UP

- According to Aristotle, like all other things of the world, man is a combination of form and matter.
- It is said by Aristotle that a matter of a man includes actually, what is the corporeal religion, living things and specially animals.
- The form of a man moulds and transforms in man his physio-chemical activities, vegetative, sex and the senses in man.
- Reason is a distinctive feature of a man.
- Aristotle vaguely tells it that the highest thing that a man contemplate goodness of God.
- Aristotle vaguely tells it that the highest thing that a man contemplates is 'goodness of God'.
- For Aristotle appetites and passion are the matter of ethical life and they have to be regulated by the form, which is for man is 'reason'.

- Pleasure can never be the ultimate end of man's moral life.
- According to Aristotle feeling cannot be the guide of life, but it can be followed as a necessary consequence or accompaniment of man's rational life.
- Ross says that Aristotle have actually meant the choice as a mean and not as an end.
- For Aristotle justice does not come under individual ethics, but it comes under state.
- According to Aristotle, the pursuit of the highest rational end of man means nothing but to control of one's passion and appetites by reason.
- This habitual control of appetites and passion by reason is known as virtue. In due course, virtue creates a good disposition and character.
- According to Aristotle justice is something, which can be attained with the help of two processes, they are distributive and corrective.
- According to Aristotle, only voluntary and not in-voluntary actions can be regarded to be moral.
- Aristotle has maintained that human beings have one peculiar quality, which is not possessed by other rational animal of the world, i.e., the quality called 'rationality'.
- According to Aristotle, 'choice' is nothing but the choice of 'means' for the attainment of the highest end in man.
- Aristotle has said that choice is the mean to attain the end called 'Goodness of God'.
- According to Aristotle, eudaimonia is the chief good for every man, which generally means 'happiness'.

- Eudaimonia is considered by Aristotle to be the 'self sufficient', 'final' and the greatest end of life.

- According to Aristotle, perfect happiness lies in the best activity of a human being, which is also regarded to be contemplative.



4.9: FURTHER READING

1) Benn, P. (2006). Ethics. Routledge: Taylor& Francis Group.
2) Frankena, W. K. (1999). Ethics. Prentice Hall of India Pvt Ltd.
3) Masih, Y. (1993). A Critical History of Western Philosophy. Motilal Banarsidass.
4) Sinha, J. (2001). A Manual of Ethics. New Central Book Agency (P)Ltd.
5) Taylor, R. (2002). An Introduction: Virtue Ethics. Prometheus Books.



4.10: ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1: Man is the combination of Form and matter.

Ans to Q 2: The distinctive feature of man is 'reason'.

Ans to Q 3: Appetites and Passion are regarded to be the passive potentiality or feeling.

Ans to Q 4: According to Aristotle 'feeling' cannot be guide of life.

Ans to Q 5: For Aristotle, justice does not come under individual ethics, but it comes under state.

Ans to Q 6: Voluntary or not in-voluntary actions can be regarded to be moral.

Ans to Q 7: Freedom of will means 'freedom of choice' for Aristotle.

Ans to Q 8: Eudaimonia is the chief good for every man.

Ans to Q 9: Aristotle has harshly criticized Socrates for saying that nobody does wrong voluntarily.

Ans to Q 10: Voluntary action derived from the agent's own mind.

Ans to Q 11: According to Aristotle, the pursuit of the highest rational end of man means nothing but to control of one's passion and appetites by reason.

Ans to Q 12: Distributive justice means reward or right activity.

Ans to Q 13: The corrective justice can be attained with the help of punishing wrong actions.

4.11: MODEL QUESTIONS:

A. Very short Questions

Q1: What is the highest end that a man can attain?

Q2: What is the role played by feeling in men rational life?

Q3: What is the literal meaning of the term 'eudaimonia'?

Q4: What is called Diagnostic?

Q5: Define cynicism?

Q6: What is the essential of moral life?

Q7: Name the two processes with the help of which justice can be attained.

B. Short Questions (Write in about 100-150 words)

Q1: Write briefly about Aristotle's concept of form and matter.

Q2: Write a short note on the essential of moral life.

Q3: Briefly explain Aristotle's concept of 'Eudaimonia'.

Q4: What is meant by the principle of golden mean?

Q5: Write briefly about the voluntary and the non-voluntary action.

C. Long Questions (Write in about 300-500 words)

Q1: Explain the concept of Freedom of will.

Q2: What does Aristotle mean by the concept of happiness?

Q3: Explain broadly the concept that happiness is the highest end of life?

Q4: Is happiness is same as pleasure. Explain

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