

Spin the wheel of happiness

Upon asking a varied selection of people about what they thought it meant to “spin the wheel”, I happened to find that “happiness” is the “answer”. The problem with pursuing happiness as the means of living a good life is that happiness is an end, and not a means. The accepted notion among philosophers, and in particular Aristotle, is that virtue is the means by which a good life is achieved. Thus, happiness is simply a side effect of living a virtuous life. Thus, assuming that this idea is correct, it appears that a good many people are “living wrongly”. Yet I must wonder – can the perceptual abilities of *so many* people be in error? Based upon my notion of perception, I would have to answer “No”. Thus, I reason that all of these people must not be wholly erroneous. Whenever someone posited the need for happiness as the true path, they invariably told me how they thought said happiness should be achieved. These “methods of achievement” can be termed virtues. Thus, most people simply employ confused terminology, focusing on happiness, which is the end result of their virtue. Yet, virtue and happiness are intertwined – virtue prompts happiness, and the desire for further happiness inspires virtuous behavior.

So to some extent, it *is* possible to pursue happiness as the ultimate goal of a good life. Thus, I am free to move along this path, guided by the actual content of the response that I received. The concept of *connections* seemed to permeate all of my “happiness” responses. In particular, I found that emphasis was placed upon connections established with other people and also with one’s self. However, I was unable to locate even a mention of our intrinsic connection to nature.

The connections that humans form in-between each other are an important part of life. I was often told how activities that form and reaffirm relationships are desirable. Not so coincidentally, these activities are also considered to be virtuous. As Confucius said, “A man of virtue never stands isolate; he will always have comrades” (Confucius, 33). One example of a relationship-forming activity is that of helping. Helping can occur in the form of sharing, whereby one person gives of their self in order to lessen the suffering of another. Once this activity has been accepted, it becomes a highly rewarding one. Furthermore, sharing is susceptible to reciprocity – previous instances of sharing can prompt further sharing in the opposite direction. When asked if one word can serve as a core principle, Confucius said: “... ‘Perhaps it is the word ‘reciprocity.’ Do not do to others what you would not want others to do to you.” (Confucius, 35). Thus, at its most elementary level, sharing could be the cornerstone upon which a good life is developed.

Another common theme is that a balance must exist between “my” needs, and the needs of others. It is thought that extreme selfishness is not virtuous, and consequently it cannot lead to happiness. As Confucius said, “...the inferior man hankers after wealth and profits” (Confucius, 34). Thus, a life constituted primarily by selfishness cannot be good. However, intense sharing will not necessarily lead to happiness. In fact, it can have the opposite effect, creating an “unlivable life”. Thus, the notion of balance takes hold, and leads me to the virtuous ideas of the “middle path”. The Middle Path is that “...’which gives vision and knowledge, which leads to calm, Insight, Enlightenment, Nirvāna” (Rahula, 24). These activities are virtuous, they promote happiness, and they are part of living a good life.

Another common type of response that I received had to do with what I call a “connection to the self”. To some, to live a good life means to have no regrets, to have a sense of accomplishment with life, or even to be true to one’s concept of self. A life without regret is one in which the proper course of action was taken at every juncture. Of course, all of these notions are relative, but then, so is a person’s life. So, a life without regret would be virtuous, because it would be the best possible life that a person could live, given their makeup and their situation. Similarly, the notion of accomplishment with one’s life symbolizes that something has been constructed that is largely good. For example, I that upon reflection, I have a strong sense of accomplishment with my tenure as Storrs Hall Council President. I don’t feel accomplished because of *what* I did, but rather that I served as a positive influence for those students around me. Looking back, I can see how my actions have influenced them, to the point that they are themselves active contributors, in ways that I never could have foreseen. This is certainly virtuous.

The last area to be explored under the “connection to self” umbrella is that of remaining true to your self. To let the truth be known – this was my response, when queried by another student. In order to discuss this concept, though, some attention must be paid to the *self*, so that it is plain what it means to be true to it. As I previously discussed, I believe that my notion of *self* evolves from my perception, culture, and my consciousness. Furthermore, it is in my consciousness that I am able to realize who I am, and what it means to remain true to that vision. Once this vision is realized, the virtuousness of remaining true to it becomes plain. As Socrates explained “While I have life and strength I shall never cease from practicing and teaching philosophy...” (Plato, 44). Thus, it is virtuous to remain true to your self, because it means that you will always

make the proper action. Furthermore, actions that integrate with the self will not be regretted, by definition. In essence, this ultimately leads not only to happiness, but also to the good of life.

Having discussed with my surveyed notion of happiness, and its consequential good life, I feel compelled to turn to the deficiencies of this argument. In my view, the central deficiency is a perceived lack of a connection with nature. I believe that a good life is one that recognizes its place in the greater order of things. Not does not only mean finding a balance with other people, but it also means finding a balance within the entirety of our external world. The writings of Eagle Man, Ed McGaa, prove to be especially valuable here. "...our survival is dependent on the realization that Mother Earth is a truly holy being, that all things in this world are holy and must not be violated, and that we must share and be generous with one another" (Eagle Man, 75). The eloquence of Eagle Man accurately portrays the idea that I am trying to convey – that as an entity, I am connected to a great many things. And if I do not recognize *all* of these connections, that I have no hope of living a good life. It is only by striving to take each dimension into account and making the result the best course of action possible, that a good life can be lived.

There is a lot of vested interest in what it means to live a good life. Most people will base their response upon how they are currently attempting to live – because at basic level, people strive to be good. To me, this not only accounts for the variation among responses, but it also demonstrates that humanity as a whole does share a common conception of good. And if this common base exists, then maybe there is hope for us – not only in our daily struggles, but also in the ultimate struggle with *life*.

Appendix – Responses to Survey

it means your content, happy,
not boring, too much to do (raising a family)
good marriage
happy, normal children
have your health, don't need to be rich, live comfortably
her faith is also important.

most important thing is not to hurt other people, and not to do
anything to hurt yourself. hopefully if you don't hurt yourself/others
you'll find happiness.

happy and content

to live the good life is to have found ultimate peace in god

led a good life if you don't have very many regrets as far as wishing
you had done things when you hadn't lived a good life if you've managed
to take advantage of the opportunities that came along for you.

soup

really truly to learn how to really love everybody
to really truly understand people
so you can be happy, and you can help make them happy
that is something spectacular
to put aside prejudices/negative emotions is really difficult to do
to be able to see clearly and to put aside all of that is worth a lot

to live a good life... um... i think it means to succeed at all that
you attempt, and all of your goals in life
have a wonderful husband, great family, excel and succeed at job
have enough money to do what i want to do, but not be frivolous w/
anything
family, love, career

one that has purpose
and that purpose is completed

happy with your self

experiencing things (in general)

i don't have a good life, so I don't know what it means to live one

to treat people well

to have little regrets @ the end
to not be able to say that i wish i did this, that, or the other thing

using time wisely
bring lasting happiness to others and being happy w/ self
finding peace within the chaotic world

to feel every emotion that is out there

a fine balance between behaving in a way that makes you feel good while being aware of others needs while not being selfish

is to make those around you happy and to be happy yourself

living a good life means striving to live a good life

living a good life is constantly striving towards an ideal

A moral life. Not necessarily defined -> personal morals (and law, etc.)

To me, living a good life involves a balance of personal happiness with what is morally right. This "rightness" for me is largely determined by my religious convictions, and dictated to me by the Bible and includes not only the thoughts that I have, but also the actions that I take towards people. I feel that once one has found happiness within the moral and ethical rights, a good life can be lived.

"same thing - what is happiness?"

achievement - feel the rewards of success.

Leading a good life is having friends...

Helping others, sharing

Feel good about "him" feeling good.

When the chips are down, you cannot be a predator to your own kind.