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 Virtue: According to Aristotle

Aristotle, one of the profound philosophers of his time, considers virtue as an important and integral part of a person’s life. In his functional argument, Aristotle deems happiness to be the ultimate goal and attempts to explain how achieving this purpose would be possible. As he proves that good is to be found in engaging in rational activity, Aristotle is able to lay down a path to attain happiness. The notion of happiness is not just a state of mind but to explore what is good and what it is to be good. Critics question how a single description of what is good or best could suffice for every person, however, this confusion arises from seeing Eudaimonia as a mental state (Barlett). However, a proper understanding of the term can be acquired by translating the word to ‘living well,' which implies that happiness can be attained through the expression of reason, fulfilling one's function in an excellent or virtuous manner. Aristotle’s functional argument is more about performing activities that express rationality from an individualistic viewpoint.

The functional argument suggests that everything inanimate or animate has a specified function, and the ability to fulfill that function is a measure of its excellence. Therefore a blunt knife lacks excellence. Likewise, human beings are not perfectly rational creatures but have a non-rational part within their souls. It has an ‘animal’ side as well as rational features (Heinaman). Each virtue corresponds to its particular part of the soul, for instance, the excellence of the ‘animal' or ‘appetitive' component of the soul are moral virtues, whereas the excellence of soul's rational part are intellectual virtues. Therefore to flourish, humans have to achieve excellence at all those functions that make us distinctively human. People do not strive to be happy to attain another goal; instead, Eudaimonia entails achieving subordinate goals which promote well-being, not because these goals are what happiness consists in. Thus, not knowing what happiness consists in makes it futile to simply affirm that it is the ultimate end. This explains why Aristotle sought to explain or theorize about ‘ergon’ or function. An important component of Aristotle's argument is the distinction made between biological and psychological works when the human soul is described to be formed of connected components, the perceptive soul; the nutritive soul, and the locomotive soul. Human beings as a species have a rational soul as well as other ‘lower’ capacities (Kraut).

Works Cited:

Barlett, R. C. "Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics. A new translation by RC Bartlett and SD Collins, with an Interpretive Essay, Notes, and Glossary." (2011).

Heinaman, Robert. *Plato and Aristotle's ethics*. Routledge, 2017.