

Arsht Research on Ethics and Community Grant

The Ethics of Everyday Life: Exploring Links between Personal Goals, Goal Oriented Actions, Core Human Goods, and Virtues

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Abstract

This study is an empirical examination of the key links between Aristotle's (1999) central concept of *eudaimonia* or human flourishing, personal goals, and virtue. He saw the ethical life in terms of pursuing worthwhile aims in an integrated and sustained way, which is made possible by character strengths or virtues. He understood ethics as a mode of life rather than an occasional decision, response to a dilemma, or set of rules or procedures. An Aristotelian framework suggests that ethical behavior is built on the pursuit of intrinsically meaningful aims (e.g., creating or sharing knowledge, justice) that bring out the best in the individual and the group. The pursuit of intrinsically meaningful ends is incompatible with unethical actions (e.g., exploitation, deception). We will study a purposive sample of individuals involved in the *prima facie* meaningful activity of improving disadvantaged children's educational opportunities through Teach for America. This mixed methods study will use the quantitative methods developed in the Goal Orientation and Life Success (GOALS) Project to assess Goal Orientations, Hedonic Well-being, and Eudaimonic Well-being. The study involves prolonged engagement (6 months) with these teachers through a series of interviews and observations (qualitative methods). The study will develop a grounded theory of how these individuals link the mission of this program with their personal goals, personal strengths, and well-being. Grounded theory analysis will develop a rich theory of the participants' purposive activity and character strengths, which will be linked to the quantitative data on Goal Orientations and modes of well-being. Investigating the links between important human goods, personal goals, virtues, and well-being will facilitate the development of eudaimonic theory and applications.

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