Nicomachean Ethics: Aristotle's Views On Supreme Good For Man

It is impossible to get a universal definition of happiness and what it is, an emotion, a chemical, a feeling. Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries describes it as “the state of feeling or showing pleasure” or “the state of being satisfied that something is good or right” but yet this is still a vague answer, to the question of what is happiness? Is happiness a set fixture in all our lives? Is it fluid? Or is it simply something that causes us to smile? Thousands of people describe themselves as happy unaware of what it truly is. Throughout all of history, the question has been debated and definitions have attempted to classify the boundless void that is happiness. Within this essay, I’ve taken four people’s opinions of what happiness is and compared them against each other to see where the similarities overlay and where the differences stand. Two philosopher’s Aristotle and Confucius viewpoints are used against two psychologists’ considerations Martin Seligman and Sonja Lyubormirsky to allow both old and new and thinkers and science to be compared. At the end of this essay, one hopes to express one’s own opinion of what happiness is based off the philosopher's and psychologists’ views.

Famous philosopher Aristotle is one of the many philosophers who contemplated what happiness is and how it can be achieved. He describes happiness as one of the main goals of human life, with a broad range of requirements needed for it to be fulfilled, including physical and mental well-being, for it to be achieved.

Aristotle presents what he believes the supreme good for man is within the works of Nicomachean Ethics, he explains what he views is the direction we should lead our lives in as well as provide meaning for them. Aristotle states that this final goal must be happy because everything we do in our lives is with the hope that it will make us happy and nothing more. He claims that we only try to achieve happiness and nothing else, for example, the pursuit of relationships and health is something everyone deems important to them to achieve during their lives, however, Aristotle argues that we only want to attain good relationships and good health to make us happy. He goes on to describe how you must work towards happiness throughout your entire life by choosing the greater good. Within his works, he claims that happiness is the end goal everyone strives to achieve as you can only receive it at your life’s end; unlike modern society which views happiness as a subjective and a momentary emotion, such as ‘having fun. Aristotle states his view that happiness is not short-lived within the Nicomachean Ethics, 'for as it is not one swallow or one fine day that makes a spring, so it is not one day or a short time that makes a man blessed and happy.' (Nicomachean Ethics, 1098a18). Additionally, Aristotle abolishes the mindset that pleasure alone cannot lead to happiness; he supports this by saying that animals work on instinct alone and that instinct is powered by seeking pleasure, and we as a species are cleverer than that and desire more from life.

Alongside this, Aristotle highlights the importance of friendship in achieving eudaimonia (happiness, virtue), a valued friendship is based on virtue where both people wish only the best for each other regardless of other emotions or circumstances. He calls it a “... complete sort of friendship between people who are good and alike in virtue ...” (Nicomachean Ethics, 1156b07-08). He states that due to the amount of effort needed to achieve and maintain such virtuous friendship, that one cannot have many friends. Aristotle views friendship so important in

achieving happiness that it exceeds justice and honor.

To conclude, Aristotle believes that our every action contributes to our moral character and the higher our character is the closest we have come to fulfilling our full potentials as human beings. This is then responsible for us achieving happiness at our life’s end, which is the ultimate goal of our existence.