



## GOOD LIFE –AN ANALYSIS FROM THE STANDPOINT OF ARISTOTLE, MILL AND RADHAKRISHNAN

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### **Abstract**

*The present study tries to discuss the philosophical problem 'GOOD LIFE' in a descriptive manner expressed by the great thinkers - Aristotle, Mill and Radhakrishnan. To evaluate the consistent nature of the good life the views of Aristotle, Mill and Radhakrishnan is the ultimate end of the present study where good life is described in the ethico-social context which is inherent in the moral philosophy of these thinkers.*

### **Methodology**

*To work out the details, the original books and literature are used as primary source of data and other reliable and suitable information collected from articles, journals, notes are treated as secondary data source. By analyzing the primary and secondary data sources, the author seeks to present the problem through existing knowledge in analytic and descriptive manner with a causal comparative approach.*

Concept of Good life is the fundamental concept of all philosophical as well as moral investigations. The emergence of human being as a self conscious, moral, social and rational agent has reflected strongly on his ultimate end of life which is termed as good life. The literal meaning of good life is a life well lived. One question always comes into the minds of human being, "Why should we be moral?" The answer of the question must be larger than morality itself, for it must supply us with the reasons for accepting moral principles and rules. That answer is called the good life. Good life is a phrase without precise meaning. It signifies the following questions: "How should we live? What do we want? What should we want? What do we most enjoy? What should we most enjoy? What is worth working for? And what is not worth the effort? What should we accept and what should we try to change?" Moral thinkers try to provide the answer of these questions which are the heart of ethics. The goal of ethics is to develop a set of principles and a view of our highest end of life that will allow us to live with clarity and confidence. The general quest includes morality as well as search for good life. Good life provides us the reasons and logical argument for accepting moral principles and rules. It embraces all aspects of human life by which we can make our life meaningful, enjoyable, duty bound, to become industrious and struggle in life amidst odds and to create a new world order by changing the society for betterment. It is an urge of life which satisfies our cravings of being moral.

These three great philosophers representing the different periods of philosophical history have been considered to find out the primary aspects of their ethical views in terms of good life as a whole. The title indicates that the paper is mainly concerned with the analysis of good life in the moral philosophy of Aristotle, Mill and Radhakrishnan. The scrutiny of the literature reveals that these thinkers have focused only certain aspects of good life, but not all through their moral philosophy and to find out all and encompassing aspects of good life.

In the present time, scientific and technological achievement in different fields influenced our lives immensely and we are confused with the material gains in every walk of life. Sometimes we are puzzled with the so-called progress, technological development and advancement and whether these rapid social changes ultimately lead to peace and happiness in the world or not. In such moment it is very necessary to discuss what actually good life is. Is it material comfort or spiritual development or both? Good life implies all round development of individual living in societies. Real worth of a nation is individual in and through which nation expresses its development. So, universal harmony and peace ultimately depends on the growth and development of individual. Welfare of the individual leads to the welfare of the society and so also welfare of the society leads to welfare of the state or nation. So welfare of the individual, i.e., good life is the fundamental stone of world peace.

The present day situation creates suspicion, hatred, and dissatisfaction amongst the people and for this they have to spend their life in a position which is devoid of mental peace. Development of mental peace is very much essential for the proper nourishment of leading a good life. Such global problem can be solved only by the unity of whole human race by agreed principle of co-existence, co-operation, compromise and mutual understanding. This unity does not require the same code of ethics, religion and language for all nations, races and regions. It requires only the efforts of development of the creative expression of their own field. Imposition and dominating attitude towards other culture should be discouraged for it. The unity of culture which is the key word for the survival of humanity must be based on harmony and integration rather than imitation and antagonism. Good life is one of the ways of awareness of this present global crises and modification of human activities. To preserve social harmony, morality and moral codes are very necessary within the social set up. Good life which is an organized moral concept is very much essential for this purpose. The aim of life is not merely to create an earthly utopia, but to attain a higher and intense form of consciousness. Every human being must have a highest good which is



contemplation, freedom and peace of understanding. The need for the concept of good life arises due to the environment where individual lives amongst a host of things which we judge as intrinsically or extrinsically good. On moral priorities we can grade them as higher or lower. Explanation of good life also arises for the sake of moral assertion which includes evaluation, prescriptions, criticism and injunction concerning others and ourselves.

Individual life and social life are inseparable. Good of the individual depends upon the good of the society and vice versa.. As primary aspect of society, man and ethics are not complementary to each other, but integral to each other's unity. They create independency as a result of which human reality make progress on earth. Due to the change of time though human ethics has turned into a complex system, its roots are based on natural values only. So good life is an indispensable stage where development of individual and society occur through ethical development. From this standpoint also good life is a very essential concept.

The main aim of this paper is to develop and defend good life based on the writings of these three thinkers. Each of them emphasizes only certain aspects of good life, not all. To find out an overall view of good life evolving through different periods of time representing the above thinkers is the main purpose of the paper which can be characterized as role model of good life. The present study is also an attempt to analyze the nature, characteristics and conditions of leading a good life in terms of moral interpretation put forwarded by them and to relate their ideas and views in the present day world and determine its applicability in ethico-social context..

The place of good life in the philosophy of Aristotle, Mill and Radhakrishnan in the ethico- social and religious perspectives: Aristotle, Mill and Radhakrishnan were from entirely different family background and atmosphere representing three different societies. They were not only brought up in entirely different atmosphere, but also practiced entirely different life styles. However, the then prevailing socio-ethical situation influenced their thinking, outlook and activities. One of the most common influences amongst themselves was from the richness of the socio-cultural and philosophical heritage of the age - old civilization.

### **Aristotle's GOOD LIFE**

Aristotle's thought is primarily functional and biological; it aims above all to understand life. His whole philosophy is built around the categories of life and his thought is teleological. Life is to be understood not in terms of its elements and origin alone, but in terms of ends. Hence we can expect Aristotle's treatment of human life to be the most illuminating part of his philosophy.

Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics (N.E.) in which we find the concept of good life as a powerful voice to our own age. It is a challenge to our values, our assumptions and above all else, it is a disposition towards the passions that is conducive to virtuous action. One of the strongest notions of N.E. is pleasure. It is neither a passive sensation nor some sort of activity, but rather that which brings the activity to perfection, supervening on the activity like 'the bloom of health' in the young and vigorous. It also means the joyful contemplation of this life in the blossom of its ephemerality and contingency. It is the synthesis of Aristotle's practical teachings where he applies his idea of moderation, the Golden mean, to numerous ethical situations in an attempt to discover what constitutes the Good life and the Good man.

Aristotle's ethical theory is good-oriented moral theory which says that happiness is the ultimate good in human life. In the ancient world, happiness is the good life, although happiness itself is not a single activity but the result of a great many activities. In his ethics Aristotle examined two one sided conception of the good life - pleasure and success and rejected them, yet he also insisted that one cannot possibly lead the good life without them. But they themselves are not the good life, only necessary condition for it. The good life is happiness, which he defined as that which is wanted for its own sake and not for the sake of anything else. As it turns out, happiness included a large number of advantages and virtues including wealth, power, community status as well as military courage, the ability to drink wine without getting too obnoxious, a sense of justice, good friend and a good sense of humor. Happiness in other words was not just a sense of well being as it is for us. Happiness, for Aristotle meant the good life as a whole.. He is concerned with action as conducive to man's good not as being right in itself irrespective of every other consideration. If Happiness is an activity of man what activity is peculiar to man? It cannot be the activity of growth or reproduction, not yet of sensation, since these are shared by other beings below man; it must be the activity of that which is peculiar to man among natural being namely the activity of reason or activity in accordance with reason. In any case, happiness as the ethical end, does not consist simply in virtue as such, it consists rather in activity according to virtue or in virtuous activity, understanding by virtue both the intellectual and the moral virtues. Moreover Aristotle says, it must, if it really deserves the name of happiness, be manifested over a whole life and not merely for brief period.



But if happiness is essentially activity in accordance with virtue, Aristotle does not mean by this simply to exclude all the common notions about happiness. For example, pleasure which is the natural accompaniment of an unimpeded and free activity, secondly some external good without which a man cannot well exercise that activity. Aristotle remarks that the truly happy man must be sufficiently equipped with external goods. He thus rejects extreme cynicism, but he warns us not to mistake indispensable condition of happiness for essential elements of happiness.

This being established, Aristotle goes on to consider first the general nature of good character and good action, then the leading moral virtues, the virtues of that part of man which can follow the plan lay down by reason, then the virtues of the intellect. At the end of N.E. he considers the ideal life or the ideal life of activity in accordance with virtue which life will be the truly happy life for man. Aristotle says that we become virtuous by doing virtuous acts, but how can we do virtuous acts unless we are already virtuous? Regarding this Aristotle answered that we begin by doing acts which are objectively virtuous without having a reflex knowledge of the acts and a deliberate choice of the acts as good, a choice resulting from a habitual disposition.

The good life is, for a human being, to live in the way that is most suitable for a human being that is according to reason. This is what separates man from the animals, as man alone has the capacity to exercise reason and the communicative ability which allows him to form political communities. For Aristotle, the good is not attainable outside of political communities, which are combination of people designed to live self sufficiently in the pursuit of good.

Happiness depends upon the actualization or the full realization of man's rationality. For the attainment of happiness Aristotle gives much emphasis on virtue which refers to the excellence of a thing, the disposition to perform effectively its proper function. According to him, a virtuous man lives according to reason, thus realizing his distinctive potentiality.

### **Mill's GOOD LIFE**

John Stuart Mill, unlike other philosophers, did not attempt to formulate an ethical theory, but rather to defend the ethical theory to which he was born. In his defense, however his intellectual depth and his intense desire to find an ethics which fits the facts of life, led him to modify and go beyond the utilitarian doctrine as it was propounded by his father and Jereme Bentham.

Mill's utilitarianism, though not fully consistent seem to have been more 'locus aggregative' than 'good aggregative' for the formula that he upheld is 'greatest good of the greatest number'. Mill is concerned with its locus, insisting that the good of every sentient being should be taken into account and maximized so far as possible (locus aggregative) rather than insisting that good ought to be maximized in the universe, regardless of who gets it (good aggregative). So, Mill's utilitarianism would be concerned mainly with how many persons get good rather than total amount of good. His theory gives emphasis on aggregative not distributive equality.

As an ethical theory, utilitarianism signifies that the ultimate end is and ought to be general happiness and that those actions are right which bring the greatest happiness to the greatest number. The utilitarian standard, according to Mill, is not agent's own happiness, but the greatest amount of happiness altogether.

Mill separated himself most completely from his predecessors in teaching that pleasure differs not only quantitatively but qualitatively and also in admitting the internal sanction of conscience. But he also held that the core of conscience is the 'social feeling of mankind', the desire to be unity with our fellow creature. Mill's utilitarianism can be regarded as hedonistic utilitarianism because according to him it is pleasure or happiness present in the consequences which made them good, desirable or worthwhile and therefore an action is right if and only if it produces at least as much happiness as any other available one. It is monistic in nature both in his theory of value by holding that one thing i.e. happiness is intrinsically good and in his theory of obligation by holding that we ought to do only that whose consequences are not less good than those of any other available actions. In Mills utilitarianism, maximization of intrinsic value occupies the most prominent place and he extends the notion of maximization in the direction of both the experience and experience of happiness. So he declares that the highest value which every one ought to aim at is the great possible amount of happiness experienced by the greatest possible number of persons concerned. Mill's theory locates intrinsic value in the mental state of consciousness, the experience, of feeling pleased or happy of being enlightened by the acquisition of knowledge or of enjoying beauty, which is intrinsically good.

Utilitarianism is the reconciliation of the elements of rationalism, intuitionism, empiricism and hedonism i.e Mill reconciles reason, intuition, experience and pleasure in the same manner. Utilitarianism states that an action is right if it tends to



promote happiness and wrong if it tends to produce the reverse of happiness, not just the happiness of the performer of the action, but also that of everyone affected by it. Utilitarianism is an effort to provide an answer to the practical question 'what ought a man to do' and its answer is that man ought to act so as to produce the best consequences possible. According to Mill, acts should be classified as morally right or wrong only if the consequences are of such significance that a person would wish to see the agent compelled, not merely persuaded and exhorted to act in the preferred manner.

.The objective of Mill's utilitarianism is to help one understand what constitutes a morally good life and cultivate it as best as one can. It is mainly based on how people behaved and also on their fitting in practices of the community rather than obeying principles for their own sake. Good life is the happiest life, the contented life, general happiness of all people which is universal and which is mainly based on amalgamation between the sensual pleasure and the intellectual pleasures though it requires maximum amount of intellectual pleasures. Social obligation is also necessary to lead a good life, for Mill. The basis of Mill's good life is feeling of humanity for mankind. So it is humanistic in nature. Sympathy for other human being's feeling and respect for such feelings as their own is another quality for leading a good life i.e. All man's feeling is equal in status. Mill's good life can be regarded as one of the important ways for social integration because its main components are happiness of all people, path of justice, sympathetic to each other, denial of selfish work at the same time respect for all people's feelings and interest which are very essential to establish an ideal society.

### **Radhakrishnan's GOOD LIFE.**

Radhakrishnan's views about ethics are similar to the views of Upanishads. The ideal of ethics is self-realization and Moral conduct is self realized conduct, where self means the deeper nature of man, free from all fetters of selfish individuality.. He tries to counter the criticism that the Vedanta philosophy has no ethics. Moral action is related to human being. He relates moral agent to the Supreme Reality because man is destined for unity with the Absolute through moral action. Man is born and reborn until he achieves the union with the Divine. Morality is not an end in itself, but is a preparation for union with the supreme.

According to him, the purpose of ethical lie is the discipline of human nature leading to the realization of the spiritual. The practical codes of morality, for him are non-hatred to all beings in thought, word and deed, good will and charity. Radhakrishnan contends that supreme virtue consists in truth. According to Radhakrishnan any ethical theory must be grounded on metaphysics because there is an intimate relation between human conduct and ultimate reality. The ultimate reality can be conceived as the Absolute and the Absolute, for him, is the total spiritual reality and the world is an attempt to realize one of the infinite possibilities contained in the Absolute.

The real goal of human life is the attainment of perfection, complete self realization, since real nature of man is spiritual, Self-realization is described as the realization of the divinity. With the course of history, moral codes of a society get distorted and lose their original significance and the Hindu society is no exception to this. Radhakrishnan also draws the attention to those ethical principles which Hindu society should dear and those which should be shunned immediately. 'Dharma' is absolute for Radhakrishnan though it has no absolute and timeless content.

Morality is a state which is not a matter of doubt, but a factor that uplifts man for the true end of his life. It is one of the means to apprehend the reality. Ethics is rooted in some concept of value and it cannot be alienated itself from the spirit- the ultimate value.

According to Radhakrishnan, spiritual life includes the ethical life as a natural outcome of a higher life order. For him ethics is not merely a science of conduct, it is rather science of good and the art of realizing it. But this goodness is not to be confused with temporal well-being. According to Radhakrishnan, 'love' and 'freedom' have very significant role in man's search for good. "Love is at the very heart of universe". He uses the word detachment. By it he means abandonment of self centeredness, rejection of selfish interest. For, ego orientation is the main hindrance to love. Love has to be realized in the actual experience of life. He regards non-violence as the most important moral virtue for a good social life. It is the expression of love.. Sacrifices, tolerance, patience, forgiveness are the manifestation of love. Radhakrishnan emphasizes a fuller, nobler, peaceful and dignified life even with man's material comfort. So, Radhakrishnan's good life can be free from compulsion and so it is with full freedom where freedom means freedom from suffering. He also considers freedom as a postulate of morality, presupposition of our moral endeavor. So he uses 'freedom' in two senses. 'Freedom from' is negative freedom, which prepares a man for his positive freedom, i.e. freedom for' where freedom means the will to be responsible. Every person has the power to will to act according to his choice.



Radhakrishnan describes his idealistic ethics not only from humanistic and spiritualistic standpoint, but also from the religious standpoint with the method of integral experience. Actually he is interested to formulate such an ethics which can be called creative good life rather than reinterpreting a conventional and routine good form already existing in the society. Such an ethics must be based on the act of integral insight controlled by mystical perception, according to Radhakrishnan. For him, the ultimate end is 'sarva mukti' or 'universal salvation'. This is achieved only when the human race as a whole is liberated, only when the redeemed souls become one with the Divine.

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