An Aristotelian Framework for the Human Good

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Where We’re Headed

- My background
  - Psychology
  - Philosophy
- My goals for the presentation
- Three core Aristotelian concepts
  - Happiness as an activity
  - Instrumental vs. constitutive activities
  - Individual vs. shared goods
- Three ways in which these ideas are used to improve the human condition
  - Goal setting and motivation
  - Personality, character, and situational influences on helping behavior
  - Philosophical critiques of non-psychologically real accounts of behavior
Three Aristotelian Concepts: Happiness as an Activity

- The good life is the life lived in accordance with virtue
- *Eudaimonia* translated better as flourishing than happy
- Focus on activities over states
Improving the Human Condition: Social Psychology

- Character and virtues are central to Aristotle’s notions of the “good life”
- Creating more psychologically real accounts of character
  - Meta-analysis of 286 studies of the impact of situational factors on helping behavior
  - Theoretically driven critique of situationist literature
  - Interactionist understanding of character and situational factors impact on helping
Three Aristotelian Concepts: Instrumental and Constitutive Activities

- **Instrumental activity**
  - Importance is *what is being achieved*
  - Examples: making ends meet, getting a degree, pleasurable hooking up

- **Constitutive activity**
  - How an activity is carried out is of equal importance as the outcome
  - Examples: work as a calling, getting an education, romance

- Both are important in *eudaimonia*
Improving the Human Condition: Goal Setting and Motivation

- Instrumental and constitutive goals
  - Qualitative study of goal setting among highly motivated emerging adults
  - Expressed both instrumental and constitutive goals
  - Constitutive goals tied to more “meaningful” activities
Three Aristotelian Concepts: Individual and Shared Goods

- **Individual goods**
  - Goods that can be pursued and possessed by an individual
  - Examples: wealth, pleasure, health

- **Shared goods**
  - Goods that can only be pursued and possessed as a group
  - Examples: friendship, justice, intimacy

- Both are important in *eudaimonia*
Improving the Human Condition: Philosophical Critiques

Three examples
- Individual and shared goods in psychotherapy
- The emptiness of the construct of meaning used by positive psychologists
- The problematic use of theological concepts in psychological explanation