

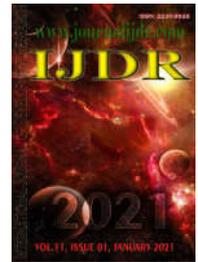


ISSN: 2230-9926

Available online at <http://www.journalijdr.com>

**IJDR**

*International Journal of Development Research*  
Vol. 11, Issue, 01, pp. 43322-43325, January, 2021  
<https://doi.org/10.37118/ijdr.20805.01.2021>



RESEARCH ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS

## 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY POLITICAL THINKING AND EUDAIMONIA

**\*Ana Lucia Magalhaes**

Professor and Coordinator, State of Sao Paulo Technological College, Cruzeiro, SP, Brazil

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History:

Received 02<sup>nd</sup> October, 2020  
Received in revised form  
14<sup>th</sup> November, 2020  
Accepted 11<sup>th</sup> December, 2020  
Published online 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2021

#### Key Words:

Happiness, virtue, political life, moral

### ABSTRACT

Happiness is treated as a concept based on Aristotle's eudaimonia with additions by other philosophers, like Socrates, Plato, Spinoza and applied to present-day political developments. The case study analyzes two speeches by world leaders: Germany's Angela Merkel at a press conference following a visit to a refugee camp, pledging acceptance of a large number of refugees, and Donald Trump during his electoral campaign, proposing an immigrant-containing wall at the US-Mexico border. The research questions are: what is the relationship between Aristotelian happiness and nobleness of character? Are there significant contributions from other philosophers? How does Merkel's speech on refugee acceptance approach eudaimonia? How does Donald Trump's discourse on the Mexican border wall relate with happiness? So, the research purpose is to contribute, through studying concepts by Aristotle and other philosophers plus academic papers published between 2016 and 2018, to further the understanding of eudaimonia in 21<sup>st</sup> century politics.

Copyright © 2021, Ana Lucia Magalhaes, 2021. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Citation: Ana Lucia Magalhaes, 2021. "21<sup>st</sup> Century political thinking and eudaimonia" *International Journal of Development Research*, 11, (01), 43322-43325

### INTRODUCTION

Aristotle, in *Nicomachean Ethics*, associates happiness to the fact that "all knowledge and all work are aimed at some good", and both the common man and the wise man see such objective as identifying "good living and the performing of good actions as being happy". The difference between the two is the down-to-earth identification of happiness with common pleasures versus the refinement of honor, which is the ultimate target of political life. It becomes clear that politics is hereby seen as close to the concept of virtue, understood as: 1) intellectual virtue, covering philosophical wisdom, understanding and practical knowledge; 2) moral, meaning judgement and temperance. Aristotle also wrote that virtue is not born with man, but it comes with training and exercise. Happiness is usually pursued in itself, as honor, pleasure or reason, what makes it possibly hard-to-find, since it is considered as absolute and self-sufficient, meaning that the happy man is the one that acts with rectitude and lives well, since Aristotelian happiness would then be a combination of good life and good deeds. Nevertheless, it can also be identified with virtue, with practical wisdom or philosophical wisdom, combined or not with the feeling of pleasure. Happiness is therefore "the best, the noblest and the most pleasant thing in the world", and those attributes of happiness appear together, not separately. Spinoza thought of man as constrained by external forces and influenced by its relations with the world and with God, forcing him to be at the same time transcendent and worldly. By stating that "anything can be by accident a cause of hope or fear", Spinoza asserts that hope is the opposite of fear. If fear is "an inconstant sadness, arisen from the image of a doubtful thing", hope is "an inconstant joy arisen from the image of a future or past thing whose outcome we doubt". Since joy is a product of passion, it is necessarily inconstant, so the true joy or happiness is connected to rationality, away from passion: he who lives rationally is free from fear, experiences only happiness.

Merkel's speech is clearly connected with eudaimonia, since it shows a strong nobleness component; it proposes Spinozan hope in the future; it follows Russell, moving away from egocentrism; it fosters, like Jefferson stated, the pursuit of happiness, and it adheres to Bentham when she proposes to receive the largest possible number of persons. Trump disregards Aristotelian eudaimonia by excluding the other; he denies Spinozan hope thus promoting sadness and fear; his egocentric proposal moves away from Russell and denies the pursuit of happiness. His speech goes against the principles of American Declaration of Independence, which makes it clear that all men were created equal, with the same rights.

**The good, the truth, ethics and happiness:** Before a deep analysis on contemporary discourse one has to look, even if only briefly, at the Greeks. The theme, presence of eudaimonia, is particularly challenging, since post-modernity brought velocity of change or, in Bauman's (2007) words, "liquid reality", an unprecedented new environment, which creates novel stimuli all the time. Social organizations, whichever they are, cannot keep for long their ways and means. Moreover, new ways can disintegrate faster than their proper implementation can be carried out. Bauman also stated that there is a separation and imminent divorce between power and politics.

this is) a source of profound and, in principle, uncontrollable uncertainty, while the lack of power makes existing political institutions, as well as their initiatives and their undertakings, less and less relevant to the existential problems of citizens of nation-states, and for this reason, attract less and less attention.

As the reader delves into Bauman's world of uncertainties, it is possible that the initial feeling is of fear, injustice, deprivation, lack of privacy - promoted by globalization. It almost means that the well-being within one space is always referenced to misery elsewhere. A pessimistic view, indeed. Nevertheless, man has survived storms, wars, different types of changes, violence. A return to Plato and Aristotle, never exhausted or outdated, shows that the fundamental structure of eudaimonic ethics may be (or has been) a path. Several other thinkers have dedicated their lives to the search for answers, with some clues found nearby, some evidence, but there is no space in this text for everyone. Thus, we will use Spinoza besides those mentioned.

**Socrates, Plato and Aristotle:** Dinucci (2010), a Brazilian researcher, sought to show how Socrates related virtue and happiness and for that he used material from two theses: Irwin (1995), according to whom there would be an instrumentality between them and, in this case, virtue would be a means to achieve happiness and Vlastos (1994), for whom virtue is a component of happiness. The first Socratic dialogues support different theses about this relation: Protagoras, for example, shows virtue as an instrument to achieve happiness, pleasant things. In Euthydemus, the wisdom that makes man virtuous is the one and only good and necessarily implies happiness, a concept reaffirmed in Apology, in the Republic and in Gorgias. Besides virtue, Socrates shows, in the Apology, wealth as also a contributor to happiness, and in Gorgias the philosopher points out wisdom as good. In other words, there are, besides virtue, other elements that constitute human happiness. So, according to those philosophers, virtue is the cause of happiness, but the Socratic eudaimonic position goes further and shows three ways: a) to seek happiness in all rational actions, b) to seek happiness in itself, and c) to seek happiness by means of any rational action.

Socrates' response to happiness is furthered by Protagoras, according to whom, in Irwin's words, "good things are considered as such because they are supposed to be pleasurable, but we do not consider them as pleasurable because they are good" (1990). We must remember that Socrates is always committed to virtue and good living, and this seems to go against an instrumentalist thesis of happiness. It is safe to say that happiness is the search of every man, and for Aristotle, long before it was reduced to advertising since the twentieth century, it was an ethical ideal. While some individuals possess an Aristotelian view of happiness — the pursuit of the highest good — others, even without knowing, associate it with something simple and obvious: pleasure, wealth, honors, power, even if they disagree with each other. Some relate it to health, especially if they are ill; others to wealth, especially if they are poor. In other words, for those people, happiness seems always to be beyond reach. The philosopher deals with eudaimonia in his "Nicomachean Ethics" and explains about good things and advantages brought by it. To determine what is the end of human nature remains however necessary, as well as what constitutes pleasure, virtue, happiness - to separate, for example, the good in itself from that which is merely useful. Besides that,

[...] Further, since 'good' has as many senses as 'being' (for it is predicated both in the category of substance, as of God and of reason, and in quality, i.e. of the virtues, and in quantity, i.e. of that which is moderate, and in relation, i.e. of the useful, and in time, i.e. of the right opportunity, and in place, i.e. of the right locality and the like), clearly it cannot be something universally present in all cases and single; for then it could not have been predicated in all the categories but in one only.. (Aristotle, 1973)

As for all things there is an end, according to the philosopher, this end must be the High Good, that is, he deserves to be sought in himself, although he affirms that perhaps this concept "seems banal" and is lacking a more clear explanation as to what it really is. In the words of Aristotle, the High Good would be absolute and unconditional, it is what is desirable in itself and does not relate to anything else "we

speak of whatever is good in two senses: some things must be good in themselves, and the others, in relation to the first". In this way, true happiness would be sought in itself and never with aiming at something else, while pleasure, for example, would be related to species of men. Pleasures would be in conflict, because they would connect to what each individual understands as a motive of pleasure, some kind of accessory. Happiness derived from any desired kind of pleasure runs out as soon as it has been achieved. So, happiness in itself, which is not the result of any desire, becomes virtuous and related to philosophical wisdom, that is, it is not exhausted. This concept fits that of virtue, virtuous activity. Aristotle, in questioning whether happiness would be acquired by learning, by habit or by training, if conferred by some divine providence or by chance, responds that, as virtue, it would be whatever is best, so it should be shared by the greatest number of people. At this point he affirms that happiness "is the goal of political life" and that "this science devotes the best of its efforts to make citizens good and capable of noble actions".

As discussed, in order to better understand the nature of happiness the philosopher relates happiness to virtue.

When speaking of a man's character we do not say that he is wise or discerning, but that he is calm, kind, or temperate; but we praise a wise man by referring to his disposition of spirit, and to praiseworthy dispositions of spirit we call virtues (Aristotle, 1973)

And he adds that the truly political man also "enjoys the reputation of having studied virtue above all things, for he wishes to make his fellow citizens good and law-abiding". The virtue to which the philosopher refers is human, for goodness is human, as well as happiness. It is not the virtue of the body, but that of the soul, since happiness belongs to the soul. The politician, then, must know what concerns the soul, precisely because he must deal with the virtues, divided into two kinds: intellectual and moral; the first, linked to teaching, experience, time and morality, acquired by habit, that is, no kind of virtue is born with man, but acquired through practice. The philosopher says that man has, by nature, the capacity to adapt. It cites that the senses are innate (sight, hearing ...) and appear before being used, contrarily to virtue, in opposition to what is innate, is acquired by exercise, by use, by doing. He adds that we potentially have the capacity for virtue, justice and all goodness (or their opposites), but only by acts, actions or exercise, we become truly virtuous. Actions are connected to both pleasant and unpleasant feelings, pleasures and pains, so, as it is easier to accept pleasures, it is understood that virtue cannot always be exercised, because it is difficult. Political science, in turn, "revolves around pleasures and pains, since the man who gives them good use will be good and whatever is misused will be bad." (Aristotle, 1973). Aristotle stresses that virtue is associated with the soul, but although the soul possesses "three kinds of things" :passions (anger, fear, envy, joy, hatred, emulation, compassion), aptitudes and dispositions of character) virtue can only be related to the third, for no one is praised or censored by aptitudes or by all passions, but by some of them.

Passions are about extremes, and the philosopher mentions deficiency, excess and the balanced middle ground, where virtue lies.

[...] more exact and better than any art, so is nature, it is still aimed at the middle ground. I am referring to the moral virtue, since it is what concerns the passions and actions, in which there is excess, deficiency and middle ground. Both fear and trust, appetite, anger, compassion, and generally pleasure and pain, may be felt too much or too little; and in one case as in another, this is an evil. But to feel them on the appropriate occasion, with reference to the appropriate objects ... in this consist the middle ground and the excellence characteristic of virtue.

Since Aristotle associates virtue with happiness and it must be acquired by man, it is thought that the exercise of the middle is a form of conquest of happiness, which would not be exactly an easy task and would be closer to the philosopher, accustomed to the search for the contemplation of truth: only where there is contemplation does one attain to happiness and, "in this sense the philosopher is the happiest of men".

## RESULTS

For an analysis of eudaimonia, we have chosen excerpts from speeches given by two leaders who, on similar themes, show different choices: Chancellor Angela Merkel, in a speech in Marrakech in 2018, explains about the adoption of the global pact for migration and President Trump, in a campaign speech in Phoenix, Arizona (2016), argues about building a wall between Mexico and the US. Merkel said:

I am delighted to be here with you in Marrakech today. I would like to express my sincere thanks to [...]. Today is a very important day. For we are adopting a comprehensive political agreement on migration at global level for the first time. [...], and on the other hand, the topic of migration, an issue affecting millions of people throughout our world.

The speaker uses the descending order, since she begins with her state of mind: "I am very happy," a strong argument, and continues to seek the middle ground which, incidentally, is related to virtue, as conceived by Aristotle. It is not about happiness as per Protagoras, which shows virtue as an instrument to achieve it, but a feeling related to the other: "We are adopting a comprehensive political agreement on migration at a global level for the first time ... the theme of refugees, whose legal basis is the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and [...] the issue of migration, an issue that affects millions of people around the world. A world concern for the good of the other.

Happiness, as explained at the beginning of the text, prepares the audience and is constructed as follows:

It is particularly appropriate that we also consider the fate of the many millions of migrants around the world and reiterate our conviction that universal human rights apply to all individuals in all countries of the earth. [...] Migration is a natural and frequent occurrence, and is a good thing when it occurs legally

Concern for the universal good, with the application of rights to all individuals on the earth, shows an ethos directed towards the common good — migration "is a good thing when it occurs legally." We remember Aristotle for whom the truly political man also "enjoys the reputation of having studied virtue above all things, for he wishes to make his fellow citizens good and law-abiding". The term world associated with all individuals has rhetorical strength, since is not that usual in speeches (on globalization, for example), but a careful lexical choice. One can think of the Higher Good as in Aristotle and the concept of liberty in Spinoza, when the speech proclaims Germany as "member of the European Union ... we enjoy freedom of movement for employment. This is an aspect of our single market, we have a greater prosperity. "Spinoza's freedom is related to the Supreme Good, for as long as man is dominated by passions, he will not be free. Nevertheless, the text touches utilitarianism and we remember Socrates, for whom, besides virtue, the Supreme Good, other elements can constitute human happiness: in Apology, wealth and, in Gorgias, wisdom.

That is why labor migration in the European Union is clearly regulated, reflecting also the principles of this pact. [...] We are interested in legal migration. And what is of

our interest is also subject to our sovereign right to self-determination.

The text shows that there is an interest in migration. For a moment, we cease to think of Socratic, Platonic, Aristotelian, or Spinozan eudaimonia connected to character, ethics, morality and values, and remind happiness as commented in relation to ordinary men: honor, wealth.

Furthermore:

However, we are aware that even in the context of legal migration as it exists in the world today, some people are exposed to extremely unfair working conditions. Child labor is still a reality. Difficult work conditions are a reality. [...] aimed at preventing and combating illegal migration and human trafficking. [...] every individual should have adequate documentation. We are all aware of the risks that people falling into the hands of human traffickers and smugglers are exposed.

This citation demonstrates a call to character, to the search for justice, to the rights of people and to appeal against actions of individuals devoid of character.

This is the only way we can make our world a better place. Germany is committed to this task. [...] will continue to play an active role in its further implementation for the benefit of the people of our planet.

The speech ends with a call for everyone to commit to improving the world so that people benefit. Discounting the moment in which the pronouncement cites Germany's interest in the workers - a utilitarian aspect of the text - it can be said that the whole discourse is based on the concepts of eudaimonia according to Socrates and Spinoza, since it seeks the general good of the individual and associates it to virtue, shown by Aristotle as the middle way, but only when she speaks of Germany's interest in foreign labor. President Trump's speech on August 31, 2016, begins with thanks to the people and with the description of his state of mind: he is happy to be in Phoenix. It uses repetition in the beginning (four thanks in four sentences) and throughout the text, as reinforcement to the chosen arguments.

Thank you. [...] I am so glad to be back in Arizona. The state that has a very, very special place in my heart. I love people of Arizona and together we are going to win the White House in November. [...] This won't be a rally speech, per se. Instead, I'm going to deliver a detailed policy address on one of the greatest challenges facing our country today, illegal immigration. I've just landed having returned from a very important and special meeting with the president of Mexico, a man I like and respect very much. And a man who truly loves his country, Mexico. And, by the way, just like I am a man who love my country, the United States. [...] And in a Trump administration we're going to go about creating a new relationship between our two countries, but it's going to be a fair relationship.

It is immediately apparent that Trump has his happiness directed to an almost personal desire: "together we are going to win the White House in November." Then he introduces the item around which he will build his speech: he announces a policy on immigration. It is interesting that he presents the president of Mexico as a man who loves his country and presents himself as a man who loves his own country: somehow, a separatist politics is already presented: each in its own space. He emphasizes that the two are in conversation and both countries will win with the policy being announced — emphasizes that a new relationship will be created between those two countries, with the adversative conjunction "but", it will be a fair relationship. It is possible to think of the Aristotelian, Socratic, Platonic justice.

Trump goes on:

Today, on a very complicated and very difficult subject, you will get the truth. The fundamental problem with the immigration system in our country is that it serves the needs of wealthy donors, political activists and powerful politicians. [...] It does not serve you the American people. When politicians talk about immigration reform, they usually mean the following: amnesty, open borders, lower wages. Immigration reform should mean something else entirely. It should mean improvements to our laws and policies to make life better for American citizens.

The speech places a strong argument that urges the American people to divide themselves for the sake of themselves "it should mean improvements to our laws and policies to make life better for American citizens." And reinforces "these are valid concerns expressed by decent and patriotic citizens from all backgrounds, all over". What is perceived so far is that there is a non-global preoccupation, but instead a concern about a slice of this population, so one could not associate happiness with Platonic Socratic (supreme good), Aristotelian (virtue) or Spinoza eudaimonia. In stating that "we have to be prepared to talk honestly and without fear about these important and very sensitive issues", it shows the possibility of dishonesty and fear before. It emphasizes that "countless innocent American lives have been stolen because our politicians have failed in their duty to secure our borders and enforce our laws as they have to be enforced." Here the speaker demonstrates concern to preserve only the well-being of his fellow citizens, without thinking of the universal good: a purely instrumental concept of happiness (Irwing, 1995) aimed at the personal good and with a specific purpose: preservation of his country. Other information reinforces the obstruction of immigration, which, according to him, is responsible for many crimes. In his view, the Mexican people consist, in substantial part, of criminals, although it does not quote this literally. The speaker led the audience to believe in the need to build a physical wall between countries to prevent immigration and curb crime.

We will build a great wall along the southern border. **AUDIENCE:** Build the wall! Build the wall! Build the wall! And Mexico will pay for the wall. One hundred percent. They don't know it yet, but they're going to pay for it. And they're great people and great leaders but they're going to pay for the wall. On day one, we will begin working on an impenetrable, physical, tall, power, beautiful southern border wall.

The speaker informs about the construction of the wall enthusiastically supported by the audience, says that also that Mexico will pay in full for the construction of this means of separation and makes clear the isolationist policy, which distances itself from what Aristotle, Plato and Spinoza wrote. Remember that Aristotle tells us that happiness is associated with virtue, half-way between extremes (lack and excess). Trump's position is that of excess: in principle, all Mexicans who wish to go to the US would be potential criminals, hence the need to build a wall. The term "removed" is associated with exclusion: people are treated as unwanted objects. It is possible that the candidate is thinking about winning honors for himself, namely the presidency, but for Spinoza, these are fleeting joys and cause evil, except when placed as instruments in the search for the supreme good, which does not seem to be the case. There is clear pursuit of specific good only for a portion of humanity.

## Conclusions

As commented on, by comparing the types of happiness, we immediately realize that Merkel thinks globally, while Trump directs his wishes of happiness to an almost personal desire: "together we are going to win the White House in November" in the whole speech, the happiness and well-being of the people of his country are the only concern. Merkel, on the contrary, worries about the welfare of all immigrants, remembering that they are people, as the presidential candidate announces a policy of expelling the immigrants from his country. She treats them as people that can help Germany and as a way of that country to recover from the evils caused during the world war. Candidate Trump treats immigrants as criminals who need to be removed. While she intends to welcome them, he intends to turn them away. The term used by the former is associated with a search for the universal good, while the latter approaches a view of the immigrant as an unwanted object. Thus, it is possible to see, in the first discourse, an association with the Aristotelian virtue, in search of the Socratic high good, and Spinozan freedom; in the second, an instrumental vision is perceived. Happiness exists while leading to a certain end.

## REFERENCES

- ARISTOTLE (Ética a Nicômaco [Nicomachean Ethics]. Transl. Vallandro, L. & Bornheim, G. In: Os Pensadores. Sao Paulo: Abril, 1973. Original work published circa 350 BC.
- DINUCCI, A. Teologia, Ética e Racionalidade em Sócrates [Theology, Ethics and Rationality in Socrates]. *Anais de Filosofia Classica*, 4 (7), 2010
- BAUMAN, Z. *Tempos Líquidos* [Liquid Times] Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2007.
- IRWIN, T. *Plato's Ethics*. New York; Garland, 1995
- PLATO. *Gorgias*. Transl. Nunes, C.. <https://mega.nz/#!r1JwDBID!VVXxrzyYSGJBzx307uLrIDE1V7q8oIfXuvhc7iEAfuw>, accessed on May 2, 2018.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Republic* (books 1-5). 11<sup>th</sup> ed, Trans. Emlyn Jones, C., Cambridge: Harvard University, 2013. Original work published circa 380 BC
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Laches*. Protagoras. Meno. Euthydemus. 7<sup>th</sup> ed., Transl. Lamb, W. Cambridge: Harvard University, 1990. Original work published circa 390 BC
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Apologiad e Sócrates* [The Apology of Socrates]. Transl. Bruna, J. Sao Paulo: Nova Cultural, 1987. Original work published circa 390 BC
- THE FEDERAL CHANCELLOR. Speech by Federal Chancellor Dr Angela Merkel in Marrakech on 10 December 2018. <https://www.un.org/en/conf/migration/assets/pdf/GCM-Statements/germany.pdf>, accessed on June 9, 2019.
- THE NEW YORK TIMES. Transcription of Donald Trump's Immigration Speech, Sept. 1, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/02/us/politics/transcript-trump-immigration-speech.html>, accessed June 06, 2019.
- SPINOZA, B. *Ética*. [Ethics]. Trans. Gomes, J & Simoes, A. In: Os Pensadores. Sao Paulo: Abril, 1975. Original work published in 1677.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Tratado da Correção do Intelecto*. [Treaty on Correction of Intellect]. Trans. Monteiro, J & Nizza, B. Sao Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2004. Original work published in 1677
- VLASTOS, G. *Sócrates: Ironie et Philosophie Morale*. [Socrates: Irony and Moral Philosophy]. Paris, Aubier, 1994.

\*\*\*\*\*