

Self-Fulfillment

Part 4 of 4

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I. Intro

Fourth of series

II. What is self-fulfillment?

First three steps – self-awareness, self-acceptance, self-love about feelings

Self-fulfillment more cognitive

involves analytical part of our brain

Deals with values and beliefs

Has to do with what we see as meaning in life

Fundamentally, self-fulfillment means we have found a sense of peace and joy in the life we have

Try to get at it today by looking at what three great traditions have to say – religion, philosophy and psychology

III. Paths to self-fulfillment

Many paths – begin by determining values – what we think is most important

Important to focus on what we believe and act on, not what we say

Evangelicals tend so say their highest values come from teaching of Jesus

But Jesus main message was about taking care of the poor

Evangelicals overwhelmingly for Trump who consistently hurts poor

How do we do identify values most important to us – how do we change the values we have if we decide they are not good ones

Story – purity, clarity, depth, concentration

Point: There is no single meaning, each person has to find it

IV. Religion

three traditions—can look to any one of them or borrow from all three

Religion first

Religion in general is about what is most important thing in life, what we might call sacred
Abrahamic religions, Christ, Judaism, Islam, based on idea of a personal God who intervenes in
the world

Carrying out the purpose God has for us in life is highest value

Idea doesn't work for me

Doesn't work for many UU's and increasingly many people in west

In fact, many would reject use of term God

Think the term God is still useful as a bridge to other cultures and historical tradition

I think of God as spirit of love in the world, but others may feel the term God is so tied to
traditional God of the Bible that it doesn't make sense

In any event, even people who are genuinely religious usually need to supplement religion with
additional values to find fulfillment

Faith alone is a dead end – issue is where belief takes you – quote from Corinthians 13; faith
without love like a clanging cymbal

VI. Philosophy

Turn to philosophy

Offers many possible paths to self-fulfillment – touch on a few

Cynics – 400-325 BCE

Contemporaries of Aristotle

we associate word with instinctively negative view, original meaning from dogs, because cynics
wore ragged clothes, begged in street

core idea – the simple life, strip down the essentials, related to being close to nature

but that doesn't mean by the most expensive camping gear possible

Close relationship to Buddhism – 500 BCE, earlier, a continent away

basic idea – give up desire but then there is the question of how to live

The Noble Eightfold Path

1. Right Views -- be free from prejudice, superstition and delusion

2. Right Thoughts -- avoid evil thoughts

3. Right Speech -- refrain from harmful talk and speak kindly and courteously to all.

4. Right Conduct -- act in a peaceful and compassionate way

5. **Right Livelihood** -- earn an honest living with no harmful consequences
6. **Right Effort** -- work to overcome ignorance and selfish desires
7. **Right Mindfulness** -- cherish good and pure thoughts
8. **Right Meditation** – focus on teachings of the Buddha and others

Buddhism, at least as advocated by the Buddha is a hard sell in the west, or in any rich society where culture is to satisfy desires and in fact to discover new desires we weren't even aware of

Aristotle

Greek word for happiness, eudaimonia – modern translation, flourishing, or living up to potential

Live virtuous life – if you do that fully, you will find happiness

One problem, Aristotle thought that happiness often depends, not only on internal virtues that you control, but on things external to one's own conduct, such as wealth, friends, success in politics, physical health and beauty.

Perhaps just being realistic, but distinguished him from the Stoics who felt that the internal virtues alone were sufficient for the good life.

Epicureans

associate word with people who love pleasure – fine wine, good food, art, other pleasures
Epicurus, 341-270 BCE, not in good health, not rich, sometime accused of hedonism, but closer to endorsing Aristotle's emphasis on virtue; like Aristotle emphasized living with reason and other classic virtues

difference between Aristotle and Epicurus -- Epicurus was not afraid to say that pleasure is the goal and that virtue is a means for achieving it

Aristotle would say that virtue is itself the goal and pleasure is a byproduct

What about pleasure – pleasure more than parties, sex, drinking, having good time, although that is part of it, there is sailing, hiking, music sitting outside feeling sun and breeze
most people find that pleasure alone is not a path to self-fulfillment
but may have good time finding out

However, pleasure is good, suffering is bad – if some priest told you otherwise, he was struggling with his own issues; courage and strength in face of suffering is good; in fact, can be one of the most meaningful things in life

Stoics

the word Stoic come down to mean strong, silent in face of adversity
Something to that but much more

heart of Stoicism -- good life is achieved by pursuing virtue in one's life
what are these virtues -- courage, wisdom, moderation, and justice
control your emotions and act deliberately and reflectively.

Attractive idea – virtues are internal, they are largely in our control
Problem is that these classic virtues don't say much about emphasize relationships
Think we need to add to these the loving virtues
Being open, loving, compassionate, having empathy for others
Good news – these are internal as well

Existentialism

Covers wide range of views – from Kierkegaard – leap to faith
To Sarte, thorough-going atheism
A famous phrase of Sartre – existence precedes essence

What ties existentialists together is the emphasis on freedom and responsibility
It is up to you how to live, within confines of your circumstances
You decide what values you have
You decide whether to commit suicide or go on living
You decide whether to hate other people or love them

But then, you have responsibility for what you decide

VI. psychology

Turn to psychology
historically concerned with mental illness
But modern psych has valuable insights for everyone

Two important contributions of psychology
Understanding the importance of the unconscious
Sometimes why we behave and feel is not accessible to us
And to the extent it is accessible, it requires hard work on our part

Another important modern contribution, understanding the barriers to happiness and fulfillment
Carl Rogers and humanist psychologists

Another later movement, positive psychology

What ties them together is that there are virtues in life that we can demonstrate that go beyond the classic virtues and the loving virtues

We might call these self-actualization virtues

How do we discover them and live by them?

Another key idea of humanist psychologists and positive psychology movement – be authentic

Find the authentic you, related to self-awareness

Some possible self-actualization virtues

1. An openness to authentic experience of both positive and negative feelings
2. A willingness to live in the present without a continual fixation on the past or future

both these are what we call mindfulness

3. Trust of our own feelings and decisions
4. A willingness to exercise freedom of choice and acting independently
5. A willingness to exercise creativity and risk-taking
6. looking for new challenges
7. appreciation for art and beauty
8. openness to spiritual experiences

Doesn't make sense to list every virtue and say, that's me

That's my higher self

Or the shepherd in the 23rd Psalm

find ones that are most important

Find meaning in demonstrating those virtues

VII. Closing thoughts

1. Love of others – this is the highest value, this is what is sacred

Can arrive at that point through religion

Recall passage from Corinthians 13

Through philosophy and ethical theory – discussed morality, whether consequences based on rule based theory, both consider welfare of others

Through psychology and observation of people who live very happy healthy lives

Key to happiness is love for others and, if we are lucky, their love in return

2. Freedom and Responsibility

Existentialist idea

In the end adults who are mentally competent make decisions about their own lives

Yes, you inherited set of ideas from parents and culture

But in the end you decide what values you have and what you live by

And you have to take responsibility for your decisions

3. Courage

We don't need physical courage too much any more but we need mental courage

To deal with suffering, death of loved ones and to face our own death

Find meaning by living in your higher self even in the face of suffering

Frankl quote

Finding meaning in facing our own death

Great gift

The last one we will ever give

To be strong and loving and peaceful

Reduce the grieving of those around us

And provide a valuable lesson for them as they face their own death