



## The Good Life

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When someone has done the right thing, we say they have been 'good.' When life is going really well, we say things like 'life is good.' And when people ask us how we are, we often say that we are 'good.' We can see from this that we use the word 'good' to mean 'morally good' and to mean 'well.' When Aristotle talked about the [Good Life](#), he was using the word in both senses and more.

### What is the Good Life?

While [Socrates](#) was probably the earliest western thinker to give thought to the [Good Life](#), it was [Aristotle](#) that gave it systematic investigation. Known as the first scientist, Aristotle categorised earthly living things into plants, animals and humans. Each category has its own form of the 'good life.' For humans, the good life flourishing or [eudemonia](#), or highest form of happiness and virtue.

Each category of living things has defining characteristics, referred to by Aristotle as 'souls.' Each soul has its own capacities. To live a good life is to live according to one's capacities. By fulfilling one's capacities, one is happy. A good life is a fulfilled life and therefore, a happy life.

### The Good Life for Plants

[Plants](#) have nutritive souls, characterised by the capacity to absorb nourishment from the environment. The good life for plants is one in which their capacities for growth and nutrition are realised. With sunshine, water and ideal growing conditions, plants flourish and realise their goal to live as a healthy, thriving plant. Being without water and shrivelling would not be a good life for plants.

### The Good Life for Animals

[Animals](#) have sensitive souls, characterised by the capacity for mobility, sensation, perception, pleasure and pain. The good life for animals is one in which they realise their animal capacities to reproduce, perceive and experience pleasant sensations - running around the paddock or garden and not being hurt. Being confined to a cage or being whipped would not be a good life for animals.

### The Good Life for Humans

[Humans](#) have rational souls, characterised by the capacity for speech and rationality. The good life for humans is one in which they realise their human capacities. Being rational, we reason about how to act, act accordingly, and take responsibility for our actions. The goal of our rational actions is to be happy. Happiness, for humans, is not the same as pleasure, which is the end or goal for animals. Happiness for humans is a rational state, which results from [Eudemonia](#), or human flourishing.

To achieve Eudemonia, we must act rationally, according to the [Golden Mean](#) - the middle way between the two extremes of excess and deficit. For example, *courage* is the Golden Mean between *recklessness* and *cowardice*. To act according to the Golden Mean is to rise above our 'animal nature.' Instead of responding instinctively, we use reason and choose the best or moderate way. Not acting according to reason but out of irrationality, such as anger, would not be a good life for humans.

By practising moderate actions, we will, over time, cultivate *intellectual virtues* or good habits, such as prudence (moderation), courage, patience, and truthfulness. When we use our reason to reflect and guide our actions in this way, we are practising [Philosophy](#). The practice of Philosophy marks the Good Life for Human Beings. Since Aristotle, we have learned that the [Good Life](#) is not always the happy life. Life lived well consists of many emotions, some of which are not happy. It is the ability to make *meaning* by doing *Philosophy* that marks a life lived well - the Good Life.