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The Good Life Through My Eyes

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FYS - "The Good Life"

Introduction

What is The Good Life, not a good life, is a question that has been pondered for millennia. With philosophers dating as far back as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, almost every aspect of this question has been pondered. Overtime, a variety of different principles and ideas have been created that each philosopher believes are the most important; that they believe every person should follow. However, how each individual looks at the question of what is The Good Life varies from person to person. Throughout this writing, I will be examining the principles of health, nature, and relationships which I believe are crucial to living The Good Life.

Health

I will be examining the importance of health in our everyday lives. The term health encompasses many different categories including physical and mental. Although there are many different kinds of health and all are important to living healthy lives, I believe that the two necessary to living The Good Life are physical and mental health.

Physical Health

Physical health is extremely important because it keeps you physically fit. By staying in shape, you are allowed to do things you wouldn't otherwise be able to do. For example, during a trip out west, my



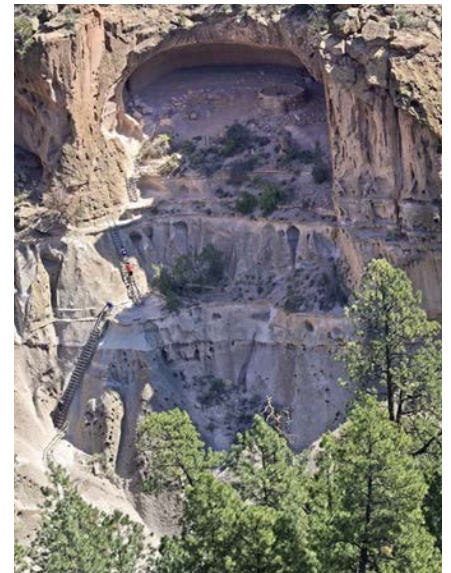
family stopped at an ancient ruin known as Bandelier.

While here, we went on a hike to an indent in the cliff face where they used to live and conduct ceremonies.

However, in order to get there, we had to scale long, wooden ladders that brought

us up 140 feet. If we had not been physically capable

of doing this, we would have missed out on this amazing opportunity. Although physical exercise "relieves stress and tension, strengthens muscles and boosts endurance, and helps your body work more efficiently," (Hanson, 2022), there are many other important aspects of physical health. These include, but are by no means limited to, eating healthy, staying hydrated, and sleeping well. Sleep, for example, is extremely beneficial to your physical health as it helps people "experience better health, and



improved emotional well-being, [and] lower[s the] risk of diseases,” (Hanson, 2022). Physical health is crucial to leading The Good Life as not only does it allow us to embrace opportunities we might otherwise have to pass up, but it also helps us to feel better, and healthier!, and live longer lives.

Mental Health

Mental health is very important to leading The Good Life as it is hard to be truly happy when you’re dealing with a plethora of mental health issues. Although some mental health issues are completely out of our control, there are measures we can take to prevent mental health issues from occurring.

According to The National Association of Free and Charitable Clinics (NAFC), exercising, eating healthy,



having a good sleep schedule, exploring a hobby, and laughing can improve your mental health (The National Association

of Free and Charitable Clinics, 2022). This is interesting as research such as this shows how closely related physical and mental health are. By exercising, eating healthy, and having a good sleep schedule, you can maintain good physical and mental health.

Exploring hobbies is also an amazing way to relax as it is something you enjoy doing and it often doesn’t create stress. In many instances, the stress that it does create is good stress; stress that helps us do better in certain



situations as it sharpens our focus. Personally, I enjoy playing field hockey, scrapbooking, and traveling. Laughter, too, is great for improving mental health. According to the Mayo Clinic, it has both short-term and long-term benefits. Short-term, it can increase organ stimulation in our heart, lungs, and muscles;

it helps with stress response and makes us feel more relaxed; and it relaxes muscle tension.

Long-term, it relieves pain, improves our immune systems and improves our mood (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2023). So, whether it be from a really bad joke or fooling around with friends, laughing



and being silly helps improve our mental health, making us happier not only in the moment but also long term. Good mental health is important to living The Good Life as being stressed, sad or uncomfortable in our own bodies or around other people makes it near impossible for us to live happy and joyful lives.

Nature

In this section, I will be focusing on the importance of nature in our everyday lives. Nature is important to our lives in a variety of different ways from taking care of the environment to the environment we live in to how nature affects our health. Although nature may seem like something that is just there, it is actually incredibly important in our lives and affects us in a variety of different ways. I believe the two most important aspects of nature that should be included in how we live The Good Life are how nature affects our health and how enjoying being in nature can benefit our lives.

Nature Health

Although many may not realize it, nature is very beneficial in improving our health both mentally and physically. Physically, nature can be beneficial in a variety of ways. The first of these ways is obvious: exercise. By being outside and going on walks or hikes or bike rides, we are improving our physical health through activity. The less obvious of ways is relaxing in nature. Just because we go outside to be in nature does not mean that we have to be hiking or biking or doing anything strenuous. Sometimes, we just need to go outside and look at and appreciate the world around us. In fact, by just being outside and acknowledging the world around us, we can improve our blood pressure, blood glucose levels, and stress hormones (Haile, 2017). Activity such as this can be referred to as “forest-bathing”.



moment, not what is to come. Although this activity can be useful in improving or maintaining our physical health, it is also extremely beneficial in improving our mental health. Nature



Originating in Japan, forest-bathing does not involve strenuous physical activity or constant movement but is instead the idea of appreciating the environment around us. When going on a walk, don't think about the destination but instead focus on what you are seeing around you. Focus on what is happening in the



largely improves our mental health because it “promote[s] calmness and well-being...expos[ing] people to low levels of stress,” (Altermar, 2013). Another nature-related method that can improve our physical and mental health is ecotherapy. “According to Howard Clinebell,...*ecotherapy* refers to healing and growth nurtured by healthy interaction with the earth,” (qtd. in *Ecotherapy*, 18). Much like forest-bathing, ecotherapy involves immersing ourselves in nature to help calm our minds and strengthen our bodies. Research proves that being active outside, or simply just being outside, causes “stress, anxiety, anger, and gloom [to] diminish, and optimism, self-esteem, and vitality [to] increase,” (Buzzell, Chalquist, 71). Nature is important to leading The Good Life because it improves both our physical and mental state which allows us to live longer and happier lives.

Enjoying Being In Nature

Although nature is beneficial to both our physical and mental health, it can also benefit us in a variety of other ways. One of these ways is that it strips away all the stress and craziness of living in modern society. In today’s world, most everyone and everything is constantly moving, constantly going, never stopping to take a break or enjoy what exists around them. However, if we were to pause for just a moment, we would see how truly amazing the world around us is. This idea was emphasized in the mid 1800s by transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau



believed that people needed to spend time focusing on the world around them; that they needed to live simply. To further prove his point, he spent two years, two months, and two days at Walden Pond living in a small shack in the woods. Although he still maintained contact with the local townspeople, Thoreau lived with only the things he needed and, instead of filling his days with business and activity, he embraced the

world around him. As he says in one of his most famous quotes, “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived,” (Thoreau, 1854). In this quote, Thoreau emphasizes his idea that the world around us is what we should be examining and focusing on; that we should appreciate the natural beauty around us. Although some people may believe that appreciating nature to this extent is unnecessary and pointless, I



agree with Thoreau. I believe that we should spend our time looking at the world around us. We should acknowledge and love the things that Mother Nature creates because, although the world we've built is interesting, the world around us is amazing. Spending time with nature is important to living The Good Life because it allows us to step back from the hustle and bustle of everyday life and enjoy what's around us.

Relationships

In this section, I will be examining the importance of relationships in living The Good Life. Although the term relationships can include many different kinds of relationships, they can be grouped into two main categories: friends and family. I believe friends and family are important to living The Good Life in so many different ways because not only do they support us through both the good times and the bad, but they also make us happy.

Friends

Friends are incredibly important to how we live our lives because they influence who we are, how we act, and how we handle situations. Friends are crucial parts of everyday life because they are who we talk to and who we hang out with. Without friends, our lives would be boring and dull; we'd have few people to talk to and few people to do things with. Friends provide us with the platonic love that we need to survive because,



although passionate love is “one of the best predictors of happiness,” having good friends other than your partner creates “higher levels of life satisfaction and self-esteem and lower levels of depression,” (Brooks, 2021). Although romantic relationships are incredibly important, friendship is just as, if not more, important. Friendship



is also crucial because it combats loneliness which has both physical and mental health affects on the body. Physically, loneliness affects us by making us “more sensitive to pain, [it] suppress[es our] immune system, diminish[es] brain function, and disrupt[s] sleep.” Alongside this, it “raises...odds of death by 26 percent in any given year,”



(Waldinger, Schulz, 2023).

Mentally, feeling lonely makes us unhappy and can cause us to be “more tired and irritable,” (Waldinger, Schulz, 2023). We don't



need research to tell us that being lonely makes us

unhappy and lowers our self-esteem making it more difficult to get out and meet new people. Alongside this, friendship is important because it helps us make it through difficult times. When we are going through a hard time, we can always turn to our friends to help us. Whether that be simply by talking to them or going out and doing something with them, they help us work through our issues and take breaks when life becomes overwhelming. Friendship is important to living The Good Life because without it we would be lonely which causes a wide variety of issues including low self-esteem and health issues. Additionally, friendship is crucial because it brings happiness to our lives and helps us live life to its fullest.



Family

Family, like friends, is extremely important to The Good Life. Family provides us with life-long relationships that provide support and love. Although friendship sometimes fades, family is forever. For me, family is the most important aspect of The Good Life because they are the people who love me the most and will always be there



for me. And, to me at least, family is who you make it. Just because you aren't blood-related doesn't mean you can't be family. In many ways, friendship can be woven into family because some friends are such close friends that they are part of your family. For example, one of my best friends, my twin sister, and I are so close that we call ourselves triplets. My best friend isn't technically related to me, but she is such an important part of my life that I call her my family. My older sister even calls her my nephew's aunt! Although family will always be there, like friends, it takes effort to nourish these relationships. According to



research from the book *The Good Life* by Robert Waldinger and Marc Schulz, "Good relationships lead to health and human happiness. The trick is that those relationships must be nurtured," (Waldinger, Schulz, 2023). In



order to maintain our relationships, we must put in the time. Although family relationships tend to be permanent, they won't be as strong as they can be if we don't make the effort to make them stronger. Although Julie Beck's article "The Six Forces That Fuel Friendship" focuses on how to maintain strong friendships, such advice can also be used to



maintain strong family relationships. For example, she emphasizes the idea of ritual which encourages people to do things over and over again to stay in contact (Beck, 2022). A personal example of this is an online meeting that my family does every weekend. During Covid, since we were unable to see each other, we created an online meeting consisting of my family, my cousins' family, and my grandparents. Although Covid restrictions that made it difficult to see each other have been removed, we still do this online meeting every weekend as a way to stay connected over the long distance. Family is incredibly important to The Good Life because it provides us with strong relationships that last a lifetime. Additionally, it always gives us someone to turn to during hard times or when we just need to talk. Family is irreplaceable therefore we should work our hardest to keep its relationships strong.



Conclusion

Although philosophers have tried to determine what everyone should have in The Good Life, every person's idea of it will be different. What I find important may not be important to someone else or it may be just as important. To me, health, nature, and relationships are the elements crucial to living life to its fullest; to my idea of what creates The Good Life. I know that these elements are what I find most important and I will work to make sure that they are strong aspects of my life.

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