

## **Inner Contentment and Fulfillment Within A Good Life**

By: Zeeniya Waseem

Life is finite, complex, and must be examined with wonder and curiosity. Human beings ultimately desire to live a good life; but what truly is a good life and is there only one answer? I will argue that while there is a plurality of ways to live a good life, all must consist of inner contentment and fulfillment, which is achieved through gratitude and meaningful self-reflection. First, I will address how inner contentment and fulfillment make up a good life, and then analyze how the practice of gratitude allows for the differentiation of two types of desires; *uncontrolled* and *controlled*. I will next elaborate on the importance of self-reflection using a series of counterarguments. Finally, I will briefly note that no matter which inner value an individual finds essential to a good life, self-reflection and gratitude are always a commonality. I will later refer to this correlation between self-reflection and gratitude as the *internal complex*.

Common terminology that will be utilized throughout the essay includes inner fulfillment, which I define as the outcome of working towards our innermost values. Inner contentment signifies happiness that is not dependent on external factors, but on our own personal outlook on life. Furthermore, self-reflection is the process of questioning and exploring personal beliefs and actions to develop a deeper understanding of one's inner values. Lastly, the desires that I will be speaking upon are spiritual and psychological rather than physical ones.

My principal argument is that a good life must consist of inner contentment and fulfillment. The praise given to a luxurious lifestyle has fuelled the common idea that external pleasures bring happiness when in fact they solely provide short-lived bliss.

Practicing inner contentment and fulfillment puts us in control of our own happiness and guides us to fulfill our inner values, which are key components to a good life.

Contrastingly, short-term desires require a need for more external pleasure. However, what differentiates an inner value from an external pleasure in a good life?

Working towards an inner value requires aid from external sources, but the long-term impact created from inner fulfillment remains without the dependence of their presence. Similarly, the lessons of a book remain without the book present, the advice from a family member remains without them being physically present, and social change remains without the protests present. Education, human connection, and justice are all examples of inner values. Whereas, if I value a house or money specifically for status, as soon as either is gone, so is the status. I am not implying that obtaining external pleasures is entirely wrong; instead I argue that we must not desire the object alone, but the meaningful experience and lesson that comes with the journey of obtaining it.

One may object to my argument by saying that there is not a plurality of ways to live a good life as there is a select set of principles and values that all beings must have. I find common ground with the idea that there are certain principles, inner values, and virtues that should be practiced. However, the way one chooses to fulfill these inner values are different. For instance, some achieve the inner value of freedom through modesty, while others through nudity. Some obtain inner peace through a nihilistic approach, while others through a spiritual one. This depends on culture, priorities, and circumstances. Hence, there is a plurality of *ways* to live a good life, but all require inner contentment and fulfillment. I will now discuss how we become internally content and fulfilled through gratitude.

Gratitude is the basis of intrinsic motivation to improve our inner values. One may assume that gratitude is nothing more than a “thanks” or the acknowledgement of what you have obtained. Rather, I believe that in a good life, gratitude is not merely acknowledging what you value, but growing its presence within your life.

Acknowledgement without growth is like appreciating the presence of a book, yet not reading it, listening to music, yet not hearing it, or attending a lecture, yet not learning from it. Indeed, the desire for growth and action is rooted in gratitude.

To analyze this further, I notice two types of desires that are differentiated through the practice of gratitude; *controlled desires* and *uncontrolled desires*. A controlled desire includes a balance between appreciation of progression (inner contentment) and intrinsic motivation for further improvement on our inner values (inner fulfillment), whereas this balance is lost with an uncontrolled desire. I refer to this as the *Growth Spectrum*. It consists of acknowledgement on one side and desire on the other. A good life includes the establishment of *controlled desires*.

To illustrate, let's suppose that *person A* is very passionate about fighting for women's rights for their inner value of equality. With an uncontrolled desire, *person A* never acknowledges the progression since the first wave of feminism. They are overpowered by desire. On the other side of the spectrum, the uncontrolled desire leads *person B* to be *too* appreciative and to have an “enough has been done” attitude. Here, ignorance overpowers growth. By contrast, *person C* has a controlled desire. They recognize and appreciate the progress and use it as motivation to continue improving their inner value of equality. Whether it is building self-confidence, enhancing the creative mind, or becoming open-minded, this spectrum is applicable to each journey

towards inner fulfillment in a good life. Even so, this begs the question: how do we understand what is important to us? Do we ever truly know?

In a good life, inner contentment and fulfillment are never possible without meaningful self-reflection, which requires vulnerability to confront ourselves and understand our true values. Self-reflection allows us to acknowledge the potential our surroundings have to make our inner values more prominent within our lives, embracing us with gratitude. It places the thought of “what is” before “what if” in order to align our values with our actions. This correlation between self-reflection and gratitude is what I like to call the *internal complex*.

However, it may be argued that self-reflection is unreliable. One may ask: how do we know that our ideas are even valid? To this, I say that the fear of unreliability should never prevent us from learning. Our opinions of ourselves include details that only we are aware of. Therefore, they should be given importance. Likewise, when sharing a dream, telling a story, or examining a painting, interpretations differ subjectively. So, if one does not refrain from creating their own opinions, philosophical thoughts, or critiques because of the concern of them being unreliable, why is it a concern when self-reflecting? Are we not to be examined? Instead of claiming self-reflection as *unreliable*, I would term it as *complex*. A valid or a comfortable answer is not the goal of self-reflection, rather, it is facing one’s internal complexity with courage to gain a clearer idea of one’s personal inner values in a good life.

Moreover, self-reflection is a collaborative process. Those who believe that a good life consists of selfless behaviour may argue that considering self-reflection as vital

to a good life is self-centred and egoistic. The *self* in self-reflection however, is misleading. Outer sources are necessary for the self-reflection process.

I propose that there are two types of outer sources: the *companions* and the *commanders*. The *commanders* impose societal expectations and norms through culture, traditions, and other primary social agents. These values are provided, rather than searched. We must reflect on the *commanders* to understand the sources of our initial values that may or may not be the ones we desire to implement within our lives.

Consequently, the *companions* help us seek other perspectives, reflect on new ideas, and make us aware of our conformity. They help us see what we do not see. Some examples include ambiguous conversations, open-minded texts, and innovative technology. They encourage questions and new opinions, guiding us to develop our own inner values. No matter how one obtains inner fulfillment, the *internal complex* is always essential. Self-reflection allows us to understand our inner values more clearly and gratitude provides the necessary motivation to work towards them.

My essay does not address the different stages of moral, cognitive, and affective development, moral skepticism, inherited deficiencies, varying psychological behaviour, and relativism, which could all add to my argument's stance on self-reflection and inner values. Overall, I conclude that there are many ways to live a good life, but all must consist of self-reflection and gratitude to prioritize our inner values. This is because a life without inner contentment is a life unexamined of what is and a life without inner fulfillment is a life that ignores all that could be. For this reason, being internally content and fulfilled is vital within a good life.

## **Bibliography**

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