



**HOME RENAISSANCE FOUNDATION
WORKING PAPERS
Number 128**

**The Primacy of Self-Care in Attaining a Healthy Work-Life
Balance**

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Paper delivered at Home Renaissance Foundation VI Experts Meeting:
"Nurturing Healthy Relationships at Home and Work", IESE Business School,
Barcelona, 8-9 July 2024

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Abstract

Contemporary life can be full of demands and frustrations. Our time and energies can be sapped by claims placed upon us by employers, families, and sometimes, friends. Workplace demands often do not stop at the end of the eight-hour workday, but can spill over into evenings and weekends. Spouses, childrens, and elderly parents can also require our time and energy. This story is all too familiar. We try our best to balance competing demands, but there are too few hours in the day. Families are frequently neglected, with detrimental results to relationships, when workplace claims take pride of place. Stress and anxiety are common features of our emotional lives. How can we attain healthy relationships and flourish under such sub-optimal conditions?

The prevalence of Buddhism with its emphasis on mindfulness and meditation provides one resource, but here I wish to explore another from ethics in the western philosophical tradition. Both Buddhism and these ethical traditions focus on mental peace and care of the soul in order to achieve equanimity. There were many ethical traditions in ancient Greece and Rome, but here my focus is primarily on Plato and Aristotle – responsible for two of the most well-known approaches to ethics in the ancient world – to highlight the primacy of self-care, or care of the soul, for living a balanced life and attaining some form of flourishing in this day and age. For Plato and Aristotle, we are able to live flourishing lives when we attain virtue. Both philosophers thought the soul consisted of parts. Virtue is achieved when reason directs and guides desire. Self-care consists of maintaining the primacy of the rational and, ideally, habituating oneself so as not to have irrational, wayward desires.

In part I of this essay, I offer overviews of the virtue ethical approaches of Plato (with a brief nod to the contemporary philosopher, Iris Murdoch, whose work is inspired by Plato) and Aristotle, and suggest that each of these theorists can be understood as advocating the primacy of self-care (in the sense of being virtuous) for leading a happy or flourishing (eudaimon) life. In part II, I apply their views to the concern specified in

the title: the need to achieve a healthy work-life balance in our contemporary era of competing and often, excessive, demands on one's time and energy.

Before beginning, a caveat is in order. One might think that references to the soul and its parts, which will feature in my discussions of Plato and Aristotle, are archaic. This seems especially true when one considers advances in neuroscience that seek to unravel the mysteries of the brain and of consciousness, as well as the contributions of psychology in understanding mental states and dispositions. Yet references to the soul are ubiquitous in religion and theology, and have made their way into popular self-help books. Whatever the status of beliefs about the soul in contemporary life, I shall show the relevance of Plato's and Aristotle's views of the soul, mental states, and dispositions, to healthy lives and our abilities to flourish.

Full Paper awaiting publication