

From The "Golden Mean" to the "Summum Bonum" - Useful or Deceptive Frames of Reference?

Post by "Eikadistes" of February 16, 2022 at 9:14 PM

I think it's important to recognize that our suspicion is toward "the form of the good", but not "goodness". (I'm going to *avoid* relying on an upper-case letter to distinguish these concepts because ancient Greek lacked this device).

The phrase Η ΤΟΥ ΑΓΑΘΟΥ ΙΔΕΑ or "the form of the good" was used by Plato in *The Republic*, and enthusiastically adopted by Plotinus, the Neo-Platonists, and, much later, the Gnostics. The concept is at the heart of Platonism, so it is fair for anti-Platonists to view any discussion of "good" with (at least) a hint of healthy suspicion.

Of course, ΑΓΑΘΟΣ can be found in pre-Socratic literature, so the Platonists by no means *own* "good".

"Agathos" is an important ancient Greek concept in general (like "telos", "ataraxia", and "eudaimonia"), and not a Platonic concept in particular. Epicurus would have augmented the meaning of "the good" for his own purposes. Personally, in terms of basic, intellectual impressions from words, when I think of "telos", I tend to think of Aristotle's "Final Cause". The same is true of "eudaimonia", which makes me think more of Aristotle's privileging of "functionality" and "excellence". Similarly, when I read "the good", I tend think of Plato, regardless of the context.

But, again, no one *owns* any of these words. They are all common words with meanings that were constantly being augmented to fit the purposes of their employers. Since Plato and Aristotle won the hearts of the philosophers and theologians of the post-Classical period, the languages we inherited champion Platonic and Peripatetic definitions.

As Don found in the *Epistle to Menoikeus*, and as I found in the *Kuriai Doxai*, inflections of ΑΓΑΘΟΣ are used frequently, much moreso, even, than a *key* vocabulary word like "ataraxia", which Epicurus rarely uses. *Not once* does Epicurus use a form of "aponia" in his *Doxai*, but he does use an inflection of "agathos" half a dozen times. This includes at least one use of "good" being preceded by the definite article "the", indicating, explicitly "the good".