

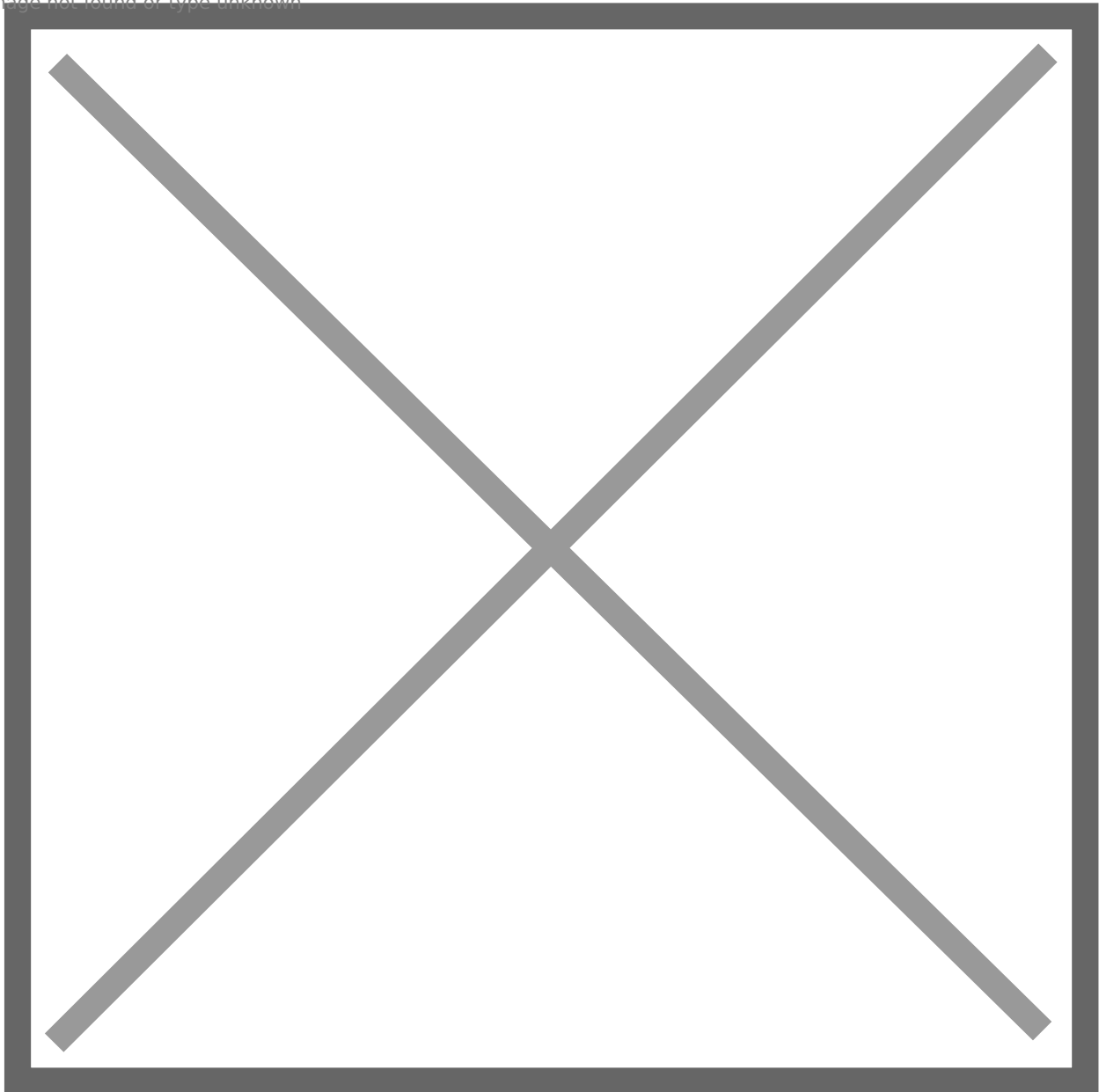
An Anti-Stoic Analysis Of Free Will That May (Or May Not) Be Helpful To Us

Post by “Cassius” of September 15, 2021 at 10:00 PM

Today I was sent the following link by a fan of Ayn Rand who also follows some of our Epicurus material. I have not had a chance to read it all, and it may well end up with an Aristotelian slant which will not be helpful. However on first glance of the beginning, he's taking a position against the Stoics and their view of fate which may be helpful to us to know about as we work to better articulate Epicurus' position.

I don't have time to finish reading this now but I want to preserve the link because I do expect it to be helpful:

Image not found or type unknown



[Stoicism vs. Objectivism: Is Free Will Magic?](#)

A common conception of causation leads many scientifically minded people to dismiss free will.
newideal.aynrand.org

Post by “Don” of September 16, 2021 at 10:28 AM

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2197-an-anti-stoic-analysis-of-free-will-that-may-or-may-not-be-helpful-to-us/>

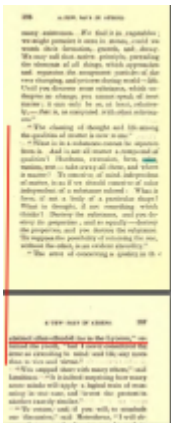
[Synopsis of Epicurus' "On Nature", Book 25: On Moral Development | Society of Friends of Epicurus](#)

I haven't had a chance to read this all from Hiram, but it gives a summary of Epicurus's On Nature XXV that directly relates to this topic.

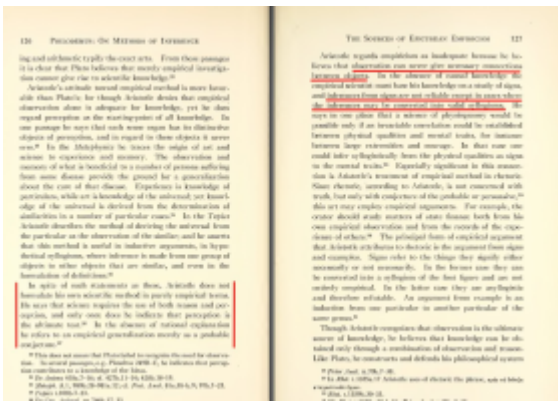
Post by "Cassius" of September 16, 2021 at 4:37 PM

I have engaged in a little private back and forth discussion with the author of the article, and have forwarded him a couple of clips in support of my view of this. I will try to circle back and add some commentary but for future reference here are the clips.

Aaron it is my understanding from what Francis Wright wrote in "A Few Days In Athens" that Aristotle held "color" to be something that exists apart from the entity which we perceive to have color. Do you believe that to be incorrect?



Also, in part of my analysis I am relying on this commentary from commentator Philip DeLacy as to the Epicurean Philodemus' "On Methods of Inference" -->



The last reference I would throw into this pot is a comment by Richard Dawkins in which he seems to also place Aristotle in Plato's camp, as per DeLacy:

2014 : WHAT SCIENTIFIC IDEA IS READY FOR RETIREMENT?

By Richard Dawkins | [Subscribe](#) | [View All Episodes](#) (16)

Richard Dawkins

Evolutionary biologist, Emeritus Professor of the Public Understanding of Science, Oxford; Author, Books Do Furnish a Life

Essentialism

Essentialism—what the called “the tyranny of the discontinuous mind”—stems from Plato, with its characteristically Greek geometric’s view of things. For Plato, a circle, or a right triangle, were ideal forms, definite mathematically but never realized in practice. A circle drawn in the sand was an imperfect approximation to the ideal Platonic circle hanging in some distant space. This needs for geometric shapes like circles, but essentialism has been applied to living things and Ernst Mayr blamed this for humanity’s late discovery of evolution—an idea as the nineteenth century. If the Aristotle, you treat all fish and blood animals as imperfect approximations to an ideal Platonic table, it won’t occur to you that rabbit might have evolved from a non-rabbit ancestor, and might evolve into a non-rabbit descendant. If you think, following the dictionary definition of essentialism, that the essence of rabbitness is “prior to” the existence of rabbits (whatever “prior to” might mean, and that’s a nonsense in itself) evolution is not an idea that will spring readily to your mind, and you may resist when somebody else suggests it.

Philosophers will argue passionately about whether a particular fossil is, say, Australopithecus or Homo. But any evolutionist knows there must have been individuals who were exactly intermediate. It’s essentialist folly to insist on the necessity of shuffling your fossil into one genus or the other. There never was an Australopithecus mother who gave birth to a Homo child, for every child ever born belonged to the same species as its mother. The whole system of labelling species with obscure human names is geared to a time slice, in the present, in which ancestors have been conveniently expunged from our awareness (and “Ying ying” is justifiably ignored), if by some wonder every ancestor were preserved as a fossil, discontinuous naming would be impossible. Creationists are egregiously fond of “Ying Yings” as embarrassing for evolutionists, but gaps are a fortunate boon for taxonomists who, with good reason, want to give species obscure names. Quavering about whether a fossil is “really” Australopithecus or Homo is like quarrelling over whether George should be called “fat”. He’s five foot ten, doesn’t that tell you what you need to know?

So to bring that back home to the discussion, my tentative diagnosis has been that by appearing to include "concepts" in her discussion of the law of identity (at least as many of her casual follows seem to do, and I can understand why) the implication of Rand is that concepts such as capitalism are also subject to categorization by "essentials" which leads to the Platonic idealism which at least on the surface Rand always campaigned against.

Last excerpt, from Heller's biography "Ayn Rand and the World She Made"



Post by “Cassius” of September 24, 2021 at 9:46 AM

Here is a reply to this thread on Facebook I want to memorialize, posted by Aaron Smith (author of the article) on 9/21/21:

Rand would disagree that reifying abstractions (e.g., 'capitalism') is part of Objectivism. Her view is Aristotelian in that only entities exist; abstractions do not -- at least not in the Platonist sense. In the 2nd ed. of her book *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, there's a good discussion of the sense in which she thinks that concepts can and cannot be thought of as entities (it's the section called 'Concepts as Mental Existents' -- in my copy, it's pp. 153-158). There's also a good discussion of the problem of people (Objectivists and non-Objectivists) Platonizing abstractions in *The Art of Non-Fiction* (an edited book version of a series of lectures Rand gave informally in her living room); it's chapter 4, pp. 27-31. There *is* a sense in which a concept has an identity. But since a concept, on Rand's view, results of the way we integrate the material provided by the senses (which is neither automatic or unerring) -- the identity of a concept is man-made, so to speak, rather than an immutable metaphysically-given fact of nature. So I think you're right to criticize the Platonizing of abstractions, but not in ascribing that kind of approach to Rand -- though you may have met fans of her ideas doing that -- I certainly have. At any rate, the resource on these questions is her book *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, 2nd, ed. Hope that's of some help.

And here is my reply to that:

Aaron thank you very much for those cites. For just the reason I posted, I think someone studying this issue would be well served by considering Rand's statements as part of the mix. Given that this is complicated enough as it is, do you have a typo here in this sentence "But since a concept, on Rand's view, results of the way we integrate the material provided by the senses (which is neither automatic or unerring)"? "results of the way?" I'm not sure that "in" for "of" is more clear so if you could look at that I would appreciate it as I would like to keep this thread for future reference.

I think your comment I am quoting here below is an important point that I would not suggest is limited to the Rand world. The problem is endemic to Stoicism, given it's Platonic basis, but I think there is a lot of work that needs to be done within the community of Epicurean partisans to deal with this problem too: ***"the identity of a concept is man-made, so to speak, rather than an immutable metaphysically-given fact of nature. So I think you're right to criticize the Platonizing of abstractions, but not in ascribing that kind of approach to Rand -- though you may have met fans of her ideas doing that -- I certainly have."***

Post by “Cassius” of July 16, 2023 at 4:55 PM

I am extending this thread since it concerns the same writer of the article with which we started. I posted this on Facebook a few minutes ago:

Thanks to Aaron Smith - one of the two key interviewees in this youtube video - for sending this link to us. As the title indicates, the discussion is focused on Stoicism and distinguishing it from Ayn Rand's Objectivism, but Epicurus is mentioned several times, and I think the content is of enough interest to our understanding of the problems with Stoicism - especially its deterministic aspect - that the video deserves to be in our Epicurean timeline here.

We have previously discussed Aaron's very good article "The False Promise of Stoicism," and this video gives him and his like-minded friend (Greg Salmieri) a chance to elaborate on those points in a way that I think will help everyone understand the point better.

Alert Epicurean readers will recognize that they are disagreeing with Stoicism from an Aristotelian/Randian point of view with which Epicurus would have significant issues. They mention pleasure and pain, but they speak from Rand's position that the ultimate standard of the good is "man's life," and the Randian and Aristotelian emphasis on "rationality" takes precedence over "pleasure" in a way that fails to get to the heart of Epicurus' argument. For now we can leave that debate (pleasure vs "man's life") for another day, and in the meantime I think this video will help our Epicurean-friendly audience better see the pitfalls of Stoicism, and the video is very worthwhile for that reason.

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Here's the video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OF92ieV5QaM>

and Here's the facebook post:

[Epicurean Philosophy | Thanks to Aaron Smith - one of the two key interviewees in this youtube video - for sending this link to us](#)

Thanks to Aaron Smith - one of the two key interviewees in this youtube video - for sending this link to us. As the title indicates, the discussion is focused...

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