

Aristotle's Virtue as Goal compared to Epicurus' Pleasure as Goal

Post by "Onenski" of July 9, 2023 at 10:00 PM

*Admin. Edit by Kalosyni

Recently in both the podcast and in our Wednesday night meeting, some of Aristotle's views on virtue have come up, and it seems like it would be good to have a thread on it. I'm copying a post by [Onenski](#) over here (and if there are any others elsewhere to add in here, we can add them). The original post is [here](#).

([Copied Post](#))

[Quote from Cassius](#)

As a note while editing this week's podcast, in the first ten minutes Don gives an excellent quote from Aristotle about how one becomes just by doing such things. My attention was distracted until the middle and by the time I realized what a good quote it was I was no longer sure where it came from, and I didn't follow up on it like I should have - it's an excellent example of how circular the standard non-Epicurean view of virtue really is.

I have some comments (about aristotelian virtue) that I hope contribute something to discussion.

- Aristotle famously established a connection between habits (ἔθος) and character (ἦθος) [a, seemingly, fake etimological connection, but philosophically fruitful]. That's why it seems circular: you can only become just (as a character trait) by acting justly continuously (so that you get the habit to be just). In this way, it's established the way we have to take in order to be virtuous.
- When you ask what (kind of thing) a virtue is, in Aristotle's ethics it's a psychological trait. Aristotle thinks that there are three kind of psychological things: dispositions (ἔξις), passions (πάθη) and capacities (δύναμις), according to NE II.5, 1105b20-30. From them, virtue it's neither a passion nor a capacity, it's an excellent disposition about actions and feelings. (What is an excellent disposition? That which it's in the middle term between two extremes, as Don recalled).
- So, the point it's not only what actions you do, but how you do them. Two people can battle,

but for one to be courageous or coward it's important which feelings or attitudes one has. As Don observed it, it matters: when we act, where, in what mood, with which people and so on. Excellence it's not easy, it's rare, but valious.

Now, did Epicurus have a conception similar to Aristotle's? I'd like to suggest (and see what happens) that for him virtue is, at least, a disposition too (about actions and about how we feel). So, someone temperate it's someone who usually, for example, doesn't eat or drink more than what she needs, and who feels reasonably good by restraining her desires.

While in Aristotle the virtuous reach excellence just because virtue it's noble, in epicureanism the person follows virtue according to a calculus of pleasures and pains ("I won't eat that cake because I have heart problems", "I won't smoke because I've felt lung pain", or whatever). Virtue is another way to talk about the most pleasant way to live.

Hope all this has some sense and it helps at least a little.

See you, guys! 😊

Post by “Kalosyni” of July 13, 2023 at 7:08 AM

I happened to find this overview, which for anyone who wants to brush up on (or simply find out about) some of Aristotle's views, then here is a very good quick read. And this touches on some of what [Onenski](#) was explaining in last night's Zoom discussion.

[Aristotle on the Good Life](#)

Aristotle (384 BC - 322 BC) was a Greek philosopher, a student of Plato, and teacher of Alexander the Great. He wrote on: physics, metaphysics, poetry,...
reasonandmeaning.com

Post by “Cassius” of July 13, 2023 at 7:30 AM

[Quote from Onenski](#)

That's why it seems circular: you can only become just (as a character trait) by acting justly continuously (so that you get the habit to be just). In this way, it's established the way we have to take in order to be virtuous.

And that's a good way of stating the question, because it's not really so easy to see whether it IS circular or whether it just LOOKS circular. I don't personally see how it avoids being circular

until you can break out to a clear position on what virtue "is" in the first place, and I don't see how you can do that without pointing to some external standard. I've never been able to figure out what Aristotle really points to other than "look at what other people do." On the other hand, looking to the pleasure or pain that is the result of an action does seem like something more tangible.