

Regarding categories | Will to Power: a natural or unnatural desire?

Post by "Cassius" of August 7, 2021 at 9:54 AM

My first and most important comment is that I think what we are seeing here is typical for a stoic (which the video producer apparently is) - he is getting caught up in logical categorizations as if there is something magical about them, and so he is from the beginning failing to appreciate the fundamental starting point of Epicurus - that pleasure and pain are the only ultimate standards given to us by nature by which to determine what to choose and what to avoid. These categories have no intrinsic meaning in themselves other than explained by Torquatus in On Ends:

"One kind he classified as both natural and necessary, a second as natural without being necessary, and a third as neither natural nor necessary; **the principle of classification being that the necessary desires are gratified with little trouble or expense; the natural desires also require but little, since nature's own riches, which suffice to content her, are both easily procured and limited in amount; but for the imaginary desires no bound or limit can be discovered.**"

So as Don has said the issue is not that there is anything wrong with power or fame in themselves, the issue is whether you choose to pursue them limitlessly as ends in themselves, or whether you recognize that there is a limit to keep in mind on all of them: You want that amount that leads you to maximum pleasure under your circumstances, no more and no less.

So I'll repeat myself but I think this is the central point: You cannot be a stoic and pull this classification out of context as if Plato or God blessed it as an absolute ideal. The classification is subsidiary - like everything else is - to the ultimate goal, which is pleasure. And since there is no god or no absolute standards of conduct, there is only a contextual evaluation process depending on your circumstances - and if you get caught up in the multiple meanings of "natural" and "necessary" rather than always asking "what will happen to me in terms of pleasure or pain if I make this choice" then you're going to lose sight of the true goal and get totally confused.

I would say that if Epicurus were here he might well say that this confusion of ends and means is one of the CENTRAL problems with the stoic approach, modern or ancient. Even ignoring the kinetic and katasematic reference on this chart, which I also think is misleading, it's simply impossible to come up with an absolute list of what to place in these three categories.



If it were possible to come up with an absolute list, then you'd have an absolute definition of "virtue," which is equally impossible.

Which is why I still have Elli's graphic from Diogenes of Oinoanda on the front page here. I would argue that you could put each of these three categories "natural and necessary" etc in this graphic in the place of "virtue" and the point would be exactly the same:

But the issue is not, "what is the means of happiness" ?
 The issue is, "what is happiness" ?
 Or, in other words, "What is the ultimate goal of our nature" ?

I say both now, and always, shouting out loudly, to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that pleasure is the highest end of life !

The virtues, which are turned upside down by other philosophers, who transfer the virtues from "the means" to "the end", are in no way the end in themselves ! The virtues are not ends in themselves, but only the means to the end that Nature has set for us !

This we affirm to be true in the strongest possible terms, and we take it as our starting point for how men should live.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2137-regarding-categories-will-to-power-a-natural-or-un-natural-desire/?postID=13133#post13133>

From Diogenes of Oinoanda INSCRIPTION

Elli 23/05/15