

# An Epicurean Study of Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics

Post by “Pacatus” of October 28, 2022 at 2:03 PM

Just a couple of comments from the far bleachers:

**First**, while we might agree on the failings of Aristotle (and certainly Plato), I think we are well-served to remember that Epicurus did owe them an intellectual debt – and that his project was of a different order, even as it required him to jettison errors of his predecessors and, in the interest of *therapeía*, to simplify (at least in the limited Epicurean corpus available to us).

For example, I posted before (in a different context) this paper: <https://www.academia.edu/34402398/What...card=view-paper>, which examines Epicurus’ debt to Plato – as well as some of what Epicurus rejected or corrected, e.g.:

“Appropriating Plato’s premise of the immediacy of apprehension and the affinity of knower to known, Epicurus declares the real immediacy and affinity to be physical.<sup>42</sup> He has even pirated Plato’s argument, that mere re[1]presentations cannot be knowledge.<sup>43</sup> Hence the odd sounding, now physicalist, Epicurean claim that what we know is reality. What Plato said of sense perception, that it cannot be knowledge since it does not capture the being (*ousias*) of things but must remain irredeemably subjective, reflecting only the way things seem to an individual (*ta idia*) has been turned against Plato by Epicurus: Our perceptions are what is real; ideas are the mere representations.”

And Aristotle (as I recall in my thickly mist-shrouded memory), did at least define *telos* in terms of a fully lived life. But Cassius’ comment – “Aristotle was apparently in the process of breaking free from Plato but did not go nearly far enough. Artificial rules and categories are just as misleading as platonic absolutes. (That’s the critique of “essentialism” that Dawkins makes.) Epicurus finished the job, but that aspect has been buried.” – seems surely on the mark.

**Second**, with regard to *telos* and the *summum bonum*, DeWitt (under the heading “The Summum Bonum Fallacy in Chapter XII “The New Hedonism,” beginning on P. 219) thought it was an error to conflate the two: “To Epicurus pleasure was the *telos* and life itself was the greatest good. ... The belief that life itself is the greatest good conditions the whole ethical doctrine of Epicurus.”

DeWitt goes on to unpack how he thought the error of conflation came about.

Now, back to the beer and popcorn bleachers ... and Philodemus’ poetry ... 😊