

An Epicurean Study of Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics

Post by "Don" of October 29, 2022 at 8:26 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I could see Epicurus holding that for individuals who do in fact find their greatest happiness in being part of a particular group of people, then for those people they are pursuing pleasure by pursuing their collectively defined interests.

I would agree with that.

Aristotle goes all in with his "The human is a 'political animal' (Zoon politikon, ζῷον πολιτικόν)." And, again to flog the deceased equine animal, he's not talking political as in serving in government, running a campaign, etc. He's talking about being an integral cog in the social, cultural milieu of the city-state, the polis (hence "politikon"). Here's where he says it again in his [Politics](#):

Quote from Aristotle Politics Book 1 Section 1253a

From these things therefore it is clear that the city-state is a natural growth, and that man is by nature a political animal, and a man that is by nature and not merely by fortune citiless is either low in the scale of humanity or above it [like the "clanless, lawless, hearthless" man reviled by Homer, for one by nature unsocial is also 'a lover of war') inasmuch as he is solitary, like an isolated piece at draughts. And why man is a political animal in a greater measure than any bee or any gregarious animal is clear. For nature, as we declare, does nothing without purpose; and man alone of the animals possesses speech. The mere voice, it is true, can indicate pain and pleasure, and therefore is possessed by the other animals as well [for their nature has been developed so far as to have sensations of what is painful and pleasant and to indicate those sensations to one another], but speech is designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the right and the wrong; for it is the special property of man in distinction from the other animals that he alone has perception of good and bad and right and wrong and the other moral qualities, and it is partnership in these things that makes a household and a city-state.

Thus also the city-state is prior in nature to the household and to each of us individually.

So, I doubt Epicurus would advocate for someone to be "citiless" but not necessarily for the reasons outlined by Aristotle. Diogenes Laertius says that the Epicurean sage will love the

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countryside, but the countryside is STILL part of the city-state/polis. The polis provides protection, security, a sense of identity. Epicurus was, after all, an Athenian citizen and had certain privileges and protections (as well as responsibilities! like his compulsory military service) that came from that citizenship. But we have to balance that along with his disdain for the paideia/education/acclturation/indoctrination that was advocated by Aristotle.