

# An Epicurean Study of Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics

Post by "Cassius" of November 2, 2022 at 5:19 AM

I am kind of late to the party in saying this but i wonder if it might not be desirable to have some way to categorize these comments other than chronologically in this thread. Does your website allow for discussion comments by page? Or should we try to somehow find a way here to be able to reference, and make new comments, by section of the book?

I ask that because in going back and picking up i am about to make a very out-of-sequence comment to the very opening of book one:

Quote

Nicomachean Ethics starts out with:

"Every art and every investigation, and likewise every practical pursuit or undertaking, seems to aim at some good: hence it has been well said that the Good is That at which all things aim."

This sets up the difference between "some good" ἀγαθοῦ and The Good τἀγαθόν. The latter is the exact word Epicurus uses in:

"I know not how to conceive the good, apart from the pleasures of taste, sexual pleasures, the pleasures of sound and the pleasures of beautiful form." (On the Ethical End)

Using Aristotle's definition (and this appears to possibly trace back as far as Eudoxus of Cnidus (c. 400-350 BCE; Aristotle was 384-322 BCE) we could get:

"I know not how to conceive That at Which All Things Aim, apart from the pleasures of taste, sexual pleasures, the pleasures of sound and the pleasures of beautiful form."

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Why is it not objectionable to seem to presume, without proof, that such a thing as "THE good" ("it has been well said that the Good is That at which all things aim.") is not only NOT well said, but stupidly said? And why is not Epicurus' response ("I know not how to conceive....") best understood as a statement that such a thing as a single good does not really even exist at all except as a construct of the mind useful for debate but not as something which truly has an independent existence?

Combining that with the Plutarch comment it begins to seem to me like it is very important from the beginning to establish that Epicurus was drawing a bright line of warning against the entire endeavor of obsessing over the discussion that such a thing as a single good applicable to everyone even exists at all.

Within the confines of philosophical debate it may make sense to talk about a single concept ("Pleasure") but seen from this perspective the entire project of setting up a single word (even "pleasure") as some kind of semi-mystical conceptual goal has to be viewed with suspicion and limitation.

In saying this, to be clear, I am not criticizing Epicurus, but suggesting that what Epicurus was saying in large part is that in the initial discussion of setting up any words - pleasure or happiness or joy or tranquility or anything else - as goals, we need to first establish that the entire discussion must be kept in check lest we think that our words are in themselves capable of creating something from nothing.

It looks like a lot of Epicurus' point was to warn again, in the phrase we've been using, that while the map can be very useful the map is not the territory and we don't live in a map.

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So if I now or new people in the future come across Don's series of articles, should we just post comments here in thread order, or subdivide the thread somehow, or what would make sense? Because reviewing N.E. is something that lots of people are going to want to do in their study of Epicurus.