

An Epicurean Study of Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics

Post by “Don” of November 2, 2022 at 7:27 AM

Wow! You dove right in!

I'm honored that you think my ramblings are interesting enough to comment on and to think about how to make it easier for others to comment on. This really started as a personal investigation to assuage my own curiosity. I was initially reluctant to go public, but then figured why not. The Google Sites don't allow for comments. As I mentioned previously, I'm just fitting this into my day as I can/want/am able, so I'm not sure how long it'll take to complete all 10 books. But I'm encouraged by your interest and am open to your ideas on how to point to it or allow people to comment on it on this forum.

With that, I have some comments on your comments...

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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?

Hmm... Unfortunately, I don't agree with your general point in this excerpt and your other general comments in this direction. My perspective and interpretation of the Epicurean position as I see it laid out by, at least, Epicurus, Metrodorus, and Philodemus, was that the discussion of the good $\tau\alpha\gamma\alpha\theta\omicron\nu$ (tagathon < ton agathon, literally "the good") appears to have been a question every Greek philosopher wanted to answer at least as far back as Eudoxus of Cnidus (c. 400-350 BCE). Aristotle was 384-322 BCE. And they all used that word $\tau\alpha\gamma\alpha\theta\omicron\nu$, including Epicurus, Metrodorus, and Philodemus, to drive home their point. I don't see the Epicureans denigrating the idea of "the good" or thinking it was a silly or meaningless discussion. My perspective is that the Epicureans, starting from Epicurus himself, felt that they had answered the question "what is $\tau\alpha\gamma\alpha\theta\omicron\nu$ 'the good'?" once and for all. They all used that word $\tau\alpha\gamma\alpha\theta\omicron\nu$ deliberately and purposefully to drive the point home that they had answered that question decisively, finally, and there was no need - had never been a need! - to "stroll around endlessly prattling on about the good." The answer had been staring everyone in the face for at least 100 years since the whole discussion began. *Pleasure* is that to which every action and thought points. We experience pleasure for itself and not as a means to an end. And it is pleasure writ

large, including *every* pleasurable feeling, both katastematic and kinetic.

So when you say...

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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.

I don't think Epicurus was doing that at all. I think Epicurus *was* in fact saying there is a "single" good - "the good" *ταγαθον* - and that good is pleasure. But importantly, it is NOT an abstract or idealized good like virtue, or an unattainable good open to only a select few. It is the concrete, physical feeling of pleasure as felt by human beings, pleasure in ALL its multifariousness. THAT is the good. THAT is "That at which all things aim." Epicurus felt he had definitively answered the question that had vexed Eudoxus, Plato, Aristotle, and all the rest. To me, he's saying, "Quit your endless prattling and simply acknowledge that feeling of pleasure is that at which all things aim."

I'll have more to say (and I'm thinking you might as well, [Cassius](#)) but that's it for now. The day calls.