

Aristotle's Virtue as Goal compared to Epicurus' Pleasure as Goal

Post by "Onenski" of July 9, 2023 at 10:00 PM

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Recently in both the podcast and in our Wednesday night meeting, some of Aristotle's views on virtue have come up, and it seems like it would be good to have a thread on it. I'm copying a post by [Onenski](#) over here (and if there are any others elsewhere to add in here, we can add them). The original post is [here](#).

([Copied Post](#))

[Quote from Cassius](#)

As a note while editing this week's podcast, in the first ten minutes Don gives an excellent quote from Aristotle about how one becomes just by doing such things. My attention was distracted until the middle and by the time I realized what a good quote it was I was no longer sure where it came from, and I didn't follow up on it like I should have - it's an excellent example of how circular the standard non-Epicurean view of virtue really is.

I have some comments (about aristotelian virtue) that I hope contribute something to discussion.

- Aristotle famously established a connection between habits (ἔθος) and character (ἦθος) [a, seemingly, fake etimological connection, but philosophically fruitful]. That's why it seems circular: you can only become just (as a character trait) by acting justly continuously (so that you get the habit to be just). In this way, it's established the way we have to take in order to be virtuous.

- When you ask what (kind of thing) a virtue is, in Aristotle's ethics it's a psychological trait. Aristotle thinks that there are three kind of psychological things: dispositions (ἔξις), passions (πάθη) and capacities (δύναμις), according to NE II.5, 1105b20-30. From them, virtue it's neither a passion nor a capacity, it's an excellent disposition about actions and feelings. (What is an excellent disposition? That which it's in the middle term between two extremes, as Don recalled).

- So, the point it's not only what actions you do, but how you do them. Two people can battle, but for one to be courageous or coward it's important which feelings or attitudes one has. As

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Don observed it, it matters: when we act, where, in what mood, with which people and so on. Excellence it's not easy, it's rare, but valious.

Now, did Epicurus have a conception similar to Aristotle's? I'd like to suggest (and see what happens) that for him virtue is, at least, a disposition too (about actions and about how we feel). So, someone temperate it's someone who usually, for example, doesn't eat or drink more than what she needs, and who feels reasonably good by restraining her desires.

While in Aristotle the virtuous reach excellence just because virtue it's noble, in epicureanism the person follows virtue according to a calculus of pleasures and pains ("I won't eat that cake because I have heart problems", "I won't smoke because I've felt lung pain", or whatever). Virtue is another way to talk about the most pleasant way to live.

Hope all this has some sense and it helps at least a little.

See you, guys! 😊