

Episode 267 - Virtue Is Not Absolute Or An End In Itself - All Good And Evil Consists In Sensation.

Post by "Cassius" of January 26, 2025 at 8:30 AM

Both Plato and Aristotle, two of the most influential philosophers in Western thought, placed great emphasis on virtue as central to a good and flourishing life. While their approaches to virtue differ, they both argued that virtue is essential for achieving *eudaimonia* (happiness or flourishing). Below are some of their most famous quotes in support of virtue being the highest good.

Plato on Virtue

Plato, through the voice of Socrates in his dialogues, often explores the nature of virtue (*aretē*) and its role in achieving a just and harmonious soul.

1. Virtue as the Health of the Soul

Quote

"Virtue is the health and beauty and well-being of the soul, and vice is the disease and weakness and deformity of the soul."

— *Republic*, Book 4 (444e)

2. Virtue and Knowledge

Quote

"No one does wrong willingly. Evil is the result of ignorance. If people knew what was right, they would do it."

— *Protagoras* (352c)

3. The Importance of Virtue

Quote

"The most important thing is not life, but the good life."

— *Crito* (48b)

4. Virtue as the Highest Good

Quote

"The good is the end of all endeavor, the object on which every heart is set."
— *Republic*, Book 7 (505e)

5. Virtue and Justice

Quote

"Justice is the excellence of the soul, and injustice is the defect of the soul."
— *Republic*, Book 1 (353e)

Aristotle on Virtue

Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, provides a systematic account of virtue (*aretē*) as the mean between extremes and the foundation of a flourishing life.

1. Virtue as the Highest Good

Quote

"Happiness is an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue."
— *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1 (1098a)

2. Virtue as a Habit

Quote

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."
— *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 2 (1103a)

3. The Golden Mean

Quote

"Virtue is a mean between two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency."
— *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 2 (1106b)

4. Virtue and Reason

Quote

"The function of man is to live a certain kind of life, and this activity implies a rational principle, and the function of a good man is the good and noble performance of these."
— *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1 (1098a)

5. Virtue and Happiness

Quote

"Happiness depends on ourselves, and it is achieved through virtue, which is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean relative to us."
— *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1 (1106b)

6. The Role of Virtue in a Flourishing Life

Quote

"The good for man is an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are many virtues, in accordance with the best and most complete."
— *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1 (1098a)

Key Differences Between Plato and Aristotle

- **Plato:** Virtue is closely tied to knowledge and the harmony of the soul. In the *Republic*, he argues that a just soul, governed by reason, is the key to happiness.
- **Aristotle:** Virtue is a habit developed through practice and lies in finding the "golden mean" between extremes. He emphasizes that virtue is not just theoretical but must be lived through action.

Summary

Both Plato and Aristotle agree that virtue is the highest good and essential for a flourishing life. Plato focuses on the harmony of the soul and the role of knowledge in achieving virtue, while Aristotle emphasizes the practical development of virtuous habits and the importance of reason in guiding ethical behavior.

If you'd like to explore these ideas further, I recommend reading:

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4227-episode-267-virtue-is-not-absolute-or-an-end-in-itself-all-good-and-evil-consist/?postID=33820#post33820>

- Plato's *Republic* and *Meno*
- Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

Let me know if you'd like more quotes or insights!

I'll combine that with this from ChatGPT;

Here are some notable quotes from ancient Stoics that support the idea of virtue as the highest good:

1. Marcus Aurelius:

- "If it is not right, do not do it. If it is not true, do not say it." (*Meditations*, Book XII, 17)
- This reflects the Stoic emphasis on virtue as the guiding principle for action and speech, aligning behavior with moral integrity.

2. Epictetus:

- "Virtue consists in a will which is in agreement with Nature." (*Discourses*, 1.4.11)
- For Epictetus, aligning one's will with nature and reason (the Stoic ideal) is the essence of virtue and the highest good.

3. Seneca:

- "Virtue is nothing else than right reason." (*Letters to Lucilius*, 66.32)
- This statement underscores the Stoic belief that living in accordance with reason and acting virtuously are inseparable.

4. Cicero (a Roman statesman influenced by Stoicism):

- "The good life is not possible without virtue, and virtue itself is sufficient for happiness." (*De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*, Book III)
- Cicero emphasizes the Stoic principle that virtue alone is both necessary and sufficient for achieving true happiness.

5. Zeno of Citium (founder of Stoicism):

- "Happiness is a good flow of life, and this can only be achieved through the possession of virtue." (Fragment cited by Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, VII.88)
- Zeno defines happiness as living in accordance with nature and virtue, highlighting the centrality of virtue to the Stoic conception of the good life.

These quotes illustrate the Stoic doctrine that virtue is the ultimate good, and other aspects of life (such as health, wealth, or pleasure) are secondary or indifferent in comparison.

Here are some significant quotes from **Plato** and **Aristotle** that emphasize virtue as the highest good:

Plato

1. **"The soul of the man who lives justly and who is dear to the gods is in the best condition."**
 - (*The Republic*, Book X, 613a)
 - Plato connects justice, a core virtue, to the ultimate well-being of the soul, suggesting that virtue leads to the highest good.
2. **"Virtue does not spring from riches, but riches and all other human goods, both private and public, from virtue."**
 - (*The Apology*, 30b)
 - In this statement, Socrates (as Plato's mouthpiece) argues that virtue is the source of all good things, prioritizing it above material wealth and worldly pursuits.
3. **"The life which is unexamined is not worth living."**
 - (*The Apology*, 38a)
 - While not directly about virtue, this emphasizes the need for self-reflection and pursuit of wisdom, which Plato associates with living virtuously and achieving the highest form of good.

Aristotle

1. **"Happiness is an activity of the soul in accordance with perfect virtue."**
 - (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, 1098a16-17)
 - Aristotle defines happiness (eudaimonia), the highest human good, as the practice of virtue in accordance with reason over a complete life.
2. **"The good for man is an activity of the soul in conformity with excellence or virtue."**
 - (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, 1098a7-8)
 - Aristotle ties the highest good to actions performed in line with virtue, emphasizing that virtue is essential for achieving the good life.
3. **"Moral virtue comes about as a result of habit."**
 - (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, 1103a14)
 - Here, Aristotle highlights that virtue is cultivated through habitual practice, making it the foundation of ethical behavior and a life well-lived.
4. **"The best good is happiness, and this is achieved through a life of virtue in accordance with reason."**
 - (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, 1177a12-18)
 - Aristotle argues that human flourishing depends on living virtuously, guided by reason, as the ultimate good.

Both philosophers affirm that virtue is fundamental to achieving the highest good, though Plato views it as a harmony of the soul aligned with the Forms, while Aristotle frames it as the practical realization of reason in human life.