

Pewdiepie Gets it Wrong - The Problem Isn't "Virtue Signaling" - The Problem is "Virtue" Itself

Post by "Cassius" of December 17, 2019 at 1:15 PM



In a video that was released just today but has already tube Personality "Pewdiepie" attacks "virtue signaling" on Twitter by comparing it with "virtue" as described by Aristotle and other Greeks (notably NOT Epicurus). In following the lead of Aristotle, Pewdiepie gets the problem totally wrong - but it's hard to blame him when he appears totally unaware of Epicurus, and he simply follows the lead of the crowd, who proclaim the supposed wisdom of Aristotle and the standard Greek philosophical view of virtue, which is totally wrong in Epicurean terms.

Here's the full video, which starts out referencing Twitter, but quickly switches to Aristotle: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1n_cPlhag28&feature=youtu.be

The video is worth watching to frame the issue, and I think Pewdiepie's instincts are correct to see that there is a problem here. Unfortunately Pewdiepie concludes that the way to solve the problem is Aristotelian word-gaming, rather than getting to the heart of the problem: that "virtue" is a meaningless term in and of itself, without reference to a well defined proper goal of life.

But even here Pewdiepie realizes that there is a problem, and that "virtue" must have a point of reference. Unfortunately he nails his colors to the Aristotelian ship and goes down with it into the abyss of further word-chopping about "extremes" and "golden means" and "wellbeing" that also lead nowhere but to further word games.

Epicurean ethics is built on the framework of rejecting Platonic/Aristotelian/Stoic virtue signaling in favor of grounding ethics, and thus all correct concepts of "virtue," in the human feeling of pleasure and pain. Probably the best summary is contained in the Torquatus narrative in Cicero's "On Ends, " a small part of which I include here:

Those who place the Chief Good in virtue alone are beguiled by the glamour of a name, and do not understand the true demands of nature. If they will consent to listen to Epicurus, they will be delivered from the grossest error. Your school dilates on the transcendent beauty of the virtues; but were they not productive of pleasure, who would deem them either praiseworthy or desirable? We esteem the art of medicine not for its interest as a science, but for its

conduciveness to health; the art of navigation is commended for its practical and not its scientific value, because it conveys the rules for sailing a ship with success. So also Wisdom, which must be considered as the art of living, if it effected no result would not be desired; but as it is, it is desired, because it is the artificer that procures and produces pleasure.

...

XIV. If then we observe that ignorance and error reduce the whole of life to confusion, while Wisdom alone is able to protect us from the onslaughts of appetite and the menaces of fear, teaching us to bear even the affronts of fortune with moderation, and showing us all the paths that lead to calmness and to peace, why should we hesitate to avow that Wisdom is to be desired for the sake of the pleasures it brings and Folly to be avoided because of its injurious consequences?

The same principle will lead us to pronounce that Temperance also is not desirable for its own sake, but because it bestows peace of mind, and soothes the heart with a tranquilizing sense of harmony. For it is temperance that warns us to be guided by reason in what we desire and avoid. Nor is it enough to judge what it is right to do or to leave undone; we also need to abide by our judgment. Most men however lack tenacity of purpose; their resolution weakens and succumbs as soon as the fair form of pleasure meets their gaze, and they surrender themselves prisoners to their passions, failing to foresee the inevitable result. Thus for the sake of a pleasure at once small in amount and unnecessary, and one which they might have procured by other means or even denied themselves altogether without pain, they incur serious disease, or loss of fortune, or disgrace, and not infrequently become liable to the penalties of the law and of the courts of justice.

Those on the other hand who are resolved so to enjoy their pleasures as to avoid all painful consequences therefrom, and who retain their faculty of judgment and avoid being seduced by pleasure into courses that they perceive to be wrong, reap the very highest pleasure by forgoing pleasure. Similarly also they often voluntarily endure pain, to avoid incurring greater pain by not doing so. This clearly proves that Intemperance is not undesirable for its own sake, while Temperance is desirable not because it renounces pleasures, but because it procures greater pleasures.

XV. The same account will be found to hold good of Courage. The performance of labors, the undergoing of pains, are not in themselves attractive, nor are endurance, industry, watchfulness, nor yet that much lauded virtue, perseverance, nor even courage; but we aim at these virtues in order to live without anxiety and fear and so far as possible to be free from pain of mind and body. The fear of death plays havoc with the calm and even tenor of life, and to bow the head to pain and bear it abjectly and feebly is a pitiable thing; such weakness has caused many men to betray their parents or their friends, some their country, and very many utterly to ruin themselves. So on the other hand a strong and lofty spirit is entirely free from anxiety and sorrow.

It makes light of death, for the dead are only as they were before they were born. It is schooled to encounter pain by recollecting that pains of great severity are ended by death, and slight ones have frequent intervals of respite; while those of medium intensity lie within our own control: we can bear them if they are endurable, or if they are not, we may serenely quit life's theater, when the play has ceased to please us. These considerations prove that timidity and cowardice are not blamed, nor courage and endurance praised, on their own account; the former are rejected because they beget pain, the latter coveted because they beget pleasure.

XVI. It remains to speak of Justice, to complete the list of the virtues; but this admits of practically the same treatment as the others. Wisdom, Temperance, and Courage I have shown to be so closely linked with Pleasure that they cannot possibly be severed or sundered from it. The same must be deemed to be the case with Justice. Not only does Justice never cause anyone harm, but on the contrary it always adds some benefit, partly owing to its essentially tranquilizing influence upon the mind, partly because of the hope that it warrants of a never-failing supply of the things that uncorrupted nature really needs. And just as Rashness, License, and Cowardice ever torment the mind, ever awakening trouble and discord, so Unrighteousness, when firmly rooted in the heart, causes restlessness by the mere fact of its presence; and if once it has found expression in some deed of wickedness, however secret the act, yet it can never feel assured that it will always remain undetected. ...

Hence Justice also cannot correctly be said to be desirable in and for itself; it is so because it is so highly productive of gratification. For esteem and affection are gratifying, because they render life safer and fuller of pleasure. Hence we hold that Unrighteousness is to be avoided not simply on account of the disadvantages that result from being unrighteous, but even far more because when it dwells in a man's heart it never suffers him to breathe freely or know a moment's rest.

If then even the glory of the Virtues, on which all the other philosophers love to expatiate so eloquently, has in the last resort no meaning unless it be based on pleasure, whereas pleasure is the only thing that is intrinsically attractive and alluring, it cannot be doubted that pleasure is the one supreme and final Good and that a life of happiness is nothing else than a life of pleasure.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/wcf/index.php?...s-from-on-ends/>

[This topic is never complete without including Elli's graphic containing the quote from the Inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda:](#)