

Natural Goods in Epicureanism

Post by “Kalosyni” of June 12, 2022 at 9:06 AM

The topic of natural goods briefly came up in last Wednesday's Zoom discussion. So thinking about what are natural goods within Epicureanism, as well as references such as the Principle Doctrines, etc.

It seems that friendship, freedom, and self-sufficiency are all natural goods, and there could be others?

Also, I just found this article (written in 2021) by Alex R. Gilham.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27007901>

This article starts out with saying that pleasure is the only intrinsic good, but that there are various other non-intrinsic goods, and the aim of the paper is to classify the Epicurean goods. Will post more after I read it. And if anyone else wants to post thoughts after reading the article, or about the natural goods question, please do so. 😊

Post by “Cassius” of June 12, 2022 at 9:19 AM

One thing that would be good would be to see if we can find examples of where such terms were used in the core texts. This will be a good discussion!

Post by “Kalosyni” of June 12, 2022 at 10:49 AM

The above article needs to be critically read since it does touch on tranquility, and kinetic/katastematic pleasure. Read this article with care. I would say that we here on the forum view tranquility as an abstract ideal which is not the ultimate goal of living. I find that reading this opens up the whole tranquility question, all over again. And so then this question pops up: Is a life of tranquility happy or pleasureable? It really all depends on how you define tranquility, and how you make choices. Do you stay home and do nothing?

From the article:

That which causes or leads to the elimination of bodily and mental pain is an instrumental good. A constitutive good is an intrinsic good. Not clear about what benefit the categorization of instrumental vs. constitutive goods hold.

VS 32 -- reverence is an instrumental good (showing reverence for a wise man is itself a great good for him who reveres).

PD 27 / VS 28 -- wisdom is an instrumental good (of all the things that wisdom provides for the complete happiness of one's entire life, by far the greatest is friendship).

Self-sufficiency is a constitutive good (Ep. Men. 130)

Phronesis is a good (Ep. Men. 132)

Friendship is a good (PD 27 / VS 28)

There is also a section on personal goods.

Post by "Don" of June 12, 2022 at 1:57 PM

Just checkin' the Greek:

VS32 Honoring a sage is itself a great good to the one who honors. τοῦ σοφοῦ σεβασμὸς ἀγαθὸν μέγα τῷ σεβομένῳ ἐστί.

ἀγαθὸν μέγα= agathon mega "great good"

VS28 Those who grasp after friendship and those who shrink from it are not worthy of approval; on the other hand, it is necessary to risk some pleasure for the pleasures of friendship.

οὔτε τοὺς προχείρους εἰς φιλίαν οὔτε τοὺς ὀκνηροὺς δοκιμαστέον· δεῖ δὲ καὶ παρακινδυνεῦσαι χάριν, χάριν φιλίας.

χάριν φιλίας = kharin philias "joy of friendship"

παρακινδυνεῦσαι = "necessary to risk"

[PD27](#)

That which wisdom (sophia) provides with regard to the complete/fulfilled blissful life, by far the best is the gaining of friendship.

Ἦν ἡ σοφία παρασκευάζεται εἰς τὴν τοῦ ὅλου βίου μακαριότητα, πολὺ μέγιστόν ἐστιν ἡ τῆς φιλίας κτήσις.

ὅλου βίου μακαριότητα= holou biou marariotēta complete, blissful life"

μακαριότητα is a version of the same word in PD1 used to describe the life of the gods.

Menoikeus 130: Καὶ τὴν αὐτάρκειαν δὲ ἀγαθὸν μέγα νομίζομεν,

ἀγαθὸν μέγα = same as VS32 above

Menoikeus 132

"and so the foundation (ἀρχή) of all these and the greatest good (τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν) is φρόνησις."

Τούτων δὲ πάντων ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν φρόνησις.

Post by "Don" of June 12, 2022 at 2:18 PM

I need to read the article for its take, but - for the record - I have no problem with "tranquility." In fact, I'm coming around to the idea that ataraxia and aponia actually refer to something like homeostasis or basically just the sensation that the body and mind are working well and in-tune. One can more easily or readily experience pleasure - of all kinds - when neither the body nor the mind are troubled. And both ataraxia and aponia *are* in fact pleasure just like khara and euprosyne. Pleasure is, by definition, good. So I think in many places in the texts where the word "good" ἀγαθόν is used, we can substitute "pleasure." And where ταγαθον tagathon "greatest good" is used by a number of philosophers in ancient Greece to mean "the highest good" (that good to which all other possible goods point to), Epicureans use it to refer to pleasure in the tetrapharmakos (and elsewhere, I believe).

Post by "Kalosyni" of June 12, 2022 at 4:49 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

...for the record - I have no problem with "tranquility."

In fact, I'm coming around to the idea that ataraxia and aponia actually refer to something like homeostasis or basically just the sensation that the body and mind are working well and in-tune. One can more easily or readily experience pleasure - of all kinds - when neither the body nor the mind are troubled.

Thank you Don, what you say is very helpful, and I realize that I need to study up more on this.

I find that it makes more sense for me to think of "peace of mind" instead of "tranquility". So essentially anytime the word tranquility comes up then substitute that. Also to think about how pleasure can be at its greatest when there is "absence of stress and anxiety".

What is further interesting about this article (which I haven't quite finished reading yet) is that it seems to point toward goods that we can cultivate -- personal Epicurean goods as those that are possessed through the efforts of those who cultivate them (they are internal and which we come to possess due to our own efforts rather than through fortune).

And it gives VS 45 as a reference:

"The study of what is natural produces not braggarts nor windbags nor those who show off the culture that most people fight about, but those who are fearless and self-reliant and who value their own good qualities rather than the good things that have come to them from external circumstances."[note](#)]

Post by "Cassius" of June 12, 2022 at 5:11 PM

We talked about some of this in the podcast recording today and it is truly a rabbit chase.

I am not sure the chase can even get off the ground until we decide what we mean by "good", which is well before we put any modifiers on the term like natural or necessary or intrinsic or instrumental or anything else.

And part of answering that question probably means coming to terms with what Epicurus really meant in his warning about walking around uselessly harping on the meaning of good.

Do we end up, as Francis Wright apparently did (need to check the text) concluding that there is nothing good but pleasure, and nothing bad/evil but pain?

I am tempted to say the answer is "yes" but so much depends on the subtle meanings assigned to the words in even that formulation.

I tend to think that whenever someone wants to discuss this, they are suggesting that inseparable from the word "good" is an implicit "always." And if that is the case, I find it very difficult to designate anything as "always good" other than pleasure.

Or do we define the good as Torquatus suggested in On Ends that "everyone agrees...." That as to the "supreme good" ---

"The problem before us then is, what is the climax and standard of things good, and this in the opinion of all philosophers must needs be such that we are bound to test all things by it, but the standard itself by nothing. Epicurus places this standard in pleasure, which he lays down to be the supreme good, while pain is the supreme evil; and he founds his proof of this on the following considerations."

Post by "Don" of June 12, 2022 at 5:35 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Epicurus really meant in his warning about walking around uselessly harping on the meaning of good

What is that citation? I've heard it. Just have source amnesia.

Post by "Cassius" of June 12, 2022 at 7:02 PM

It is apparently Usener 423 citing Plutarch, here from Epicurism.info

[Epicurus.info : E-Texts : Epicurea](#)

U423

Plutarch, *That Epicurus actually makes a pleasant life impossible*, 7, p. 1091A: Not only is the basis that they assume for the pleasurable life untrustworthy and insecure, it is quite trivial and paltry as well, inasmuch as their "thing delighted" – their good – is an escape from ills, and they say that they can conceive of no other, and indeed that our nature has no place at all in which to put its good except the place left when its evil is expelled. ... Epicurus too makes a similar statement to the effect that the good is a thing that arises out of your very escape from evil and from your memory and reflection and gratitude that this has happened to you. His words are these: "That which produces a jubilation unsurpassed is the nature of good, if you apply your mind rightly and then stand firm and do not stroll about {a jibe at the Peripatetics}, prating meaninglessly about the good."

***Ibid.*, 8, p. 1091E:** Thus Epicurus, and Metrodorus too, suppose {that the middle is the summit and the end} when they take the position that escape from ill is the reality and upper limit of the good.

Post by "Kalosyni" of June 12, 2022 at 7:51 PM

The way I understand it is a "good" or to be more specific a "natural good" is condition or a virtue which leads to pleasure and pleasant life.

So just like you can have goods that you buy from a store (which are physical and extrinsic) then you have intrinsic goods which are conditions or virtues.

Post by "Don" of June 12, 2022 at 8:09 PM

Thanks!!

Here's the section at Perseus:

[Plutarch, *Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum*, section 7](#)

For what occasions transcending joy (he saith) is some great impending evil escaped; and in this lies the very nature and essence of good, if a man attain unto it aright, and contain himself when he hath done, and not ramble and prate idly about it.