The Nature of Virtue According To Some Early Greek Philosophers

Thomas Vandenberg
Carroll College

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THE NATURE OF VIRTUE ACCORDING TO SOME EARLY GREEK PHILOSOPHERS

BY

THOMAS L. VANDENBERG

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BY
THOMAS L. VANDENBERG
HAS BEEN APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
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INTRODUCTION

Man has always tried to uncover the mystery of his existence, that is, for what purpose was he created and how can he fulfill this purpose. Some of the earliest solutions are found in the teachings of the philosophers of ancient Greece. Most important among these are Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Zeno the Stoic, and Epicurus. Two schools of thought, the hedonism of Epicurus and the Stoicism of Zeno, are particularly interesting for they are in seeming contradiction, thus posing the question of how each contributes to the solution of the problem. For this reason, I have chosen to study them as the topic of this thesis.

Whenever the subject of man's goal in life is presented, a consideration of the nature of virtue necessarily follows. Since the hedonists and Stoics maintained different views of man's end, the very essence of their concepts of virtue had to also be different. Was it a means to an end, or an end in itself? Was virtue by its nature of positive value or worthless? Was it the greatest good, or an evil? Was it of universal application, or relative to time and circumstances? The two schools bring up these questions and attempt to answer them. Only through an evaluation of their doctrines can their accuracy be determined. This is the purpose of this thesis.
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CHAPTER I

Greek Hedonism and Virtue

One of the major problems facing the philosophers of ancient Greece was centered around man's attempts to achieve happiness. The nature of happiness was disputed among various schools, each believing - and with good reasons for certitude - that its views were the true ones. A study of this kind cannot be divorced from the study of virtue. Since the nature of happiness, or man's ultimate end in life, took on numerous meanings, the nature of virtue also changed. In this first chapter the views of the hedonistic doctrine will be discussed. Two Greek schools were proponents of it, the Cyrenaic and the Epicurean. Because our main objective is to arrive at an understanding of the nature of virtue as they defended it, and because we find that virtue in this case is a means to an end, it is necessary to lay down their conceptions of that end before we can grasp a worthy comprehension of virtue.

Hedonism, in general, is the term used to describe the doctrine that pleasure is the sole or chief good in life and that moral duty is fulfilled in the gratification of pleasure-seeking instincts and dispositions. A study of both the Cyrenaic and Epicurean schools is important because each has its own idea of pleasure and consequently virtue as the means to this end. In certain respects, they are so utterly different
that it may become difficult to explain how they can both be classified under this term. In final analysis, however, we find that their general effects on society are quite similar. For the reason that Epicureanism is based upon and is a development of Cyrenaicism, a study of the latter first should prove to be more profitable than beginning with the former.

The Cyrenaic school of philosophy was founded by Aristippus (c. 435-356), from the prosperous colony of Cyrene in Libya, whence the name of his school. He maintained that the ultimate end of man was found in sensual or bodily pleasure. Some writers in attempting to evaluate his philosophy hold that mental emotion could also be called a good, but all agree that it must be conditioned by bodily enjoyment. At any rate, the whole of life was made up of pleasure, to be sought as good, and pain to be avoided as evil.

Aristippus had reason for establishing this fundamental principle that physical enjoyment is essential to pleasure. The city of Cyrene was rich and luxurious. Here Aristippus lived as a boy and grew up. In the process he grew accustomed to the many enjoyments it offered, until, finally, its influence led him to a love of pleasure. When a young man, he traveled to Athens and made contacts with both Protagoras, the great Sophist, and Socrates. Each played a part in the formation of his doctrine. From the former, he acquired subjectivistic tendencies, such as believing that the mind could not know external reality, but only the effects which it
produced on the body. Also, that all alleged knowledge was but opinion; that man could never go beyond his passing impressions and feelings; that the affections in one man's consciousness differed from another's, and, therefore, that the sense impressions between them need not agree.⁴

From Socrates, Aristippus distorted the view that the Socratic life was one of understanding and which alone yielded real happiness to mean that the happy life, the life of the greatest pleasure, is the really intelligent and worth-while life.² Thus his childhood experiences and later associations with Protagoras and Socrates can be pinpointed as the primary reasons why Aristippus developed his hedonistic doctrine.

In order that the precise nature of pleasure could be understood, Aristippus formulated an analogy between the body's reaction to stimuli and variable degrees of motion expressed as wind or the like. Trouble, pain and suffering were like a violent wind and could be referred to as violent motion. Pleasure, on the other hand, was like the sensation of a breeze and was assigned a meaning of gentle motion, that is, it was congenial to the nature of man. Stimuli which were indifferent to it were likened to a sea-calm or feeble motion.³

Pleasure was, therefore, something positive. It was not the mere absence of pain as we shall find in the doctrine of

Epicurus, but rather consisted in active movement. Every pleasurable feeling was accompanied by an affection of a bodily organism and was continuous and gentle.

Because Aristippus had adopted the subjectivism of Protagoras, he was forced to believe that man could not be sure of what the future might bring. As a result, pleasure had to be acquired at the present time, for only the present was in man’s power. Each passing sense impression had to be clung to and each "drop" or "crumb" of pleasure had to be enjoyed, moment by moment. All pleasures were equal in value, 

Per se they had no intrinsic worth. It was only determined by their degree and duration. Thus, whenever a situation of pleasure presented itself, whether of eating, drinking, or sexual behavior, it was to be taken advantage of, so that the individual involved could arrive at his ideal. Aristippus summarized the ultimate goal of life when he said, "If we could live from moment to moment, filling each with the fullest delight that sense and mind alike are capable of receiving, that would be the ideal life."

Thus, the norm of morality was centered in the individual. The goodness of an action was determined by the pleasure it produced, while evil depended upon the resulting pain and suffering. What was morally good to one could possibly be morally evil to another, because a single stimulus might be received as either enjoyable or painful, depending on the

4. Ibid., p. 97.
person's reaction to it. But pleasure, as pleasure, was never bad, even though it may have been derived from an evil cause. 5

From this brief sketch of the Cyrenaic's supreme good, we are prepared to develop their views of virtue with the hope of deriving an adequate definition. Because we already know it is a means to pleasure, we can ask just exactly what part it has in aiding man to attain it.

The Cyrenaics learned through experience that if they allowed themselves to overindulge in some pleasurable act, they would possibly bring upon themselves suffering, sickness, or even disease. In consequence, they concluded that man must have complete control of his passions at every given moment. Mastery of one's emotions, therefore, demanded the practice of self-control, and this became their understanding of virtue in the broadest sense of the term. The control of pleasure, in the midst of pleasure, could only be secured by the practice of virtue. 6 Thus the Cyrenaics regarded it as an indispensable factor in the pursuit of true sensual gratification.

A further analysis of virtue leads us to some of its attributes. Virtue, since it does assist man to his end, is a good, but only in so far as it is successful in fulfilling this duty. Consequently, per se it has no intrinsic value and can be considered as indifferent. This must follow from

6. Ibid., p. 70.
the fact that pleasure in itself, is the only good, and that pain is the only evil. By pragmatic and utilitarian standards alone can the worth of virtue be evaluated. But the true Cyrenaic, realizing that if he possessed it he would find happiness easily within his grasp, looked upon it as something of positive value and as something to be greatly desired. From these remarks, a fairly accurate definition of virtue can be educed. It is a lasting and habitual action, indifferent in itself, which acquires worth only when used successfully by man in order that he may dominate his emotions, thus enabling him to enjoy pleasure in the midst of pleasure. In application of this, Aristippus believed that one should keep himself in condition to enjoy, and this was the virtue of temperance, or rather prudence i.e., knowledge of how to avoid satiety. Also, that if a passion should enslave a man, it would jeopardize his full enjoyment. "I possess," he boasted of his lusts, "but I am not possessed." Because of the fact that the hedonistic doctrine was strictly individualistic, the social virtues had no significance. Justice and equity were valueless. Man's only obligation was to himself, thus making it possible to neglect society and state.

In actual practice, the Cyrenaics found themselves struggling to gain the ideal. They had sought for happiness in pleasure alone, but failed to become aware of the fact that... in seeking pleasure itself, they could never truly find it. This is commonly termed the hedonistic paradox. They never

expressly stated what was meant by virtue. It was something vague, but, nevertheless, important to man in his acquisition of pleasure. Physical and personal satisfaction had influenced its nature.

With this knowledge of Cyrenaic virtue, we proceed to a later understanding of it as was proposed by Epicurus (342-270) in his own hedonistic doctrine. It is a revival, revision, and perfection of its predecessor. As a matter of fact, it differs so greatly from the Cyrenaic views, that only the essence, that pleasure is, at least nominally, the end of man's existence, remains the same. As all hedonism, it is of an egotistical nature. Because Aristippus' views had proven to be impractical, they gave way to others. In a sense, Epicurus brings them once again into prominence. He revises their meaning by putting them on a popular level and by basing them on practical reason. At times their perfection even approaches Aristotelian concepts.

Epicurus attacked the problem of morality in a logical manner as can be seen by his very definition of philosophy. He said, "Philosophy is a daily business of speech and thought to secure a happy life."8 It is a practical concern which deals with the health of the soul, a life and not a mere doctrine. It alone holds out the promise of well-being and happiness, and, consequently, it is the only thing necessary.

All other studies are useless unless they can contribute to the good of philosophy.⁹

He noticed that those men believing in gods and religion were continually plagued with superstitions, fears, and terrors. Because they were obviously uneasy, he concluded that such practices must be condemned as sources of unhappiness. Therefore, the only necessary study for the philosopher became the study of nature, what we now call natural science - not for itself but to assist man to freedom from the bonds of mental anguish. This point immediately distinguishes the Epicurean ideas of pleasure from the exclusively sensualistic idea held by Aristippus. Epicurus did not deny that such pleasures were good, but he did, however, subordinate them to mental pleasures. Also, he emphasized a necessity for selecting and preferring simple and natural pleasures to the questionable pleasures of luxury and extravagance. After all, philosophy was now much more sophisticated than it had ever been before.

From this point Epicurus tends toward the extreme. We find him disregarding almost entirely the value of positive pleasure in favor of a philosophic poise of mind, a quiet and undisturbed possession of one's faculties liberated from pains of body or troubles of spirit. In fact, his position toward it very closely approaches that of his opponents', the Stoics, who believed physical enjoyment to be an evil.

⁹. Ibid.
At times, it is even difficult to distinguish between them, but yet, Epicurus was a hedonist because he was ultimately a pleasure-seeker.

His pleasure obviously existed in the mind as a state of the mind. He knew that a disturbed mind was the source of pain and suffering. Of necessity he strove after that state whereby it would be free from all disturbances. This leads us directly to his views on desire.

Desire is in all men and is prompted by a want, which, if unsatisfied, is painful. However, is the reverse of this true, that is, does satisfying a want bring pleasure? Epicurus answers "not necessarily." He reasons as follows, although it is true that when we gratify our desires for any external object, we remove the mental unrest present while desiring it and acquire some pleasure produced by it, we will always be faced with additional desires for other objects simply because of the pleasures that come from satisfying them. Although sensual enjoyment might have been a consequence of the act, mental or spiritual gratification is of a greater value. Because of this and because there is a continued desire for something else, man is left with mental unrest, the greatest evil. Therefore, the natural end and aim of all action is neither want nor desire nor the temporary excitement of satisfying them, but rather a neutral state of freedom from physical pain or mental disturbance. Epicurus

10. Ibid., p. 165.
11. Ibid., p. 166.
found that to go beyond this state was impossible.

Pleasure is, therefore, a negative conception. It is an absence of bodily pain, but especially of spiritual suffering. As Epicurus himself said, "The amount of pleasure is defined by the removal of all pain. Wherever there is pleasure ... there is neither bodily pain nor mental suffering, nor both." 12 This is the ideal element to be realized in human life.

Now we are prepared to examine the nature of Epicurean virtue. Once again it is a means to pleasure, and, consequently, is determined by its characteristics. However, what it was per se they took no pains to explain at any length. Still, they classified under it actions and habits similar to the Christian philosophers' views of prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude. 13 But because the absence of pain was man's supreme and ultimate end, to which everything else was subordinate, there could only be one order of right conduct by which it could conceivably be attained. It is to carry out the rule that, to enjoy oneself as much as possible, one must avoid excesses attended by painful consequences, and prefer the long-lasting to the shorter and the more refined to the grosser pleasures. The observance of this order may be termed virtue, regarding forethought and caution in enjoyments as its nature. 14 Thus, the application of this

to the various circumstances of daily life determined the precise nature of individual virtues, that is, prudence, justice, etc..

Once again the norm of morality is centered in the individual himself. For example, chastity is not considered as a strict observance of purity, but rather as lust cautiously gratified, so as to not bring later suffering or sickness. As meekness is restricted anger, patience is guarded revenge. Benevolence is not a matter of kindness or charity but one of controlled selfishness. Such actions as thievery and oppression are even looked upon as just, so long as they are not reached by any promulgated law. However, these virtues, by themselves, cannot lead man to the true pleasure of peace of mind.

The virtue of prudence proves to be the only absolutely necessary virtue. It was superior to all the others for two basic reasons. First, all virtue proceeded from it and, second, without it, man could not lead a life of pleasure. In other words, one could not lead a "happy" life apart from the prudent life. A union of it with the others grew into one with the pleasant life, and such a life was inseparable from them. Thus, the virtuous man proved to be the prudent man who could arrest all unnecessary desire by being capable of directing his actions only to things which would not be harmful to him. He cared only for himself at the expense of society, for self-love and attention were the primary aims.
of his action. This was supported by Epicurus when he said that "benevolence would cease to be a virtue if it ceased to be self-regarding."\textsuperscript{15}

In the final analysis of Epicurean virtue, we find that it has characteristics which have already been applied to the virtues according to the Cyrenaics. Therefore, it should satisfactorily summarize the whole of the Hedonistic views.

From the very fact that the ultimate end of man is pleasure as such, virtue must, if it has any value at all, be a means and only a means to the end. In itself, it is considered as something indifferent; but, because, by a practice of it, pleasure can be had, it takes on a positive value. Virtue can now be termed a "good" in that it has conduciveness to pleasure and, especially, protection from pain or evil. If, on the other hand, an act brings pleasure to one but pain to another, it is considered virtuous to the former and vicious to the latter. Therefore, its relation to pleasure alone makes it desirable and gives it its moral worth.

Virtue, according to the doctrine of hedonism, is that which leads man primarily to pleasure as the first and principal end to be pursued. But, man is striving for an end which is confined by the limits of time and the things of the world. He, therefore, cannot be called a eudaemonist, that is, one who is hunting for true happiness, which is an

\textsuperscript{15.} Hicks, \textit{Op. Cit.}, p. 183.
enduring possession of the supreme good. Therefore, both the Cyrenaics and the Epicureans could never quite reach that state of contentment after which men naturally strive.
CHAPTER II

Stoicism and Virtue

We have now studied one solution to the problem of man's ultimate end, what it is, and the significance of virtue in its attainment. The hedonistic view was predominantly materialistic and individualistic. Personal pleasure was the criterion of "proper" moral habits. Finally, virtue was good only insofar as it was a useful means to pleasure. We now turn to another solution proposed by the ancient Greek school known as the Stoa. It arose after the time of Aristotle, and, in some respects, is more refined in its teaching than his. It is also the third noted school in ancient Greek philosophy, with the Academy of Plato and Aristotle's Lyceum preceding.

As hedonism primarily seeks pleasure as the supreme good, Stoicism strives after happiness, which is only to be found in the possession of virtue. Another early Greek school, that of the Cynics, held a similar position, and is a helpful aid for understanding the Stoic stand. It existed contemporaneously with the Cyrenaic school, and, like them, had been influenced by Socrates. However, instead of emphasizing man's physical powers, as Aristippus had, it went to the other extreme by demanding an unqualified master of mind over body.16

The Cynic school, founded by Antisthenes (446-365 B.C.), believed virtue to be worthwhile for its own sake and apart from any ulterior reward in the form of pleasure. The well-being of the individual was only to be secured through the renunciation of pleasure. This view is quite different from that of the Cyrenaics. In their case, pleasure was man's ultimate end, in this, it was often considered as an evil.

Antisthenes arrived at this conclusion from the results of his wanderings through the streets of Athens in an attempt to find a truly happy and free man: one frank, unpretentious, unworried, one always his true self. However, he discovered, with much disgust, that those who were seemingly happy were only impostors or actors. Therefore, since these people had sought happiness from external things, he surmised that the only place satisfaction and happiness could be found was from within the individual himself.\(^{17}\) He maintained that most alleged needs were only imaginary, and that dignities or possessions were only superficial burdens. In consequence of this, the norm of morality rested in man's attitude with regard to desires, or rather, lack of desire. This was the ethics of the life of self-expression and self-sufficiency.\(^{18}\)

An even more famous and noted Cynic, Diogenes of Sinope (412-323 B.C.), developed this thesis further. He also found the world and human life to be counterfeit. External attachments were only burdens to freedom, for, as he thought,

\(^{17}\) Ibid., pp. 46-47.
\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 47.
citizenship to a state would entail obligations towards it; or marital ties would restrain one's free activity. Therefore, he believed man had to be master of self without envy, ambition, or any sense of obligation.

The essence, then, of the Cynic's concept of virtue was self-control, that is, the keeping of one's actions continually directed to the individual person and the avoidance of the external pleasures of life. Only a virtuous man could be godlike, as his wisdom was like armor which could not be pierced by temptations. Consequently, one who might reach the state of wisdom would never cease to be virtuous.

Here was the Socratic emphasis on the supreme worth of the inner life carried to excess and oddity. External goods were disregarded as impediments to happiness. Laws, rules, standards, and mores of society were rejected because they interfered with personal freedom. In fact, it was not uncommon to find such men acting as beasts in public places. But this was of no concern to them for they believed themselves subjects of no state, god, nor religion. They were subject only to that ideal which they had framed for themselves, that is, virtue. It alone would be worshipped as the "god" of their choice. And, because of its necessary relationship with wisdom, it alone dictated to man how he was to act day after day.

In a descriptive way, therefore, virtue was the final cause which, on the one hand, directed man toward the
suppression of his desires for pleasures of life, and on the other, toward a life of self-expression, self-sufficiency, and self-denial. Such things as fortune or the like would have no effect on the Cynic, for he reasoned that if he should be deprived of anything, he would not miss it since he had already renounced everything.

The more radical Cynics carried this doctrine to such eccentric extremes that they ceased bathing, dressed in rags, went unshaven and unshorn, and existed on the crudest of foods. Even though they were sincere and advocated kindness towards others, they had no place in the social scheme of life and disgusted sensible people. No other school of philosophy went as far toward flight from the world as did the Cynics, which eventually resulted in their ultimate downfall.

Returning once again to the Stoics, we see how they merged with and developed the Cynic philosophy. Zeno (350-258 B.C.), who founded the Stoa in Athens about the year 300 B.C., recognized its narrow nature and incompatibility with society. But, accepting the basic identity of virtue with the ultimate end of man, he placed it on a logical and metaphysical foundation, thus making it more applicable to man's reason and social relations. It was opposed to Epicurean philosophy, but, in some points, drew very close to the positions held by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. In

many aspects, it even surpassed them. Stoicism, in fact became the predominant philosophy of the Romans.

Zeno formulated his doctrine by selecting the metaphysics of Hericlitus and the ethics of the Cynics, with the moderating influence of Plato and Aristotle. Although it was materialistic in nature, it stressed the importance of ethics, making it paramount to all other studies. Clearly, Zeno was earnest in his attempt to solve the problem of morality.

From Socrates, who taught the importance of knowledge, Zeno became aware of the relationship existing between man's rational and physical powers. Plato and Aristotle had both believed that harmony and balance existed between them, that is, a moderate satisfaction of desires and emotions regulated by reason. But, as hedonism overemphasized man's physical nature, Zeno advocated an uncompromising rationalism, the opposite extreme. He, as it were, emphasized the conflict between the two and insisted on the unqualified mastery of reason.20

To establish a reasonable understanding of the Stoic ethical position, we must view their physics wherein they held that behind the universe and its actions there was a directing agent. Or, in other words, they believed that there was a rational plan which guided the universe, this being their way of referring to what we now call the Natural Law. This law of the universe applied to all beings. Because of

this, moreover, man was, of necessity, subject to this law. Therefore, its influence became the paramount criterion of Stoic ethics. Right life was woven into the texture of man's nature and had no place aside from its design. Thus, once again feeling the Socratic emphasis that knowledge and virtue were identical, it was educed that a good life would have to be one of understanding both the nature of man and the nature of the world, plus man's relation to it and how he was to live suitably in this relationship. The conclusion was drawn that before man could reach perfection, he would have to act in harmony with the purpose of the universe and would have to accommodate his own purposes to the larger design manifested by the laws of nature. Finally, in allowing reason to rule in him as it did in the universe, he would be practicing virtue.

The vocation of every individual was to face this reality and act accordingly. He would not only have to submit his willful actions to the "will" of the world or to the law of nature, but would also have to accept his place in the universe without deviation from it, as caused by allowing his passions and emotions to overcome his power of reason.

Such happenings could only lead to allusion and evil. Therefore, the practice of self-restraint was most necessary. Note that this is quite similar to Antisthenes' view of self-control, but practiced for a higher motive.

From the foregoing, we are led to the Stoic concept of virtue. Epictetus, a prominent Stoic, taught that "the essence
of good and evil lies in the attitude of the will." He defended this for two reasons. First, he believed that the only way man could fulfill his obligation of living in accordance with the "divine" plan, i.e., the natural law, was by having a knowledge of it, and by choosing only those things which would lead him to it. Therefore, a proper disposition of the mind was required. Second, if man were to yield to the demands of his emotions or passions, he would be led away from the plan of nature, because they lacked an understanding of it. The principle forms of emotion, such as fear, anxiety, or desire, proceed only from false practical judgments of what is good or evil. They are not in accordance with nature, and hence, cannot be reconciled with virtue. For this reason, well-being cannot depend upon man's passions or emotions, but only upon how his will confronts them.

From this it follows that, since the disposition of the mind alone determines virtue and, at the same time, happiness, physical or sensual pleasures could be regarded as valueless or even evil. Moreover, this state of mind is chosen for its own sake and not for the possible acquisition of something else as a reward for so acting. Consequently, the Stoics believed that the reasonable course of procedure was to develop an apathy toward all the lures and incitements of the senses. In other words, action according to reason,

which shows the law of nature and has control of desire, alone is good and valuable; this is virtue. He who understands good and evil and intends to do the former, is virtuous and truly happy. No act is per se praiseworthy or reprehensible; morality is determined by one's disposition.  

The Stoics also maintained the oneness of virtue, adhering to the old Socratic doctrine. Yet, they believed it capable of being manifested in numerous ways, such as in the practice of prudence, justice, temperance, or fortitude. Man was either virtuous or not virtuous; there was no middle ground. This depended upon his disposition, since mental attitude and virtue were inseparable.

With these points in mind, an adequate definition of the Stoic concept of virtue can be drawn forth, that is, the disposition of the mind, always consistent and harmonious, always sought for its own sake, liberated from the influences of fear, hope, or reward external to man himself. Applications of this are found through an examination of the attitudes and dispositions of the true Stoic when faced with situations demanding his attention and self-control. In all cases, however, the virtue of prudence is predominant, for it held control over all the other virtues for the purpose of assisting them to conform to the laws of the universe and human reason. Obviously, then, a temperate attitude was one of plain, hard self-control, continence, and decorum in resisting

the sensual appetites. The only temperate person being the sober person. Courage was, more or less, viewed as a power of endurance. It was a type of loyalty to one's convictions, regardless of the consequences, such as Socrates showed when faced with death. Finally, justice, the social virtue, was that attitude had when dealing with others, which had significance only if it was adhering to the valid laws of the state, which were merely manifestations of the law of the world. All the virtues mutually accompanied each other.

The Stoics maintained that man could not be perfect or truly happy unless he possessed virtue in its fullest degree, nor could his actions be perfect unless done in accordance with all the virtues. They believed that the self-regarding virtues could not exist without the social virtues, for all were mutually dependent on the others. The good of society could be best attained by each individual pursuing his own perfection. Finally, as long as man retained his power of reason and understanding, the virtuous disposition could never be lost.25

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CHAPTER III
Evaluation of Greek Hedonistic and Stoic Concepts of Virtue

We have now examined two examples of early Greek thought concerning goodness or badness of moral action. From the position of egotistical hedonism, we found an act to be virtuous if it successfully aided in the acquisition of pleasure. The two proponents of this doctrine were the Cyrenaics and the Epicureans. The Cyrenaics held pleasure to be exclusively sensual. To the Epicureans it was primarily freedom from pain, or, more precisely, the possession of mental tranquillity. In either case, virtue was really a means to pleasure, and was believed to be in itself valueless. The position of the Stoic philosophers, on the other hand, was found to be quite opposite. Not only were sensual desires to be subdued as sources of pain, but pleasure itself was regarded as an evil, the only thing of value being virtue itself.

Neither school of thought, as thus stated, has been preserved to the present time, although there are modifications of each which have had some advocates down through the history of philosophy - even to the present. Since these contemporary views are fundamentally the same as their early predecessors, a critique aimed at the ancient moralists will likewise be applicable to such "moderns."
Before this can be done, however, it is necessary to realize that philosophy is a gradual development of the views held by the greatest minds of all time, with each defended position containing some elements of truth. Originally, a teaching might have meant one thing, but, through a process of gradual evolution, it would lose its primary meaning to take on another, until finally, many of its errors had been eradicated leaving truth as the end product. We find that hedonism and Stoicism are still in the transition stage of development. Therefore, they both have in their respective doctrines elements of truth and error alike. Hence, the purpose of this chapter is not to completely condemn them, but to show their valuable contributions and to demonstrate the mistakes which led to their misconceptions of virtue.

Since the basic faults of each rested in the misconception of man's nature, an understanding of his true nature is essential before these faults can be explicitly shown. From a knowledge of man's essence, his ultimate purpose or end can be determined. Now, since all life is either irrational or rational, man must be either one or the other. From experience we have learned that man has the powers of growth, nutrition, and reproduction, as do all animate beings, but more important is the fact that he has the powers of intellection and volition. Man is, therefore, of an animal of a rational nature.

Furthermore, every creature, according to teleological
philosophy, has a purpose for its existence. This end, or final cause, as Aristotle chose to call it, is determined by the essence, or formal cause of the being. Consequently, the end of beings of a material nature can only be found in things of a material nature. However, since the intellect and will are spiritual faculties, their objects must be of an immaterial nature, i.e., they are not bound by the limits of the material world. The proper object of the intellect is unlimited truth, and the proper object of the will is the unlimited good; neither of which can be had through the possession of material things.

Man must have both proximate and ultimate ends in life. The ultimate end corresponds to the possession of the proper objects of his intellect and will, while the proximate ends correspond to the means thereto. Thus, any action which in one way or another leads man to his final end will be good, while those which tend to draw him from it will be evil. An habitually good moral action is virtue. Bad moral habits are vices.

This brief discussion, although not stating precisely man's end, is sufficient for the purpose of emphasizing how the Greek moralists, whom we have studied, failed in their attempts to establish a norm of moral value, and, likewise, where many of our contemporaries are misled concerning the nature of virtue itself.

It is not a difficult task to discover why the hedonists of ancient Greece believed pleasure to be the ultimate value and end of their existence. I have selected three arguments
to demonstrate this point. First, consider those who reasoned that the end of life must be something which would give satisfaction. The greatest satisfaction would consist in that which settled the most fundamental demands of human nature. Now, when asked what that was, they naturally answered "Pleasure." Second, consider the person who saw that all animals, endowed with reason or not, manifestly sought pleasure. He would surmise that whatever was desired was good, and that most desired being the best for all. Since all animals sought pleasure, pleasure would have to be the ultimate end for all, including man. Third, the hedonists believed the goodness of pleasure could be demonstrated by considering its opposite, i.e., pain. Since pain is naturally shunned as evil, pleasure would, of necessity, have to be an essentially desirable thing. Now, whatever is desirable of itself is not chosen as a means to something else, but is chosen for its own sake. Therefore, pleasure must be the supreme good.

There are elements of truth in these arguments, e.g., it cannot be denied that man's end must give him satisfaction, or that the satisfaction of desire is natural to man, and that pleasure may relieve or reduce feelings of urgency. Also, if all men desire a common thing, it must be good. Finally, all agree that whatever is opposed to pain, is bound to have

some positive value. To this extent, the hedonists had a valid philosophy.

However, with the standard of criticism being the true nature of man, that is, a rational animal, their errors are as easily detected. In the first argument, which stated that pleasure satisfied the most fundamental demands of human nature, the supposition was that the highest desires of man are toward the possession of material things or sensual satisfactions, with no aspirations above the physical world. On the contrary, the greatest good to man must be in accord with his higher nature, which is eternal, and, consequently, the more ideal to be sought. The second argument, which maintains that the highest good must be that which all animals seek, again places man with the animals and shows their desires to be equal. However, its major error lies in the failure to realize that man actually strives after happiness, with pleasure desired only secondarily. The third argument makes this more clear. It states that pleasure is sought for its own sake as being opposed to pain. In actuality, however, before pleasure can be had, something must be desired which gives pleasure as the result of its acquirement. In other words, objects of attainment, which bring pleasure, are the real things desired, not pleasure itself.\(^\text{29}\)

This answer once again presents the paradox of hedonism. If one thinks of gaining pleasure itself, he is almost sure

to miss it; whereas, if he were to direct his desires toward properly human ends, pleasure would come of itself. When seeking pleasure for pleasure's sake, one will not find it. Happiness requires the use of reason whereby man may choose objects which lead to it. Socrates himself made this point quite clear when he said that whoever does as he pleases, will never get what he wishes. In fact, although pleasure may come as a consequence of acquiring a certain object, it need not result of necessity. There are living examples of persons today who are leading happy lives, but yet are suffering from grave illnesses which inflict upon them continual pain. If this be the case pleasure cannot be the highest good, but instead only something concomitant with or a possible resultant from the possession of happiness. In fact, some goods, such as knowledge or moral and intellectual excellence, are to be sought without regard for pleasure at all. At times, pleasure is even to be avoided if, through its acquisition, evil is the effect.

In conclusion, therefore, pleasure is a good insofar as it completes and perfects an act, thus making it satisfying. However, it must be remembered that many persons can have pleasures and still be unhappy. Finally, there are duties which face everyone which must be accomplished irrespective of pleasure or displeasure.

30. Ibid., p. 70.
With this rejection of pleasure as the highest good, the nature of hedonistic virtue has all but been destroyed. But here also, valuable truths to philosophy were maintained, a prominent one being that virtue was considered as a means to an end. Making this end happiness, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle all held virtue as a means. The Stoic philosophers failed to see this truth when they made virtue its own reward, i.e., an end in itself.

A standard of judgment is needed before we can adequately evaluate the hedonistic idea of virtue. For this, we use Aristotle's definition of virtue, i.e., a disposition of the mind which enables man to perform his function well - the duty of living in accordance with his true nature - by avoiding extremes and choosing the mean in actions and feelings. This immediately discards as unsatisfactory the extremism of the pleasure-dominated idea of virtue. Nevertheless, from the very fact that pleasure and virtue are related, an approach to truth was made.

Moral goodness is a quality disposing man to act in the best way when dealing with pleasures and pains, which result from the proper or improper regulation of his passions and emotions. However, what many hedonists meant by the "best way" was overindulgence in sense pleasures. Aristotle maintained it was a mean between excess and deficiency.

35. Ibid., p. 60.
36. Ibid., p. 68.
a virtuous man would experience a sort of pleasure or satisfaction when practicing the virtues, whereas, to the non-virtuous man, such actions would produce in him pain and unpleasantness. Therefore, there is a definite relationship between pleasure and virtue.

By saying that virtue was only a good insofar as it was successful in leading man to pleasure, the Greek hedonists were again only partly correct. That which directs man to his final destiny is indeed a good, but it does have a positive value of its own. This is supported from the fact that a particular man is not spoken of as good or bad because of his nature, for in all men it is the same; nor because of his end, which again is of universal application; but by reason of his dispositions which are either in accord or not in accord with both his nature and end. Virtue, by its very essence, is that attitude of mind which directs man, through governing his actions, to his ultimate goal, i.e., happiness. It must of itself, therefore, be intrinsically good. Nevertheless, virtue must not be regarded as the highest good, but only as a necessary means to the end.

Keeping these points in mind, hedonistic virtue becomes a perversion of man's rational nature. It strives for pleasure, which is actually only secondary to objects represented in their goodness and perfection, toward which man's faculties, guided by reason, primarily tend. In addition, virtue has in hedonism no practical moral value, for it is relative and varies with time, circumstances, and individuals. Therefore,
virtue in its proper conception must be considered by the hedonist as an absurdity. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, we said, each believed virtue to be a means to an end. However, not one of them said that it was valueless. Rather, they said that it was necessary for attainment of happiness. For Socrates, virtue was knowledge of good, which was essential for true happiness. 37 Plato maintained virtue to be a health of the soul, wherein its beauty and strength consisted. He concluded that "virtue must be loved for its own sake...." 38 Finally, since Aristotle maintained that virtue was that which made a man a good man, he must have believed it to be of intrinsic worth. 39

In concluding this criticism of the Cynic and Epicurean philosophers' views on virtue and man's goal in life, we may summarize why they have not and cannot be accepted by us. First, to identify moral rightness with pleasure is to debase human nature. Second, pleasure is not an end but a result; not a principle, but an effect. Third, consciousness shows that pleasure is not absolute or universal, hence, not a standard of morality. Fourth, if pleasure is man's end, it must be sought at all cost, and in whatever circumstances, thus allowing the end to justify the means.

Hedonistic ethics is not, in the strict sense of the word, a "system" of morality at all. It contains no principles

of morality, for it reduces right and wrong to a matter of individual feeling. It cannot be applied to social life, because it is only concerned with the individual. Such virtue is self-regarding and, therefore, contrary to man's essentially social nature.

The philosophy of Stoicism presents a different problem. Instead of considering pleasure as good, it is regarded as an evil. Individualistic interests are subjected to the good of a world society. Man, in himself, is not the norm by which morality is judged, but instead, a law external to him is held as the norm. Finally, virtue is neither valueless nor a means to an end, but is the highest good and very end for which man strives. However, both hedonism and Stoicism, each in their own way, failed to recognize the true nature and end of man and consequently, the true nature of virtue.

Man's complete nature is both physical and rational, and at the same time, individual and social. The Cyrenaics and Epicureans abused it by overemphasizing the physical and individual aspects, while the Stoics exaggerated the rational and social aspects. Stoicism, like Hedonism, contains elements of truth and elements of error.

This critique of Stoic virtue is divided into four parts: first, the supremacy of man's mind over his body; second, the consideration of man as a social animal; third, the influence of the natural law on man; and fourth, the value and importance of virtue for a happy life.

According to the position of the Stoics, reason dominated all human acts. It was the undisputed master of man's passions and emotions. And, although believed to be composed of refined matter, it was throughout the entire body as the only faculty in man. In addition, the natural urges of man were rejected because of the belief that they would impair this reasoning power. Consequently, all pleasures and sensual desires were rejected.

Thus, it is evident that man was raised to a position superior to that defended by hedonism. No longer was man considered as other animals, for recognition was made of the importance of his rational faculties. This approach resembles the position of Aristotle, for he believed the intellectual faculties of man to be the distinguishing factors which separated human life from that of the animal kingdom. The Stoics were correct in saying that the passions could be sources of evil. However, their stand is only valid insofar as I have stated it. They went too far in its application, i.e., in maintaining the passions to be intrinsically evil.

Even though it may be true to say man's rational nature is superior to his physical nature, it cannot be maintained that it has complete dominance over the body. Man's physical actions are subject to the dictates of reason, in order that they will not tend to lead him away from his final goal, and, consequently, to evil. However, it must be accepted that

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41. Hicks, Op. Cit., p. 64.
passions are not intrinsically evil. Man was endowed with them for definite purposes. Evil only arises from their misuse, not from their use.  

Therefore, they are not, per se, bad, for fault rests only in the mind of the agent.

The reason the Stoics overstressed the rational powers of man lies in their misunderstanding of his twofold nature, that is, that man has both rational and animal faculties, each of which having a necessary role in the attainment of happiness. When used properly, they complement each other. Had the Stoics realized this one truth, their concepts of good and evil would have been quite different.

With regard to the social nature of man, Stoic thought was similar to Aristotle's. Both were proponents of the idea that man was politically social by nature, and that from this, the state had arisen. However, concerning the equality of men and their rights to any privileges within the state, there was considerable disagreement. Aristotle was a strong advocate of slavery, for he believed some men were created for obedience and by nature destined to be slaves. On the other hand, the Stoics thought that all men were by nature equal. This represented quite an advance on Aristotle's doctrine.

If the social nature of man were denied, the nature of virtue itself would be greatly abused. It could only be self-regarding, as was shown by the hedonist philosophers. Men

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would live only for themselves, with no concern for society, except for the protection and usefulness it might offer to the individual. In fact, such modern philosophers as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean Jacques Rousseau based much of their philosophies on this very error. They failed to see that the individual person could not perfect himself and thus attain happiness without the assistance of his fellow man. Aristotle maintained that social intercourse with friends effectually encouraged and promoted virtuous action, and thus led to a happy life.44

As with the Stoic stand concerning man's social nature, their basic understanding of the natural law has to be accepted, i.e., that there is a plan behind all actions in the universe which is the norm by which morality is judged and upon which the system of natural ethics is founded. Because it is universal and applicable to all men, it is not a utilitarian or relative norm such as the hedonistic, but is stable, immutable, and eternal. It applies to all men at all times.

In actuality, the natural law is that part of the divine plan for the universe which is applicable to the actions of man as known by reason. Since it is part of the divine plan, man has to follow it and subordinate himself to it before he can attain his perfection. Basically, this is the same as what was taught in Stoicism. In fact, the fundamental law of human conduct was expressed as accommodating man's will to

44. Ibid., p. 124.
the Divine Will. For pagans, they approached the Christian formula for sanctity.

When actions are in harmony with the natural law, they are morally good actions, and when these actions become habitual, they are virtuous. Evil is the result of non-conformity with the natural law. Since the Stoics believed that the passions impeded the power of reason, thus keeping man from understanding the law of nature, we can realize why they condemned the passions per se.

Because of their materialistic belief that all things were composed of matter, the Stoics confused the natural law (lex naturalis), which applies to man alone, with the laws of nature, which apply to all created material beings. Thus, the spirituality of man's nature was neglected and held as subject to the same laws which governed the material world. But yet, they maintained law to have its basis in nature, with man having an inborn knowledge of right and wrong. Obedience to the eternal law of the world in a life according to reason became the ethical principle of Stoicism. Consequently, as Aristotle himself maintained, actions corresponding to man's nature were objectively good; others, repugnant to his nature, were objectively bad.

The last point in this criticism of the Stoic concept

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45. Ibid., p. 140.
47. Ibid., p. 22.
48. Ibid., p. 17.
of virtue concerns its very essence. We recall that virtue was not only good in itself, but also the only and highest good sought for its own sake. Without it, man could not be truly happy.

When the Stoics maintained virtue to be the only good, they were obviously in error, since, as we have already shown, physical actions are good if performed in a manner which will not lead man away from his end in life. In addition, virtue, though good by its very nature, seeks an extrinsic object, i.e., happiness. The Stoic philosophers, though they were eudaemonists, believed happiness could in no way be had through the acquisition of something outside of man himself. Furthermore, since life in accordance with the laws of nature was the good life, they were led to believe that the happy life would be simply one of living in harmony with these laws as more or less a matter of duty. This would be virtuous living and, at the same time, happiness.

But man, by his very nature, does not act for the simple motive of fulfilling his duty. For instance, a mother does not care for her child just because it is her duty to do so, but also because of the motives of love and devotion. Certainly a sense of duty is present here, but love and generosity, or the like, are always esteemed as higher motives and give an act a much higher moral value. Morality is not simply a matter of fulfilling obligations, for such is done every day without the presence of a virtuous act. The determinants of morality are the nature of the act, its motive, and
circumstances; not just the motive alone. Therefore, the Stoics, in stressing virtue for virtue's sake, fell into this fallacy.

Furthermore, virtue and happiness cannot be identified. Virtue often demands self-control and self-sacrifice, at times even amounting to acts of extreme heroism. However admirable this may be, nothing painful or difficult is compatible with perfect happiness. Virtue can only be an indispensable means to perfect happiness, not happiness itself. The Stoic might be virtuous in every sense of the word, but when disaster or calamity is present, he could hardly admit being happy.

Man's passions also have an important role in the attainment of happiness. Without them, life would be wholly unnatural and deficient in meeting its practical needs. Therefore, they are not to be completely subdued, as the Stoics believed, but are only to be regulated in accordance with right reason. Passions, to be moral, must always, as Aristotle maintains, "observe the mean".

In saying that man could not be perfectly happy without virtue, the Stoics were stating only a half-truth. Virtue is essential to happiness, but only as a means to it. What they should have said was that without virtue, one could not be led to happiness.

The Scholastics agree with the Stoics in maintaining

that each of the various virtues is only a manifestation of one attitude of mind, which is in harmony with the divine plan. In addition, while distinguishing between the different virtues, the Stoics followed the teaching of Aristotle. For example, in matters of human actions, prudence was the virtue - its influence being prior to the practice of all the others. When considering desires and pleasures, temperance was the virtue; in dealing with social relations, justice; and when confronting dangers, courage. Therefore, in this respect, Stoicism's concept of virtue qua virtue cannot be condemned. Condemnation can only be applied to the meaning of virtue as influenced by the Stoic concept of the nature of man. Temperance, for them, sought the complete elimination of pleasure, because the law of nature, they thought, demanded complete self-control over the passions, which were held as evil because of their supposed hindrance of reason.

Conclusion of CHAPTER III

The philosophy of Stoicism has had not a little influence on both Christianity and Scholastic philosophy. In the early Church, its effects were felt in many questions of morality. One of the Church Fathers, St. Ambrose, a prolific writer on the subject, modeled much of his study after the works of Cicero, who expressly classified himself among the Stoics.51 Although Aristotle had a tremendous respect for the proper

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use of reason, which he held to be essential to the happy life, he completely lacked the ordering of free human acts to an objectively real, ultimate end as had the Stoics. He looked only to subjective self perfection, while the Stoics conceived of a deity, which was an immutable guide to moral action.\textsuperscript{52} Such a position had to be accepted by the early Church.

St. Thomas could have hardly avoided the influence of Stoicism, for he had studied much from the Church Fathers, who had kept the reasonable and valuable tenets of Stoicism. Even though the Stoic ideal of a life of reason undisturbed by the passions was kept by some of the early Christian Moralists, St. Thomas interpreted this to mean control of inordinate passion, thus further developing the Stoic doctrine rather than completely rejecting it.\textsuperscript{53} Of course, with regard to the important question of the ultimate end of human acts, St. Thomas went far beyond the cosmic reasoning of the Stoics. They did not know of personal immortality, much less the participation in divine and supernatural happiness. Nevertheless, the importance of the Stoic contribution toward the solution of man's end is indeed of great value.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., p. 27.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., p. 29.
CONCLUSION

The philosophers of ancient Greece had tried, as best they could, to solve the problem of man's end and how he could attain it. The greatest criticism which can be leveled against the hedonists and Stoics rests in their misunderstanding of human nature. As a result, they could not rise above the limits of natural ethics, thus leaving man to find his ultimate end in natural and temporal things.

In the rather crude philosophy of hedonism, the Cyrenaics and Epicureans sought the ideal in the possession of pleasure, sensual or otherwise. But, through the practice of the hedonistic virtues, it was realized that one never finds that pleasure so greatly desired, the result being the dissolution of their respective schools. Yet, we cannot condemn this the Greek's hedonistic contribution. Generally, it is spoken of as negative, but nevertheless important, for every school of philosophy contains some elements of truth.

The belief of pleasure as the end of life was revived in modern times by such philosophers as Herbert Spencer, J. S. Mill, and Jeremy Bentham. However, since they failed to take advantage of the experience and progress of the intervening centuries, they can be more quickly condemned for their teachings than can the ancient Greek philosophers. Virtue, as an intrinsically good means to happiness, was rejected, this being the natural consequence for the
importance given to pleasure in man's life.

The contribution of the Stoic philosophers was of a positive nature, for it approached the proper concepts of morality and moral human acts. The Stoic idea of virtue was acceptable for the most part, even though its intrinsic value was overemphasized. This again, however, was due to the lack of knowledge of the final end of man, and to the belief that man's end could be found in material things.

The philosophers we have studied were but a sample of the Greek Moralists who had effects on later moralists. In all cases, parts of their doctrines could be accepted and others could not. Also, not one was able to rise above the bounds of natural ethics nor the chains of the material world. St. Thomas very aptly expressed the reason when he maintained that an old woman, by faith, after the coming of Christ, would know more of true happiness and eternal life than any philosopher, before Christ, could with all his striving and labor.54

54. Ibid., p. 42.
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