

‘Proper Function’, Virtue, Happiness

Together with those of last week, these readings constitute the core of Stoic ethics. Next week we will explore the passions, and hence lived ethics in action.

- 59ABC 1. Looking at the definitions of ‘proper function’: what is the main point?
- 59 2.★ What is the source of ‘proper function’?
- 59D 3. Cicero describes a series of stages of ‘proper function’ (D3). How do they relate to the good?
- 59EQ 4. In what sense do we have more than one ‘proper function’?
- 61 5. What is a virtue (*ἀρετή*, *aretê*)?
- 61D–H 6.★ In what sense are virtues ‘sciences and expertises’ (*ἐπιστήμαι καὶ τέχναι*, *epistêmai kai technai*) (D1)? And what does it mean to say that they are ‘inter-entailing’ (61F1)?
- 61I–S 7.★ Try to bring together the passages. For instance, there is ‘nothing between virtue and vice’, yet there is moral progress; the virtuous cannot become vicious, yet virtually nobody is virtuous.
- 61T 8.★ In light of the other passages, explain the drowning simile that Plutarch reports.
- 63A 9. What are your thoughts about Zeno’s definition of happiness?
- 63 10. Explain the phrase ‘living in agreement’.

Background Information. (a) The term *kathêkon* (*καθήκον*) is difficult to translate. Cicero calls it *officium* in 59D 3, which is why Long and Sedley call it ‘proper function’. Another related term used is hence ‘duty’. It is something that falls on me to do, and hence *kathêkon* has some prescriptive power: if *x* is in my nature, then *x*-ing is what I ought to do. (b) As mentioned in 61H, the four primary virtues are prudence (*φρόνησις*, *phronêsis*), moderation (*σωφροσύνη*, *sôphrosunê*), justice (*δικαιοσύνη*, *dikaïosunê*), and courage (*ἀνδρεία*, *andreia*). This classification goes back to Plato. Socrates defended the view that the virtues are essentially the same (the ‘unity’ of the virtues). (c) In ancient philosophy, happiness (*εὐδαιμονία*, *eudaimonia*) is not a conscious feeling or mood. Rather, it denotes a more enduring state of well-being or flourishing. We are ‘happy’ insofar as we live genuinely worthwhile and fulfilled lives; when we not just live, but live well. So, the happy life is both an aspiration and an achievement, and in this sense an ‘end’.