

Aristotle's concept of courage

Philosophy



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One of the primary elements of a virtuous man is that he also be a courageous man. Despite the fact that Aristotle's ideas lie at their foundations, much of Aristotle's ideas are presented in relatively abstract terms, often difficult to understand and apply to everyday modern conceptions. However, studying Aristotle's concepts of what constitutes a courageous man can provide a great deal of insight regarding what he intended when he discussed the more abstract concepts of virtue. Aristotle dedicates three full chapters to the discussion and investigation of what constitutes a courageous man in his book, *Nicomachean Ethics*, which begins to demonstrate on a more concrete level what he intended in his discussions of the virtuous man.

Courage is a mean between fear and recklessness. All objects of fear are fearful things, and generally, they are evil also, so fear is defined as the expectation of evil. It is right and proper to fearsome evils, but wrong to fear those which are not within one's control as an agent. The truly courageous man is concerned only with the most terrible of evils—death—and in particular with death in the noblest of circumstances, war. The real test of courage is how a man behaves in the face of dangers that are to some extent within his control.

Like all human beings, the courageous man fears what is fearful, but he endures his fear in the right way and for the right reason because his aim is to act with nobility. It is possible to fear things to a greater or lesser extent than is warranted or to fear what is not really fearful, and these are the forms taken by the vices surrounding courage. Common usage has no name for excessive lack of fear, but the man who is afraid of nothing is either a madman or totally immune to pain. Excessive confidence is called

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recklessness. Excessive fear is cowardice. Cowards, reckless men, and courageous men are all concerned with the same situation but have different attitudes toward it.