

Epicurean Virtue

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We are often slandered by Stoics and the religious as devaluing the virtues, as though treating them as “mere means” strips them of beauty. Truly, the virtues are means. But this does not devalue them in the least. On the contrary, by understanding the Epicurean conception of virtue as inseparable from living pleasantly, we learn to love virtue more deeply than anyone, because of the beautiful life it gives us. Unlike the vanity of the religious who promotes the virtues out of fear, or the Stoics who sing an empty name of virtue unconnected to the beautiful life they give, we Epicureans sing the song of virtue triumphantly as I wish to show.

So allow me to prove the slander wrong by speaking poetically, piously, and with utmost gratitude toward the virtues. To prove that the elegant praise of virtues do not belong only to the Stoics or the religious. It belongs to us as well. It is my hope that this clarifies our position and inspires delight in the teachings of Epicurus, even among those not yet come to the philosophy.

With that said, let us turn to the virtues and how they are necessary for living pleasantly.

Wisdom: The crown of the virtues and the source of every other virtue. Prudence teaches us how to choose and avoid the fine art of living, arming us with knowledge of every other virtue and guiding us toward a life full of pleasure. It shows us that the gods present no fear, death no worries, that the good is easy to obtain, and what is terrible is easy to endure. Without prudence, pleasure cannot be secured.

Honor: The gentle grace that guides us to life's pleasures. Honor is the wisdom of conducting oneself in a way that avoids needless offense and easily earns respect. We know that we cannot please everyone, only a fool would think this, but we by respecting reasonable customs and dignity of others, we can easily secure the goodwill and affection of our neighbors, a secure means of pleasure. In doing so, we may even soften hostility from fools and people filled with hatred, turning former rivals into allies through simple consideration and respect.

Justice: The ground beneath our feet, it gives us security from other men, allowing us to operate life free of anxiety, for injustice pollutes the mind, if not by the actual penalties of the law, than always by the fear of discovery, the association with vicious people we don't trust, the sacrifice of things that truly matter, the just hatred of our fellow men, and the guilty conscious stemming from acts of injustice.

Courage: The sword against the fears of pain and death. Courage allows us to endure temporary pain for greater pleasure. It strengthens us to act rightly under threat and even, if necessary, to die for a friend, since death itself is no evil, while a life preserved at the cost of betrayal is poisoned by distrust and inner turmoil. Courage destroys the fear of everlasting

torment — for none exists. It dissolves the terror of death, which is nothing to us. It casts down the image of angry gods and opens the way to the greatest pleasures by removing fear at its root.

Temperance: The greatest armor of everlasting pleasure in life, it ensures we are safeguarded from our own follies by means of true reason, telling us to not choose pleasures which lead to pains many times worse than the pleasure they bring. Advising us against those vain and groundless desires for limitless wealth, fame, or power, and those natural desires that are hard to get or likely to cause pain.

Self-Sufficiency: Freedom itself, showing how easily we can resist the harm of relying on the unstable force of fortune, and reminding us how easy it is to procure that which is acquired by nature. Showing us how easy it is to free ourselves from the vain and groundless desires which stretch on to infinity and making even the poor man feel wealthy in every way that matters.

Making Friends: Of all that wisdom provides for living one's entire life in happiness, the greatest by far is friendship. Friendship gives affection, security in danger, shared joy, and trust in adversity. It is among the greatest goods life offers. We must speak well of our friends, present or absent. Show gratitude in word and deed. Not reduce friendship to a transaction, nor pretend we expect nothing in return for mutual goodwill and hope strengthens the bond and thus life itself. For wisdom shows us that a poisoned friendship poisons life itself. But nothing enhances life more than a faithful friendship.

Piety: Far from the slander that Epicurus was a god-hating atheist, he taught a purified reverence. A proper conception of the gods, whether as ideals formed in the mind or as blessed beings existing beyond us, does not inspire fear. It inspires admiration of blessedness. The gods, rightly understood, are models of tranquility and immortality. They do not threaten. They do not punish. They show us what blessed existence looks like and how it is to get even with a mortal life. Truly I declare, with bread and water, friendship and wisdom, we may rival even the gods in happiness.

Frank Speech: How can we hope to improve ourselves and our friends unless we're willing to criticize and be criticized in open and free speech? We need the sympathy of our friends to sometimes save us from our faults and we need to show sympathy to our friends to better improve them. We must show patience, a proper understanding of what truly matters and what does not, and a understanding of our own faults as well as those of our friends in open and respectful dialogue to truly achieve the peaks of friendship and security.

Magnanimity: Tell me, how can we hate one who makes mistakes, when we know that we ourselves make mistakes? Magnanimity teaches forgiveness where forgiveness is deserved. It prevents punishments disproportionate to the crime. It transforms enemies into friends, earns goodwill and affection, and frees us from empty anger — that corrosion of the soul which disturbs and destroys what we most value. Resentment disturbs. Forgiveness restores peace.

Philanthropy: Unless we commit to helping others, we cannot reap the rewards of their goodwill. Thoughtful concern expands our circle of friends, enhancing both security and affection. A life of greed breeds righteous contempt. A life of generosity earns righteous respect. Enhancing our life immensely with simple acts of charity, courtesy, and love of mankind.

Faith: The radical skeptic, who rejects trust in life itself, is left paralyzed and confused. We must say, without some firm trust, life collapses into endless doubt, a fate worse than even a person who fears the Gods, since at least they have hope of deliverance. Rather we must have confidence to navigate life with clarity, confidence that we can have knowledge, that we can control our own destiny and some actions are up to us, that our senses reveal reality as it appears; that the gods do not punish, that death brings no suffering; that the good is easy to get and the evil to endure, that our friends are trustworthy, and that wisdom steadies us in misfortune. Without faith, there is paralysis. With it, there is peace.

Hope for the Future: Without hope, the present becomes bitter. Even if no deliverance from misfortune ever comes before death, the very act of hoping preserves sweetness in the present. Hope is defiance against despair. Even hope for goods after one's death can be a blessing, as seen in Epicurus' will, where he provided for the preservation of his community of friends, giving him joy on his last days. To prove the power of hope, tell me, who would you rather be at your final moment? One who still anticipates good and is delighted even in the worst misfortunes with anticipation of the future, or one who believes pleasure has forever passed them by? Hope strengthens the present. And if deliverance does come, hope is vindicated all the more.

Delight in the Past: Memory of past goods gives us our greatest guardianship against misfortunes. Another great act of defiance whenever life or men do us wrong. One should not look at the past with fear but rather take delight in the many pleasures we have had in life, every feeling of laughter, excitement, hope, joy, friendship, and affection we have felt. Epicurus himself proved this as he was dying painfully from kidney stones, he wrote that these pains, though extreme, were offset his past delight in his conversations with his friends. Delight in the past shows us not to feel dismay at the prospect of the missing future goods, but rather delight in all the goods of life that we did have, and even when death finally comes, go to the grave with a triumphant song that we have lived well.

Enjoyment of the Present: Yet none of this matters if we cannot enjoy the present. For just as life is diminished not only by hopelessness about the future or regret about the past, is it also poisoned by the failure to savor what is here. Wisdom teaches the good news of life, no one is too young, too old, too broken, or too imperfect to live a good life. Showing us that happiness is never out of season. Delight in the past. Hope for the future. But above all, enjoy the present.

Hope people enjoy this piece! For me the pleasure i got just from writing is enough for me, but if others enjoy it, all the better. Please never stop feeling delight in the simple art of living offered by Epicurean philosophy. For someone who has these virtues and the pleasures they

bring is like a god walking among men."