

# The Importance Of The Perfect Not Being Allowed To Be The Enemy of The Good

Post by "Cassius" of May 18, 2023 at 10:30 AM

This is a thread specifically devoted to "perfect as the enemy of the good." Seems to me this has a lot of application in Epicurean decisionmaking, although this thread stems from the discussion of [Hegesias the Death Persuader](#). Some apparently assert that the perfect "is" the enemy of the good, but others react that we cannot allow this to be accepted. While the two things may not be the same, having the imperfect is superior to taking positions or actions that never allow us to obtain the perfect. Absence of pain may be desirable in the abstract, but for humans the only way to achieve total freedom from pain is death, and the dead can experience neither pleasure nor pain, so obsessing on total absence of pain is self-defeating for humans. That's why I think it is unfair to Epicurus to interpret him as doing so, and that when he "seems" to do so he is engaged in philosophical debate about competing philosophic definitions, not stating that we should forgo the pleasures of life in order to make sure we never experience pain.

This is the current 5/18/23 content of the [Wikipedia page](#):

**Perfect is the enemy of good** is an [aphorism](#) which means insistence on perfection often prevents implementation of good improvements. The [Pareto principle](#) or 80–20 rule explains this numerically. For example, it commonly takes 20% of the full time to complete 80% of a task while to complete the last 20% of a task takes 80% of the effort.<sup>[1]</sup> Achieving absolute [perfection](#) may be impossible and so, as increasing effort results in [diminishing returns](#), further activity becomes increasingly inefficient.

## Origin[[edit](#)]

In the English-speaking world the aphorism is commonly attributed to [Voltaire](#), who quoted an Italian [proverb](#) in his [Questions sur l'Encyclopédie](#) <sup>[fr]</sup> in 1770: "*Il meglio è l'inimico del bene*".<sup>[2]</sup> It subsequently appeared in his [moral](#) poem, [La Béguéule](#), which starts<sup>[3]</sup>

Quote

*Dans ses écrits, un sage Italien  
Dit que le mieux est l'ennemi du bien.*

(In his writings, a wise Italian  
says that the best is the enemy of the good)

Previously, around 1726, in his [Pensées](#), [Montesquieu](#) wrote "*Le mieux est le mortel ennemi du bien*" (The best is the mortal enemy of the good).[\[4\]](#)

## Antecedents[\[edit\]](#)

[Aristotle](#) and other classical philosophers propounded the principle of the [golden mean](#) which counsels against [extremism](#) in general.[\[5\]](#)

Its sense in English literature can be traced back to [Shakespeare](#),[\[6\]](#) In his tragedy, *King Lear* (1606), the [Duke of Albany](#) warns of "striving to better, oft we mar what's well" and in [Sonnet 103](#):

Quote

Were it not sinful then, striving to mend,  
To mar the subject that before was well?

## Variations[\[edit\]](#)

The 1893 *Dictionary of Quotations from Ancient and Modern, English and Foreign Sources* lists a similar proverb, which it claims is of [Chinese](#) provenance: "Better a [diamond](#) with a flaw than a pebble without one."

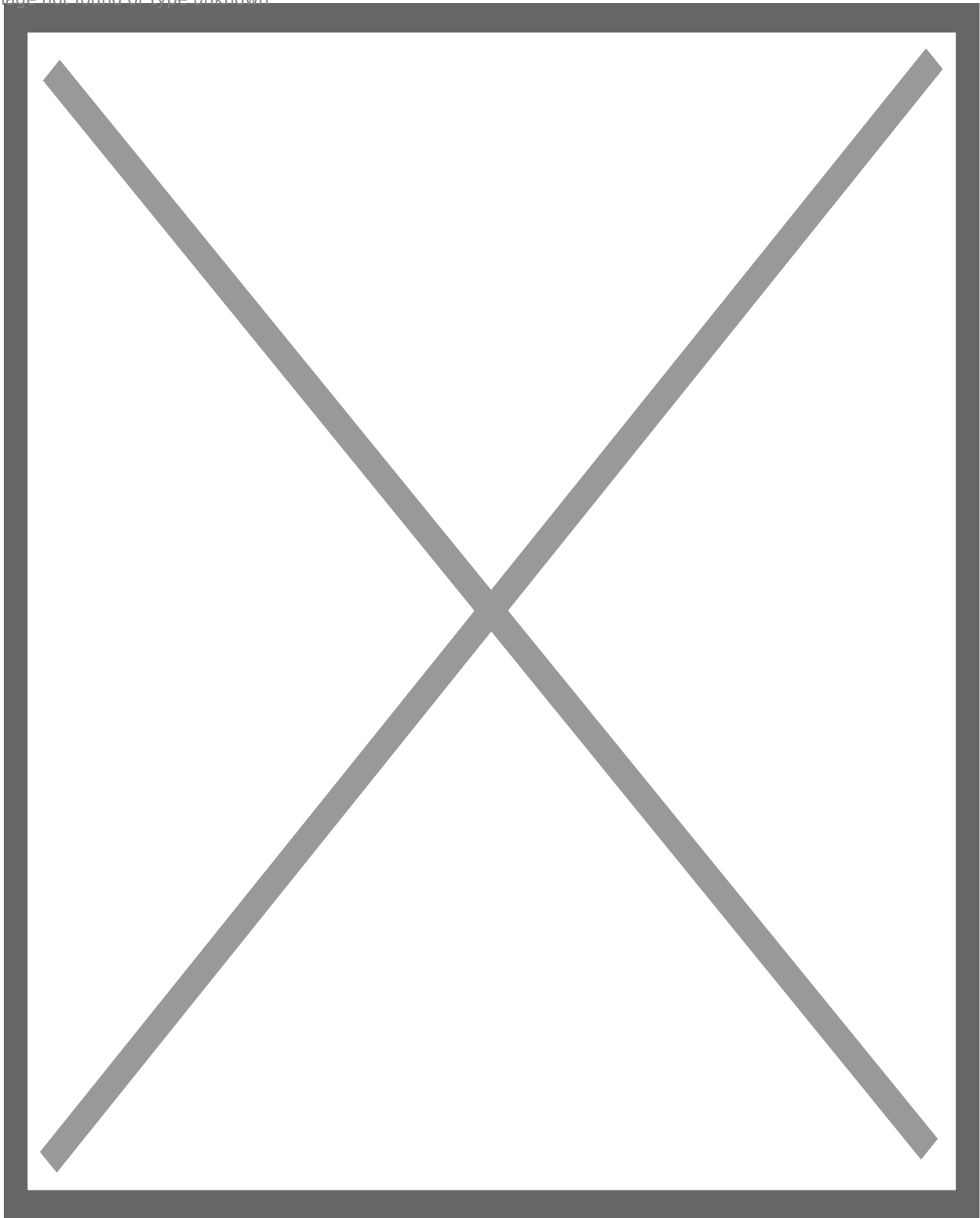
More recent applications include [Robert Watson-Watt](#) propounding a "cult of the imperfect", which he stated as "Give them the third best to go on with; the second best comes too late, the best never comes";[\[7\]](#) economist [George Stigler](#)'s assertion that "If you never miss a plane, you're spending too much time at the airport";[\[8\]](#)[\[9\]](#) and, in

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**Post by “Cassius” of May 18, 2023 at 11:17 AM**

Supportive of the main point:

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### [Why Perfect Is The Enemy Of Good](#)

Why obsession with perfection can paralyze.

[www.psychologytoday.com](http://www.psychologytoday.com)

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3072-the-importance-of-the-perfect-not-being-allowed-to-be-the-enemy-of-the-good/>

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## Post by “Cassius” of May 18, 2023 at 11:23 AM

Looks to me too like this section of the following article is interesting, however I am not comfortable with the "better" part in the title or the "modest satisfaction." near the end.

Sounds to me this is parallel to where Diogenes Laertius says Epicurus valued *\*both\** pleasures of rest and of action, and I would think the better approach is just to be aware of the differences and how the choice between one vs the other is contextual and requires prudence. Slow mental pleasures might not be what you want when you're resting on a railroad track and a train is approaching, while at other times the roller coaster ride really isn't a good idea when the ride isn't being well maintained and the chance of accident is high. And as to the "modest satisfaction" it's better just to realize that pleasure comes in many packages both mental and physical.

But thinking about these three bullet points makes sense.

### Satisfaction is better than exhilaration.

We've been conditioned to think that the right combination of actions will achieve a flash of exhilaration. When we happen upon the *perfect* marketing strategy, we expect a rush of joy. When we discover the best business for us to start, we're flooded with an electric sensation of excitement.

This thrill-seeking mentality is yet another symptom of the good killing the perfect. It's important to understand that the perfect-being-the-enemy-of-the-good can skew aspects of our daily lives, like those listed above. But the concept can impose even more damage, skewing our expectations even as it cripples our actions. So, try the following moves:

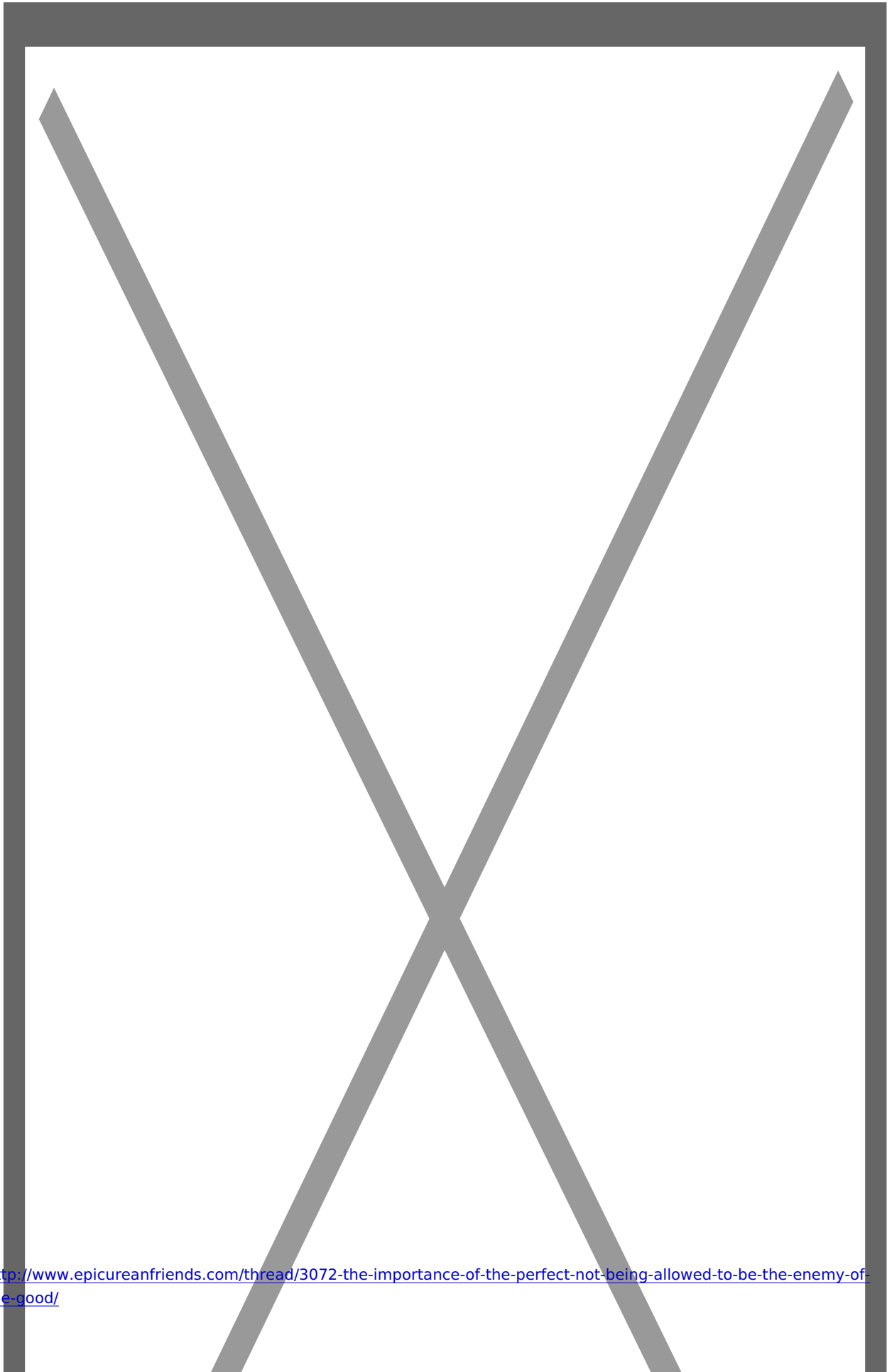
- **Rather than expecting *aha* moments**, prepare yourself for gradual improvement.
- **Rather than risking sudden leaps in ability, skill, or progress**, expect marginal improvement over periods of time.
- **Rather than waiting for a rush of exhilaration**, expect modest satisfaction over time.

It's good to condition ourselves for success. We can do this by preparing for it, visioning it, pursuing it, seeking it and wanting it. But we can't expect our success to explode like the finale in a Fourth of July fireworks display.

Instead, success is more likely to be gradual. It may feel good, but it won't necessarily feel perfect. Success arrives as a sense of satisfaction, not a sudden thrill.



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<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3072-the-importance-of-the-perfect-not-being-allowed-to-be-the-enemy-of-the-good/>

[Your Secret Mental Weapon: 'Don't Let the Perfect Be the Enemy of the Good' | Entrepreneur](#)

Now, get busy accepting good enough as a great place to start.

[www.entrepreneur.com](http://www.entrepreneur.com)

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of May 18, 2023 at 1:26 PM**

Isn't "perfect" more along the lines of a Platonic ideal than an actionable concept? What is the most perfect iteration of any given thing? If you're comparing several things you can determine one to be the most perfect based on the criteria you select. Beyond that, anything can always be more perfect. But how would you define "Perfect"? It's much like "Quality" in [Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance](#).

As a practical matter, "perfect" can be used as a label. But that varies from person to person, from life stage to life stage, from context to context.

(I haven't read any of the above attachments, so apologies if I'm just repeating something said elsewhere.)

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### **Post by “Cassius” of May 18, 2023 at 1:43 PM**

Yes I think that's the point.

And it may also be exactly the same point as with the "greatest good" which exists only in Platonic ideal status.

Many of our conversations may boil down to exactly that point, and maybe that's exactly why Epicurus recommended against walking around obsessing over the meaning of "good."

It is pretty mind-boggling to think that so much controversy might in reality be so simple to unravel.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of May 18, 2023 at 1:51 PM**

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3072-the-importance-of-the-perfect-not-being-allowed-to-be-the-enemy-of-the-good/>

The Greeks of Italy, on the contrary, were not greatly interested in physical change or in natural processes. They were addicted to the sitting posture. In art they are represented as comfortably seated with a slender rod or radius in the hand, with which they draw figures on a sanded floor. Counters and writing tablets were also at hand. The advances made by them were in the domains of geometry and arithmetic and these advances were so remarkable as to capture the imagination of the contemporary world and to overshadow for a time the progress which had been made by their Ionian brethren. Geometry in particular, though itself a positivistic study, inspired in the minds of men a new movement that was genuinely romantic.

I think closely related:

It was the romantic aspect of the new knowledge that captivated Plato, who was no more than up-to-date as a mathematician himself. In geometry he seemed to see absolute reason contemplating absolute truth, perfect precision of concept joined with finality of demonstration.

He began to transfer the precise concepts of geometry to ethics and politics just as modern thinkers transferred the concepts of biological evolution to history and sociology. Especially enticing was the concept which we know as definition. This was a creation of the geometers; they created it by defining straight lines, equilateral triangles, and other regular figures. If these can be defined, Plato tacitly reasoned, why not also justice, piety, temperance, and other virtues? This is reasoning by analogy, one of the trickiest of logical procedures. It holds good only between sets of true similars. Virtues and triangles are not true similars. It does not follow, therefore, because equilateral triangles can be precisely defined, that justice can be defined in the same way. Modern jurists warn against defining justice; it is what the court says it is from time to time.

The deceptiveness of **analogy**, however, does not prevent it from flourishing, and Plato committed himself to the use of it unreservedly. In this he was abetted by a happy coincidence. The method of analysis by question and answer, developed by Socrates recently before, com-

Note: This kind of reference to Italians and Ionians always confuses me. I am not sure whether I am misreading DeWitt's labels here or he is talking colloquially, or what, because according to Laertius Epicurus is listed with the Italians and Plato with the Ionians. Then again Aristotle is an Ionian and he disagreed a lot with Plato. But those labels aren't really relevant to the current discussion.

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**Post by "Don" of May 18, 2023 at 11:46 PM**

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

And it may also be exactly the same point as with the "greatest good" which exists only in Platonic ideal status.

No. No, no, no.

"The greatest good" did not only exist in "Platonic ideal status." Epicurus was more than happy to discuss - to proclaim - "the greatest good" on the same terms as his rivals and predecessors but his declaration was rooted in the real world of experience, of feeling. Epicurus declared that The Good was not some ethereal ideal form. It was pleasure, the feeling of pleasure.

The word in ancient Greek that Aristotle uses, that they all use when talking about "The Good," is ταγαθον (tagathon). ταγαθον literally means "The Good Thing" or just "The Good." That is the exact word Epicurus uses when saying:

### Quote

[It is observed too that in his treatise *On the Ethical End* (Περὶ τέλους Peri telous/telos) he writes in these terms:] "I know not how to conceive **the good (τάγαθόν)**, apart from the pleasures of taste, sexual pleasures, the pleasures of sound and the pleasures of beautiful form."

"Οὐ γὰρ ἔγωγε ἔχω τί νοήσω **τάγαθόν**, ἀφαιρῶν μὲν τὰς διὰ χυλῶν ἡδονάς, ἀφαιρῶν δὲ τὰς δι' ἀφροδισίων καὶ τὰς δι' ἀκροαμάτων καὶ τὰς διὰ μορφῆς."

The "greatest good" is the reason - the final reason, the end reason, the goal, the limit, the telos - of why we do what we do. It is the reason left at the top of the heap after we answer every other question "Why do you do what you do?" The "greatest good" is that toward which every other good thing aims.

Epicurus also used the word in one of Cassius' favorite sayings:

*Like unto this is that of Epicurus, where he saith: **The very nature of The Good** (τὴν **τάγαθοῦ φύσιν**) arises from the escaping of bad, and a man's recollecting, considering, and rejoicing within himself that this hath befallen him. For what occasions transcending joy (he saith) is some great impending evil escaped; and in this lies the very nature and essence of "good" (ἀγαθοῦ), if a man attain unto it aright, and contain himself when he hath done, and not ramble and prate idly about "good" (ἀγαθοῦ). ([Source](#) with my edits)*

τάγαθόν is also the word used by Philodemus and/or the later Epicureans in the Tetrapharmakos for "The Good (τάγαθόν) is easy to obtain."

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

maybe that's exactly why Epicurus recommended against walking around obsessing over the meaning of "good."

He lampooned the Peripatetics (Aristotle's school who "strolled around") for the kind of circular arguments and hair-splitting about what "good" means like Aristotle displays in his *Nichomachean Ethics*. The Epicureans, starting from Epicurus himself, felt that they had answered the question "what is αγαθον 'The Good'?" once and for all. They answered "What is the good thing at which all other good things and our actions aims?" Epicurus and the Epicureans all used that word αγαθον deliberately and purposefully to drive the point home that they had answered that question decisively, finally, and there was no need - had never been a need! - to "stroll around endlessly prattling on" about what "good" meant. You can FEEL The Good. It's right here, now, in our bodies and our minds. All good things point to The Good Thing which is pleasure. Pleasure is the only thing good in and of itself. We do all our actions for it, at their root. Keep asking "Why?" and the final answer, the final good thing at the root of it all is pleasure.

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## Post by "Cassius" of May 19, 2023 at 6:42 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

No. No, no, no.

Once again as I see it we have a perspective issue, in which I placed "greatest good" in scare quotes in extension of the way that Godfrey and I are discussing it as an ideal form, while you also rightfully bring back the point that there is another perspective in human feeling where it is essential and vital that we do consider it to be real.

My view is that \*both\* observations have to be made (the "greatest good" does not exist as an ideal form but does exist as a feeling which is our guide), and we have to be flexible enough to keep both in mind at the same time. Only then can we both understand where Plato and friends go wrong, while at the same time understand where Epicurus gets it right.

If we don't understand that \*both\* perspectives are important for us to understand then I don't think we ever get on top of these issues with enough confidence to deal with the Platonic arguments that undercut [Philebus](#) and the whole attack against "pleasure" as the greatest good. From the ideal perspective we have to see that Platonically the "greatest good" doesn't exist any more than does a line with no width, but from the real world perspective it does exist in our focusing of our mind on an intelligible guide.

I would like to think that we could dispense with this argument and simply talk about pleasure in "realistic" terms, but we don't live in such a world and given the way it has developed for 2000 years we - at least we in our lifetimes - in all likelihood never will.

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### Post by "Eikadistes" of May 19, 2023 at 8:42 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

[Quote from Don](#)

No. No, no, no.

My view is that \*both\* observations have to be made (the "greatest good" does not exist as an ideal form but does exist as a feeling which is our guide), and we have to be flexible enough to keep both in mind at the same time. Only then can we both understand where Plato and friends go wrong, while at the same time understand where Epicurus gets it right.

I think an analogue can be found in the discussion about Epicurean theology on Facebook (i.e. *what is the proper descriptor for Epicurean theology?* In which case, I proposed that "anti-creationist polytheism" might fit the bill).

Simply invoking the word "the God(s)" immediately invokes Idealistic notions. One responder to the Facebook post seemed to have been stuck on that point, that "the God(s)" necessarily indicates ideas like "Creation", "Fate", and "Magic". In fact, Epicurus used ΘΕΟΣ without implying anything related to the traditional burden of being a member of a cosmic government or in being a cosmic shepherd to sheep on the other side of the galaxy.

ΤΑΓΑΘΟΝ seems to have a similar application, in that the word popularly connotes a *perfect, transcendental principle*, but also literally refers to that *objects that create pleasurable feelings, or pleasure* itself.

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### Post by "Cassius" of May 19, 2023 at 9:04 AM

[Quote from Nate](#)

ΤΑΓΑΘΟΝ seems to have a similar application, in that the word popularly connotes a perfect, transcendental principle, but also literally refers to that objects that create pleasurable feelings, or pleasure itself.

Yep. And how do you fight against thousands of years of false premises in the meaning of "gods" or "good" or "the end" or any of such terms -- it's very frustrating but a conversation that has to be held.

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### Post by “Don” of May 19, 2023 at 9:33 AM

#### [Quote from Nate](#)

ΤΑΓΑΘΟΝ seems to have a similar application, in that the word popularly connotes a perfect, transcendental principle, but also literally refers to that objects that create pleasurable feelings, or pleasure itself.

I'm not sure if I agree with the definition there.

Nicomachean Ethics starts out with:

“Every art and every investigation, and likewise every practical pursuit or undertaking, seems to aim at some good: hence it has been well said that the Good is That at which all things aim.”

This sets up the difference between “some/a good thing” ἀγαθοῦ and The Good Thing τἀγαθόν.

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### Post by “Pacatus” of May 21, 2023 at 5:27 PM

#### [Quote from Don](#)

You can FEEL The Good. It's right here, now, in our bodies and our minds.



Ah! That dovetails with Cassius’ response to my post in the Pleasure vs Pain thread.

Aristotle, as I recall, said that the highest good is *eudaimonia* (which I render as happy well-being). But what is a eudaimonic life but one that is the most pleasurable/pleasant (including ataraxia)? Eudaimonia is just that - not some additional state to which pleasure and pleasantness lead (contra Aristotle, I think).

And it is an affair of pathe ...

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### **Post by "Pacatus" of May 21, 2023 at 5:58 PM**

I want to add that, for much of my life, I let the (unattainable) "perfect" both keep me from progressing from simple good to good - and be the condemnatory judge of wherever I happened to be in my life's course. Never "good enough" - in the kind of Puritan/Kantian/Stoical milieu I had absorbed.

I had "good" programming for that in my early and formative years. And I compulsively (co-dependently) attached myself to people who would re-enforce/abuse/manipulate that tendency.

It was only in my 40s that (with the help of new friends) I was able to begin the process of extricating myself from that psychological morass. But it still lurks in my subconscious, rearing its head on occasion (especially in occasional nightmares).

Epicurus - after long searching in various spiritual and philosophical traditions (some helpful along the way) - gives me a sturdy base from which to examine and pragmatically address those tendencies. And that is why I am grateful to everyone on this site (even as I stumble along).

Maybe some of the newcomers here will not have to endure the years that I did.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of March 1, 2024 at 5:16 PM**

I understand that Kalosyni may make this topic a part of our "First Monday\*" zoom for 3/4/24.

In addition to what has already been stated in the thread, I wonder if people can think of passages from the main Epicurean texts which support the point.

After thinking for a while without coming up with anything, I wonder if we should not include the "Romantic Intoxication" passage in Lucretius Book 4 as almost exactly on point. Is not a

major part of that passage the goal of showing that looking for a "perfect" romantic partner can get in the way of finding a "good" romantic partner?

Anyone agree or disagree with that, or have other suggestions of passages that illustrate the point?

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of March 2, 2024 at 9:57 AM**

This excerpt from the wall of Diogenes of Oenoanda may somewhat pertain to the idea of "not letting the perfect be the enemy of the good":

#### Quote

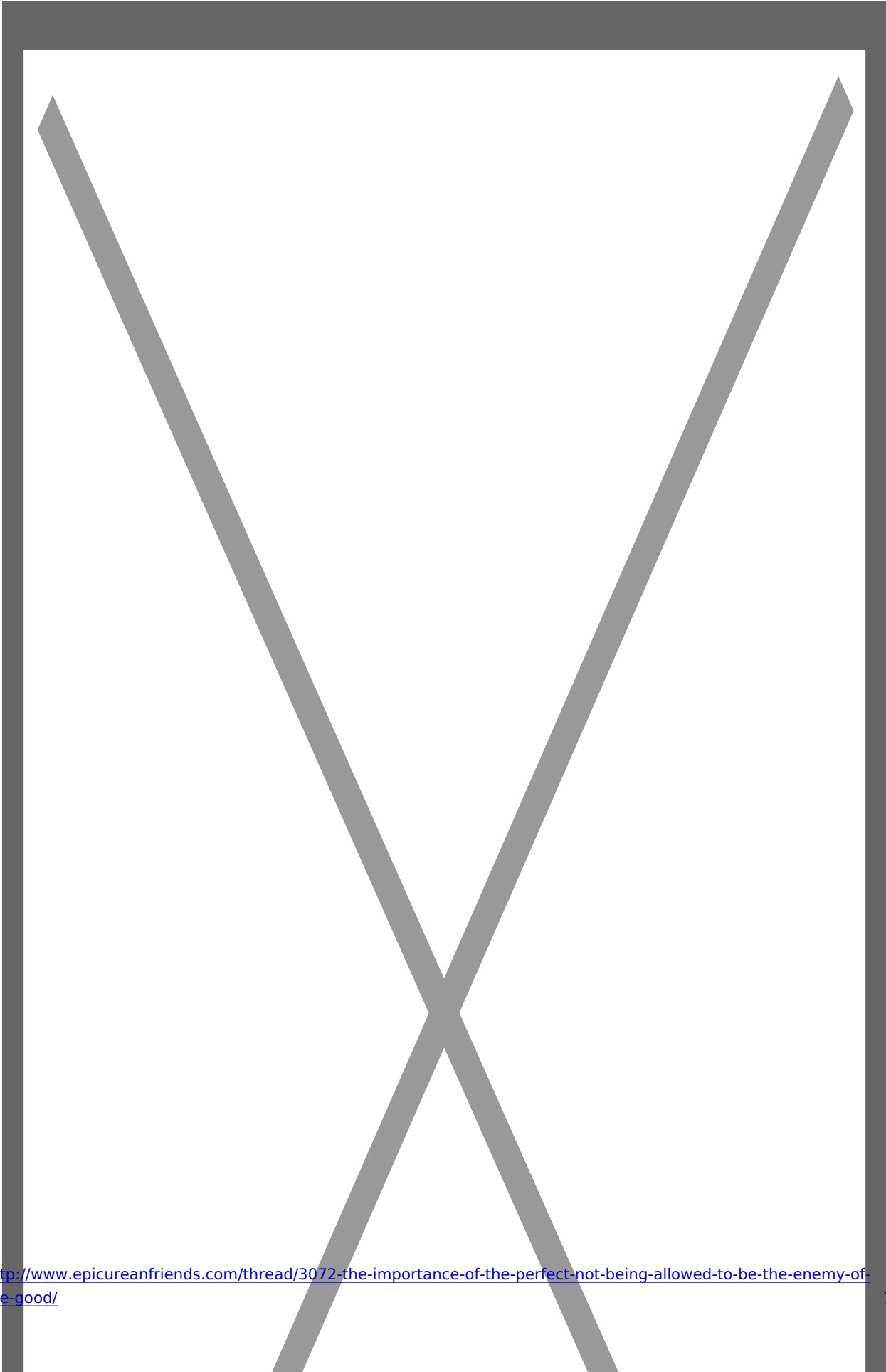
If, gentlemen, the point at issue between these people and us involved inquiry into «what is the means of happiness?» and they wanted to say «the virtues» (which would actually be true), it would be unnecessary to take any other step than to agree with them about this, without more ado. But since, as I say, the issue is not «what is the means of happiness?» but «what is happiness and what is the ultimate goal of our nature?», I say both now and always, shouting out loudly to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that pleasure is the end of the best mode of life, while the virtues, which are inopportunately messed about by these people (being transferred from the place of the means to that of the end), are in no way an end, but the means to the end.

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of March 2, 2024 at 10:41 AM**

A slightly similar yet different phrase: "Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater":

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[Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater - Wikipedia](#)

en.m.wikipedia.org

One place in which we "don't throw the baby out with the bathwater" is in *De Rerum Natura* which we know has some places with scientifically incorrect causations, but yet there still are many good and beneficial aspects to Lucretius' writing.

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## Post by "Cassius" of March 2, 2024 at 10:48 AM

From the wikipedia entry -- I really like the *second* suggestion as much or more than the first, although they are both about the same in the end.

"**Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater**" is an [idiomatic](#) expression for an avoidable error in which something good or of value is eliminated when trying to get rid of something unwanted. [\[1\]](#)[\[2\]](#)[\[3\]](#)

[170px-Murner Narrenbeschwörung.kind.jpg](#)

Earliest record of the phrase from *Narrenbeschwörung* (*Appeal to Fools*) by [Thomas Murner](#), 1512

*A slightly different explanation suggests this flexible catchphrase has to do with discarding the essential while retaining the superfluous because of excessive zeal.*

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## Post by "Cassius" of March 2, 2024 at 10:54 AM

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

One place in which we "don't throw the baby out with the bathwater" is in *De Rerum Natura* which we know has some places with scientifically incorrect causations, but yet there still are many good and beneficial aspects to Lucretius' writing.

Yes that's a huge point too, and applies not only to Lucretius but to all of Epicurus. People who can't separate the baby from the bathwater end up passing through Epicurean philosophy quickly, and the harder time they have seeing what's important from what is not, the faster they pass through and move on to something else.

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<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3072-the-importance-of-the-perfect-not-being-allowed-to-be-the-enemy-of-the-good/>

## Post by “Kalosyni” of March 5, 2024 at 9:48 AM

This came up very briefly in last night's Zoom meeting (here is a full quote):

"It is not good to desire what is impossible, and to endeavour to enunciate a uniform theory about everything; accordingly, we ought not here to adopt the method, which we have followed in our researches into Ethics, or in the solution of the problems of natural philosophy." - Letter to Pythocles, Yonge translation

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## Post by “Pacatus” of March 5, 2024 at 4:32 PM

I haven't gone back through the thread, so I might be rehashing a bit. My last impression was that “perfect” is generally taken as an absolute abstract ideal, an attachment to which could easily deter one from pragmatically seeking the attainable “merely good” or “good enough.” But then I recalled the words from the preamble to the U.S. Constitution: “in order to form a **more perfect** union.” It turns out that “perfect” has not necessarily been confined to that absolute sense –

“A few usage guides still object to the use of comparison words such as *more*, *most*, *nearly*, *almost*, and *rather* with perfect on the grounds that perfect describes an absolute, yes-or-no condition that cannot logically be said to exist in varying degrees. The English language has never agreed to this limitation. Since its earliest use in the 13th century, perfect has, like almost all adjectives, been compared, first in the now obsolete forms *perfecter* and *perfectest*, and more recently with *more*, *most*, and similar comparison words: *the most perfect arrangement of color and line imaginable*. Perfect is compared in most of its general senses in all varieties of speech and writing. After all, one of the objectives of the writers of the U.S. Constitution was ‘to form a more perfect union.’” <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/perfecter>

And : <https://strategiesforparents.com/is-it-correct-...-perfect-union/>

And Wiktionary includes the understanding of “excellent” for the Latin “perfectus”:  
<https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/perfectus#Latin>. Similarly from  
<https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=perfect>.

Just for interest ... 😊 😞

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## Post by “Cassius” of March 5, 2024 at 4:47 PM

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3072-the-importance-of-the-perfect-not-being-allowed-to-be-the-enemy-of-the-good/>

If Jefferson had written the constitution I bet he wouldn't have made that grammatical slip! 😊

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### Post by “Don” of March 5, 2024 at 8:42 PM

#### [Quote from Wikipedia](#)

To form a more perfect Union

The phrase "to form a more perfect Union" has been construed as referring to the shift to the Constitution from the Articles of Confederation. The contemporaneous meaning of the word "perfect" was complete, finished, fully informed, confident, or certain. The phrase has been interpreted in various ways throughout history based on the context of the times. For example, shortly after the Civil War and the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment, the Supreme Court said that the "Union" was made "more perfect" by the creation of a federal government with enough power to act directly upon citizens, rather than a government with narrowly limited power that could act on citizens only indirectly through the states, e.g., by imposing taxes. Also, the institution was created as a government over the States and people, not an agreement (union) between the States.

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### Post by “Martin” of March 6, 2024 at 4:49 AM

The German translation "perfekt" has "perfekter" and "perfektester" and similar words as grammatically correct comparison forms but I do not recall any actual usage of those forms.

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### Post by “Cassius” of March 6, 2024 at 5:26 AM

I seem to recall from the dim past of my schooling that I was taught that the "proper" forms are "more *nearly* perfect" and "most *nearly* perfect" leading up to *perfect* itself.

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## Post by “Don” of March 6, 2024 at 7:43 AM

People, were talking the late 1700s here. Grammar is not what it used to be.

The whole idea with that phrase was that the Constitution would be "closer to being finished, more complete, more fully formed" than the wonky, loosey-goosey Articles of Confederation.

The Constitution, in the eyes of the Framers, made the United States of America closer to a real country rather than a conglomeration of individual states (ie, their own countries).

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## Post by “Pacatus” of March 7, 2024 at 2:46 PM

### [Quote from Don](#)

People, were talking the late 1700s here. Grammar is not what it used to be.

Absolutely. Not to flog a trivial point to death, but Latin also has/had comparative and superlative forms of *perfectus*:

<https://www.latin-is-simple.com/en/vocabulary/adjective/6667/?h=perfectus>

[perfectus - Wiktionary, the free dictionary](#)

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## Post by “Cassius” of May 2, 2025 at 6:39 AM

Tullius comes to the aid of the "perfect is not the enemy of the good" camp in our upcoming Lucretius Today episode 279. In discussing life span, he says at [Tusculan Disputations 1:39](#)

### Quote

Men judge better in other things, and allow a part to be preferable to none; why do they not admit the same estimate in life?

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3072-the-importance-of-the-perfect-not-being-allowed-to-be-the-enemy-of-the-good/>

At id quidem in ceteris rebus melius putatur, aliquam partem quam nullam attingere: cur in vita secus ?

OK more like ""But indeed in other matters, it is considered better to achieve some part than none at all: why is it different in life?"

It looks like the placement of the comma is questionable and ought to be deleted or moved:

At id quidem in ceteris rebus, melius putatur aliquam partem quam nullam attingere: cur in vita secus ?

So the key Latin phrase is: melius putatur aliquam partem quam nullam attingere

*better it is thought a large part, than none, to be achieved.*

It also looks like both Yonge and Hicks are ignoring the aliquam and just saying "a part" - when the aliquam seems to indicate "a *large* part."

Here's nodictionaries.com:

aliquam partem quam nullam attingere, cur in vita secus ?

**aliquam** largely, to a large extent, a lot of

**nullus, nulla, nullum (gen -ius)** no; none, not any

**attingo, attingere, attingi, attingere** touch, touch/border on; reach, arrive at, achieve; mention briefly; belong to

**cur** why, wherefore; for what reason/purpose?; on account of which?; because

**vita, vitae** life, career, livelihood; mode of life

**secus** otherwise; differently, in another way; contrary to what is right/expected

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## Post by "Bryan" of May 2, 2025 at 9:59 AM

The "**aliquam**" from your list is the adverb "largely," --- which is not that common -- but in this sentence it is a version of **aliquis** and means "some."

"It is thought better to obtain some part rather than none [at all]."

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### Post by "Cassius" of May 2, 2025 at 10:47 AM

Why do you use "some" instead of "largely"?

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### Post by "Bryan" of May 2, 2025 at 11:44 AM

In the sentence we are looking at **aliquam** is an adjective, from **aliquis** and usually means "some."

*Less common is the adverbial use of **aliquam**, and only there does it mean "somewhat, to some degree" which comes close to "largely."*

<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=aliquis&la=la#lexicon>

"**aliquis**, *indef. adj.*, some, any"