

The Role of Virtue in Epicurean Philosophy According to the Wall of Oinoanda

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 10, 2025 at 9:09 AM

In the inscription on the wall of Oinoanda it says this:

"I shall discuss folly shortly, the virtues and pleasure now.

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.

Let us therefore now state that this is true, making it our starting-point.

Suppose, then, someone were to ask someone, though it is a naive question, «who is it whom these virtues benefit?», obviously the answer will be «man.» The virtues certainly do not make provision for these birds flying past, enabling them to fly well, or for each of the other animals: they do not desert the nature with which they live and by which they have been engendered; rather it is for the sake of this nature that the virtues do everything and exist.

Each (virtue?) therefore means of (?) ... just as if a mother for whatever reasons sees that the possessing nature has been summoned there, it then being necessary to allow the court to be asked what each (virtue?) is doing and for whom [We must show] both which of the desires are natural and which are not; and in general all things that [are included] in the [former category are easily attained]"

[The inscription](#)

Unfortunately there are lost sections, but it might be a good exercise to summarize what we can...and perhaps bring in other material from PDs, VSS, etc.

(will post more soon)

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 10, 2025 at 12:06 PM

Some are some of my own personal reflections (without external aids) on the above text:

- Happiness and pleasure are the same thing.
- The virtues are the means toward happiness/pleasure.
- Pleasure is the end goal of the best mode of life, not virtue.
- The virtues benefit humans, not animals.
- Nature supplies birds with the ability to fly well, and they don't desert this natural ability.
- Humans need the virtues to bring them back to nature.
- Each virtue points toward the understanding of a particular set of desires, and the ability to discern which desires are natural and which are not.

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 12, 2025 at 9:26 AM

It is important to note that the virtues are referred to as "the virtues", and indicates the commonly understood set of ancient virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and courage.

Here is a simple article for reference:

---->[The Four Cardinal Virtues in Ancient Greece](#)

(Also, about the wall: The inscription has been assigned on [epigraphic](#) grounds to the [Hadrianic](#) period, 117–138 CE. (Source: [Wikipedia](#))