

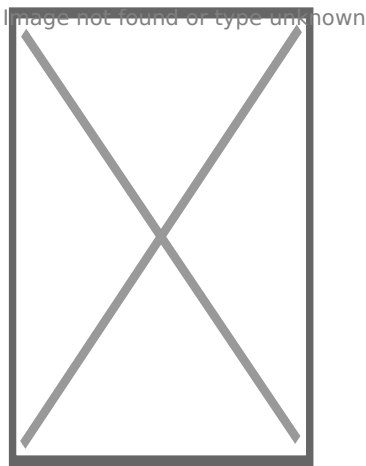
# What is the relationship between Arete (moral virtue) in Hellenistic Philosophy vs. Religions

Post by "Cassius" of March 11, 2017 at 3:32 PM

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) shared a [link](#).

[March 9 at 11:19am](#)

The notion of arete is key to Hellenistic philosophy and often misunderstood. Conflation with religious law is wholly inaccurate.



[Arete \(moral virtue\) - Wikipedia](#)

, this notion of excellence was ultimately bound up with the notion of the fulfillment of purpose or function: the act of living up to one's full potential.

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[8You, Jason Baker, Haris Dimitriadis and 5 others](#)

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[Cassius Amicus](#) type unknown

**[Cassius Amicus](#)** OK this is an interesting test of Epicurean vs other philosophy:.  
**\*\*Where in the letters of Epicurus, and/or reliable quotes by him, does the Greek word "arete" appear, and how is it used?\*\* Finding places in Epicurean texts where this is referred to would be very interesting.**

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[Jason Baker](#) and or type unknown

**[Jason Baker](#)** In Elli's graphic below, aretes is listed as one of the important words in the Letter to Menoeceus.

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Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

Cassius Amicus

**[Cassius Amicus](#)** One way to search for arete in Epicurean text would be by searching at the Epicurus wiki, but I am not able to search and find it - maybe I am searching



wrong but (?) <https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3...dR4I-4jIYWyttQw>

[Epicurus Wiki](#)

. Epicurus developed his teachings during the Hellenistic era of Ancient Greece — a period of transition...

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Jason Baker

**[Jason Baker](#)** I'm not certain the search function works on that page at all. Entering Epicurus returns no hits.

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[Ron Warrick](#) and or type unknown

**[Ron Warrick](#)** I searched the site via google. No hits. I think excellence was not a

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/134-what-is-the-relationship-between-arete-moral-virtue-in-hellenistic-philosophy-vs/?postID=183#post183>

particularly relevant concept to Epicurus. Can't think why it would be.

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Cassius Amicus type unknown

**Cassius Amicus** Other than as a tool to achieve pleasure it doesn't seem like excellence would be a major topic tremendously more than would the topic of food or hammers or nails. But people don't admire and worship food and hammers and nails like they do "virtue" so it has to be addressed to explain why admiration for tools doesn't add up to explaining the purpose for which you are using those tools.

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Cassius Amicus

*Write a reply...*

Cassius Amicus

**Cassius Amicus** Using Perseus it would "appear" that this is one location: [132] οὐ γὰρ πότοι καὶ κῶμοι συνείροντες οὐδ' ἀπολαύσεις παίδων καὶ γυναικῶν οὐδ' ἰχθύων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων, ὅσα φέρει πολυτελῆς τράπεζα, τὸν ἡδὴν γεννᾶ βίον, ἀλλὰ νήφων λογισμὸς καὶ τὰς αἰτίας ἐξερευνῶν πάσης αἰρέσεως καὶ φυγῆς καὶ τὰς δόξας ἐξελαύνων ἐξ ὧν πλεῖστος τὰς ψυχὰς καταλαμβάνει θόρυβος. τούτων δὲ πάντων ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν φρόνησις: διὸ καὶ φιλοσοφίας τιμιώτερον ὑπάρχει φρόνησις, ἐξ ἧς αἱ λοιπαὶ πᾶσαι πεφύκασιν ἀρεταί, διδάσκουσα ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν ἡδέως ζῆν ἄνευ τοῦ φρονίμως καὶ καλῶς καὶ δικαίως, οὐδὲ φρονίμως καὶ καλῶς καὶ δικαίως ἄνευ τοῦ ἡδέως: συμπεφύκασι γὰρ αἱ ἀρεταὶ τῷ ζῆν ἡδέως, καὶ τὸ ζῆν ἡδέως τούτων ἔστιν ἀχώριστον.

[132] It is not an unbroken succession of drinking-bouts and of revelry, not sexual love, not the enjoyment of the fish and other delicacies of a luxurious table, which produce a pleasant life ; it is sober reasoning, searching out the grounds of every choice and avoidance, and banishing those beliefs through which the greatest tumults take possession of the soul. Of all this the beginning and the greatest good is prudence. Wherefore prudence is a more precious thing even than philosophy ; from it spring all the other virtues, for it teaches that we cannot lead a life of pleasure which is not also a life of prudence, honour, and justice ; nor lead a life of prudence, honour, and justice, which is not also a life of pleasure. For the virtues have grown into one with a pleasant life, and a pleasant life is inseparable from them.

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Cassius Amicus

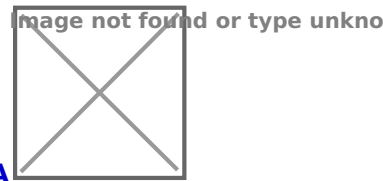
**Cassius Amicus This is Diogenes Laertius rather than Epicurus:**

[138] Διὰ δὲ τὴν ἡδονὴν καὶ τὰς ἀρετὰς αἰρεῖσθαι, οὐ δι' αὐτάς, ὥσπερ τὴν ἰατρικὴν διὰ τὴν ὑγίειαν, καθά φησι καὶ Διογένης ἐν τῇ εἰκοστῇ τῶν Ἐπιλέκτων, ὃς καὶ διαγωγὴν λέγει τὴν ἀγωγὴν. ὁ δ' Ἐπίκουρος καὶ ἀχώριστόν φησι τῆς ἡδονῆς τὴν ἀρετὴν μόνην: τὰ δ' ἄλλα χωρίζεσθαι, οἷον βρωτά. Καὶ φέρε οὖν δὴ νῦν τὸν κολοφῶνα, ὡς ἂν εἴποι τις, ἐπιθῶμεν τοῦ παντὸς συγγράμματος καὶ τοῦ βίου τοῦ φιλοσόφου, τὰς Κυρίας αὐτοῦ δόξας παραθέμενοι καὶ ταύταις τὸ πᾶν σύγγραμμα κατακλείσαντες, τέλει χρησάμενοι τῇ τῆς εὐδαιμονίας ἀρχῇ.

[138] And we choose the virtues too on account of pleasure and not for their own sake, as we take medicine for the sake of health. So too in the twentieth book of his Epilecta says Diogenes, who also calls education 'ἀγωγὴ recreation' διαγωγὴ ἢ. Epicurus describes virtue as the sine qua non of pleasure, i.e. the one thing without which pleasure cannot be, everything else, food, for instance, being separable, i.e. not indispensable to pleasure.

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[Hiram Crespo](#) or type unknown



[Hiram Crespo](#) <https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3...NlqtXgIMU7Pfl7A>

[On Epicurean Virtue](#)

A discussion of Epicurean virtue is needed as a result of our constant encounters with students of philosophy...

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[Jimmy Daltrey](#) or type unknown

**Jimmy Daltrey We are agreed that arete is not a value system or anything resembling a codification of behaviour, punishment and reward or religious devotion. Rather personal excellence.**

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Hiram Crespo

**[Hiram Crespo](#)** no. Not personal excellence, but any means to pleasure. Perhaps the Buddhist concept of upayas is better suited, as they are understood and usually translated as "efficient means". Efficient means to what?! is the key question. We say it's to pleasure. Buddhists say it's to nirvana.

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[Matt Jackson](#) or type unknown

**[Matt Jackson](#)** I post this again because the Neoplatonists did conceive of virtue as proceeding from a Divine Principle. Virtue is emanated from the Divine Mind into the Gods who we emulate their likeness.

But if there be no Divine Principle then man is the measure...[See More](#)

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Matt Jackson

**[Matt Jackson](#)** "What, then, precisely is Virtue, collectively and in the particular? The clearer method will be to begin with the particular, for so the common element by which all the forms hold the general name will readily appear.

The Civic Virtues, on which we have touched above, are a principle or order and beauty in us as long as we remain passing our life here: they ennoble us by setting bound and measure to our desires and to our entire sensibility, and dispelling false judgement- and this by sheer efficacy of the better, by the very setting of the bounds, by the fact that the measured is lifted outside of the sphere of the unmeasured and lawless.

And, further, these Civic Virtues- measured and ordered themselves and acting as a principle of measure to the Soul which is as Matter to their forming- are like to the measure reigning in the over-world, and they carry a trace of that Highest Good in the Supreme; for, while utter measurelessness is brute Matter and wholly outside of Likeness, any participation in Ideal-Form produces some corresponding degree of Likeness to the formless Being There. And participation goes by nearness: the Soul nearer than the body, therefore closer akin, participates more fully and shows a godlike presence, almost cheating us into the delusion that in the Soul we see God entire.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/134-what-is-the-relationship-between-arete-moral-virtue-in-hellenistic-philosophy-vs/?postID=183#post183>

**This is the way in which men of the Civic Virtues attain Likeness."**

**Plotinus, On Virtue.**

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Jimmy Daltrey

**[Jimmy Daltrey](#) [Hiram Crespo](#)**: Stoic arete (I don't actually like the translation Virtue, Excellence is better) would be, I think, efficient to "being in accordance with nature" that nature in the case of humanity being a rational being. Arete, being ultimately rational (applied wisdom in effect) gives us the circular nature of arete being for its own sake.

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Jimmy Daltrey

**[Jimmy Daltrey](#)** They then go on to argue that an excellent person, a person in accordance with their nature, will necessarily have eudaemonia and ataraxia.

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Jason Baker

**[Jason Baker](#) [Jimmy](#)**, humans aren't (just) rational beings! MoSto wants to throw the baby out with the bathwater, cleaving off our irrational experience of life with the cost of being indifferent to pleasure. To borrow some preferred translations of eudaemonia, arete, and ataraxia, it's not well-being (pleasurable living) if wisdom (sagacity in the management of one's affairs (efficient means)) isn't continuous (without disturbance).

**We call someone wise when they experience pleasurable living without disturbance. But what does Stoicism know of wise men? It is considered an unachievable goal through their methodology.**

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[Stephen Brown](#) type unknown

**[Stephen Brown](#)** The stoic Greek terms or meanings seem much more interrelated than the usual English equivalents e.g. eudaimonia is more like flourishing than a kind of passive happiness . Something flourishes when it expresses its particular arete or excellence e.g. a horse running fast .The same unity is not apparent when English synonyms are used. Hence a lot of circular arguments or unnecessary conflicts arise.

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Jason Baker

**Jason Baker** I think we can leave stoic out of that description and just say Greek, but I concur. That said, these concepts are universal. We have words for them in English, it's just a matter of figuring out which ones make sense as part of the whole.

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Stephen Brown

**Stephen Brown** Yes you are right . The ' stoic ' was an afterthought. I have noticed a similar difficulty when the four stoic virtues are discussed as they are considered a unity with wisdom supreme. Whether this is due to Greek retranslation I could not say. However...[See More](#)

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Jimmy Daltrey


**Jimmy Daltrey** Stephen "But what does Stoicism know of wise men? It is considered an unachievable goal through their methodology" you are criticizing them for not believing in an illusory dream of godlike perfection? All they say is improvement is possible. Eminently practical. Stoic psychology is the most powerful aspect of it.

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Jason Baker

**Jason Baker** Stephen didn't write that, I did.   type unknown

Isn't it interesting how Epicureans defined the wise man as something eminently practicable but the Stoics defined wise man as something illusory?

Nothing motivates like pursuing an unachievable goal. Perhaps that's why stoics are so miserable all of the time, the impracticality of achieving their aims.  type unknown



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Jimmy Daltrey

**Jimmy Daltrey** Lol  ? Do you know any Stoics? I've never met one in the flesh.

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Jason Baker

**Jason Baker** I have two friends, one much closer and older than the other, who profess to be stoics. One doesn't really know what it means, other than the common conception of "stiff upper-lip." I would consider him a proto-MoSto, he has the desire but not the motivation to dig deeper into the classics. The other has spent most of his adult life contemplating philosophy alone in the wildernesses of the world as a solo adventurer. He is VERY well versed in classical Stoicism and knows very well the bases of his philosophy and his misery.

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Jimmy Daltrey

**Jimmy Daltrey** Hmm, alone in the wilderness isn't very Stoic.  Image background type unknown

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Jason Baker

**Jason Baker** Right? I keep telling him the more time he spends out in the desert the more messianic he's going to become. The isolation makes people crazy, no exceptions.

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**Jimmy Daltrey**

**Jimmy Daltrey** Also, how does he get to practice Stoicism with nobody to piss him off? It's like boxing solo.

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