

Welcome Kungi!

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@ Kungi

For me, a virtue is something that leads to a value. For Aristotle, the ultimate value (that which is not just instrumental, leading to another, higher value) was *eudaimonia* – a life of happy well-being. A virtue is anything that leads to that goal (*telos*).

But if the goal (value) is to, say, split wood well, a proper and well-honed axe is a virtuous axe. The Greek term, *arete* ("excellence"), included but was not limited to moral virtue.

The Stoics seem to have generally equated a set of specific moral virtues with *eudaimonia* itself: If you were sufficiently wise, courageous, just and temperate – then you must have had a *eudaimonic* life. (This is not to suggest that the Stoics were a monolithic group, without variations – nor that they did not recognize *eupathe*: good feelings, as opposed to the more general *pathe*, for which they recommend *apatheia*). As one modern Stoic, Massimo Pigliucci, suggested in a blog I read, *eudaimonia* thus becomes a value judgment: “Have I done well enough?” (Again, there are variations among Stoics, old and new.)

For Epicureans, *eudaimonia* is a life pleasantly lived. A life pleasantly lived means one in which natural pleasures (mental and physical) outweigh pain and suffering (mental and physical).

And that goal (*telos*) requires certain social, as well as strictly personal virtues. To live justly, for example (which Epicurus thought was necessary to live such a life), means actively making due allowance for others to also have what they need to live such a life. None of the virtues are abstract (or Platonic) ideals worthy in themselves *per se* (or *eudaimonic* in themselves *per se*) – but are instrumental. An Epicurean view of socially virtuous behavior – for me – is grounded more in natural sympathy/empathy (which can be cultivated, but not demanded) than in any simple, dictated “should.”

That is my simplified interpretive summary. (But there are others here who are better versed than I – including those who have posted here before me.)