

# Episode 207 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 15 - Does Epicurean Philosophy Lead to Injustice?

Post by "Cassius" of December 30, 2023 at 5:34 PM

## [Quote from Matteng](#)

In this subject the Stoics often seems to have the "better ethics" because they emphasize cosmopolitism, altruism, philanthropy for all humans, not only friends.

As a defense I only know 2 aspects...

Matteng:

I agree with Joshua's response but I would also say this - that I do not not think that it is as all a given that the Stoic ethics is "better" for the reasons you state.

To what authority would someone check to see that "altruism" (which is generally defined as a flat "placing others above self" regardless of circumstances) is always a better course, or that I should as a rule show equal concern and action for "all humans" most of whom I will never know, rather than for my friends, who I do know. I would say that I would call into question anyone who claimed to be my friend who placed the interests of random strangers over those he or she has known for a long time.

I'm phrasing this kind of challengingly just to make the point that if you take the philosophy seriously and conclude that in fact there are no supernatural gods and no ideal forms, then indeed there is no authority to approve of "love of humanity" being superior to "love of friends." That leaves the decision between the two to be a purely personal one that varies according to circumstance.

So first and foremost I would dismiss the haughtiness of the Stoics on this (as on many other subjects concerning "virtue") as a lot of hot air. The Stoic view of the universe is nonsense from an Epicurean perspective, and without that Stoic supernaturalism there is no real-world basis for them to assert that their ethics is "better" in the first place.

The perceived irony (that Epicureans are more compassionate than many others) derives from that same commitment to reality. In the absence of high-minded and high-sounding calls to divine fire and the reward of absolute virtue, people operating from an Epicurean perspective have only what they perceive as the short space of time between birth and death to get all they are going to get out of life -- and that includes the emotional reward of benevolence toward others.