

Episode 267 - Virtue Is Not Absolute Or An End In Itself - All Good And Evil Consists In Sensation.

Post by "Joshua" of February 9, 2025 at 11:17 AM

Show Notes

Serafino de' Serafini, Allegory of St. Augustine as Master of the Order

[St. Augustine as Master of the Order](#)

Nature's God; The Heretical Origins of the American Republic

[Nature's God: The Heretical Origins of the American Republic](#)

Cicero, *On Ends*

Quote

It is however my opinion that if I shew there is something moral, which is essentially desirable by reason of its inherent qualities and for its own sake, all the doctrines of your school are over- thrown. So when I have once briefly, as our time requires, determined the nature of this object, I will touch upon all your statements, Torquatus, unless perchance my recollection fails me. Well, by what is moral we understand something of such a nature that, even if absolutely deprived of utility, it may with justice be eulogized for its own qualities, apart from all rewards or advantages. Now the nature of this object cannot be so easily understood from the definition I have adopted (though to a considerable extent it can) as from the general verdict of all mankind, and the inclinations and actions of all the best men, who do very many things for the sole reason that they are seemly, right and moral, though they see that no profit will follow.

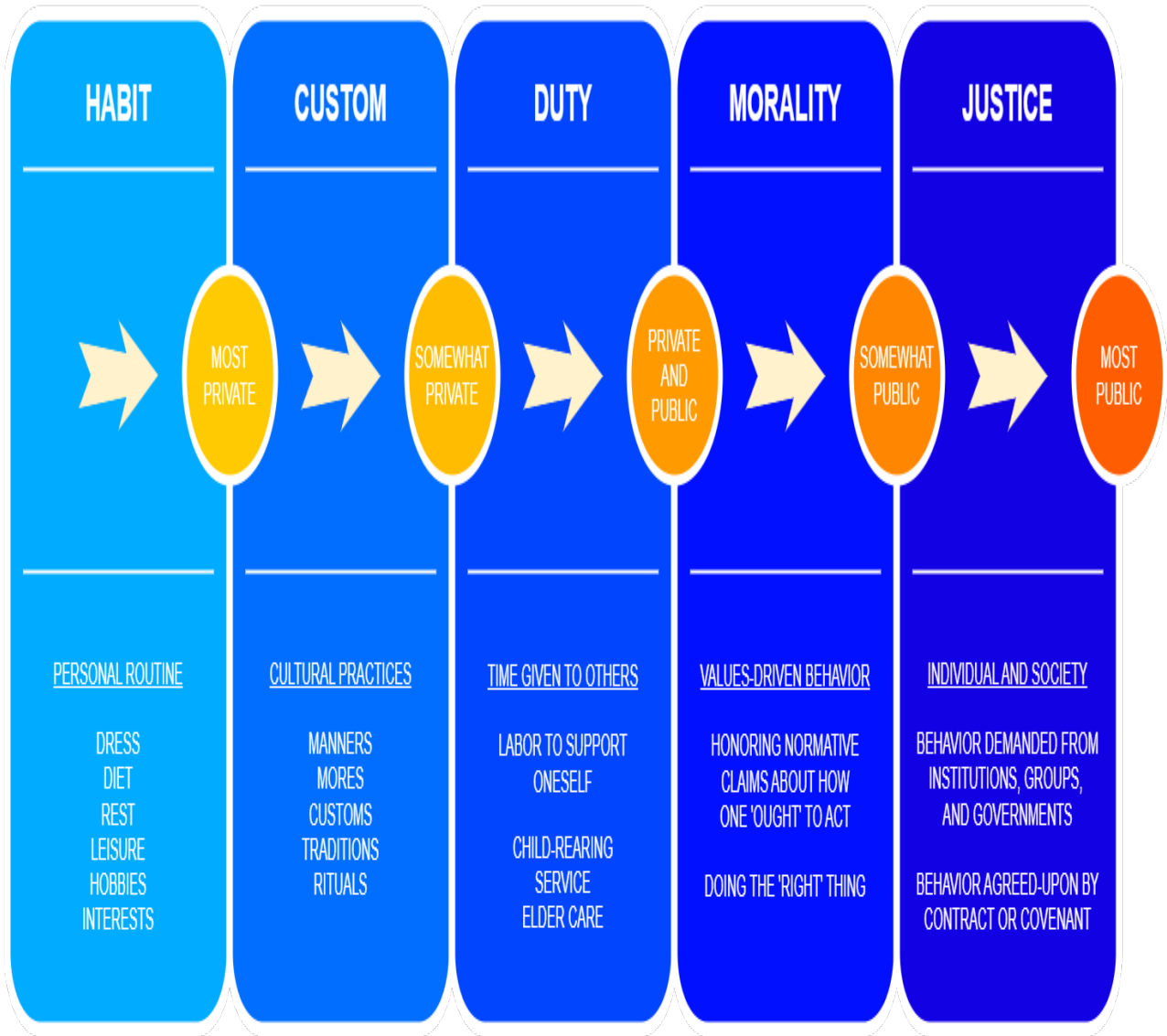
'How I wish, said he, 'that you had felt a bent towards the Stoic school! It was surely to be expected of you, if of any one, that you would place in the category of good nothing but virtue.' 'Look well to it, said I; 'perhaps it was rather to be expected of you, inasmuch as your views substantially agreed with mine, that you would not force upon the doctrines new titles. Our principles are at one, and only our language is at variance.' 'Our principles are very far from being at one,' said he, 'for whatever that

thing may be over and above morality, which you declare to be desirable, and reckon among things good, you thereby quench morality itself, which we may liken to the light cast by virtue, and virtue too you utterly overthrow.' 'Your words, Cato,' said I, 'are grandiose; but do you not see that you share your high-sounding phraseology with Pyrrho and Aristo, who are thorough-going levellers? I should like to know what you think of them.' 'Do you ask what I think of them?' said he. 'I think that all the good staunch upright soberminded statesmen of whom we have been told, or whom we have ourselves seen, who without any learning and merely following nature's guidance, have performed many meritorious exploits, were better trained by nature than they could possibly have been trained by philosophy, if they had accepted any other doctrine than that which regards nothing save morality as belonging to the category of good, and as belonging to the category of evil nothing save baseness; as to the remaining philosophical systems which, no doubt in different degrees, but still all of them to some extent count as good or as evil some object unconnected with virtue, they, as I think, not only fail to aid us or strengthen us in the struggle to become better, but actually corrupt nature.

-Translated James Reid

[My chart on Ethics](#)

ETHICS AND VIRTUE COMPARED



VIRTUE AS UNDERSTOOD BY ANCIENT THINKERS IS NOT SYNONYMOUS WITH MORALITY AS WE UNDERSTAND IT. TO THE STOICS, VIRTUE IS TIED UP WITH EVERY ASPECT OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR. CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING;

VIRTUE AND HABIT

It is a mark of want of intellect to spend much time in things relating

VIRTUE AND CUSTOM

For where our interest is, there, too, is piety directed. So that whoever is careful to regulate his

VIRTUE AND DUTY

Yet we never give anything with more care, we never take such

VIRTUE AND MORALITY

In the practice of these things

VIRTUE AND JUSTICE

Usage is the first ground of justice

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4227-episode-267-virtue-is-not-absolute-or-an-end-what-is-it-if-good-and-evil-consist/?postID=34007#post34007>

Diogenes of Oenoanda

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. 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.

Diogenes of Oinoanda Fragment 32 (Martin Ferguson Smith)