

What is Virtue and what aspects of Virtue does an Epicurean cultivate?

Post by “Pacatus” of August 15, 2025 at 4:41 PM

Here is a Wiki article on **Virtue Ethics**: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtue_ethics

“Some modern versions of virtue ethics do not define virtues in terms of well being or flourishing, and some go so far as to define virtues as traits that tend to promote some other good that is defined independently of the virtues, thereby subsuming virtue ethics under (or somehow merging it with) *consequentialist* ethics.”

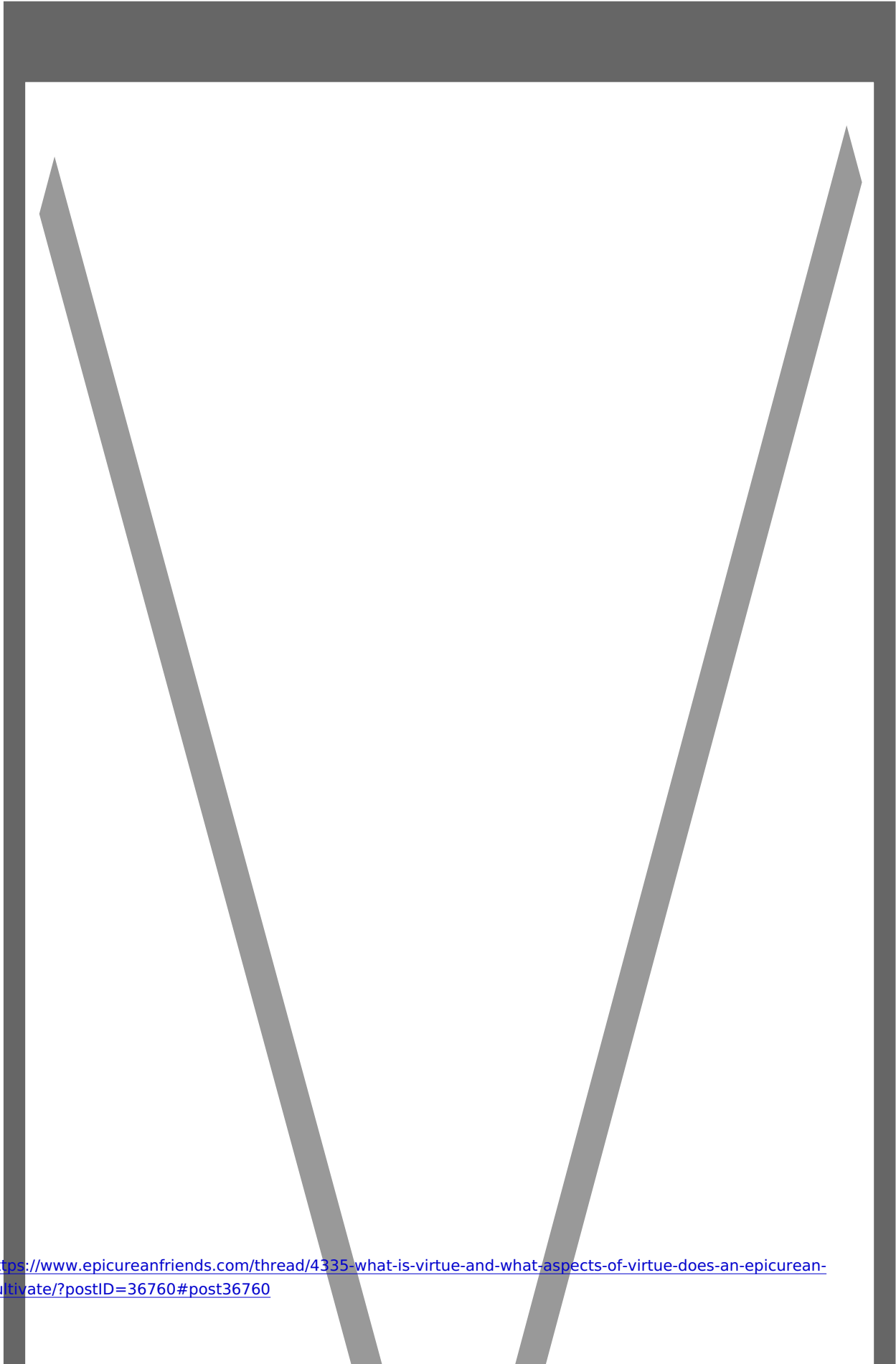
This seems to be the move made by Lawrence Becker (sort of the “founding father” in academic circles of modern Stoicism) in his *A New Stoicism*. He essentially defines virtue as something necessary to enhance and sustain “effective agency” toward some (any) endeavor. Effective agency is necessary (though not sufficient) to the successful outcome of any endeavor. He makes some other (to me very questionable, to say the least) moves to try and salvage a Stoic virtue ethics from being a thoroughgoing consequentialism. I think he fails – and once again reminds of Emily Austin’s essay suggesting that modern Stoics are really disguised Epicureans. (Becker also dismisses any notion of an intelligent, providential universe. And he seems to hedge on eudaimonia as telos.)

Areté

This does at least remove “virtue” from any particular “moralism”. And I think that moves it closer to the original Greek term **areté** (ἀρετή) – as “excellence” of any kind – especially a person or thing's “full realization of potential or inherent function.” (Which may include, but does not strictly refer to, “moral virtue”).

And: “The ancient Greeks applied the term arete (ἀρετή) to anything: for example, the excellence of a chimney, the excellence of a bull for breeding, and the excellence of a man.” Since this view seems focussed on functional values, it seems closer to consequentialism to me.

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<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4335-what-is-virtue-and-what-aspects-of-virtue-does-an-epicurean-cultivate/?postID=36760#post36760>

[Arete - Wikipedia](#)

en.wikipedia.org

I'm sure that [Don](#) can contribute more on this ...