

VS63 - "Frugality Too Has A Limit..."

Post by "Cassius" of August 21, 2025 at 7:57 PM

Just thought I would add here too that since this thread started we've come across a long discussion of "frugality" by Cicero in Tusculan Disputations giving the word "frugality" a much more expansive meaning than we probably would today:

III-VIII.¶

And from these considerations we may get at a very probable definition of the temperate man, whom the Greeks call σώφρων, and they call that virtue σωφροσύνην, which I at one time call temperance, at another time moderation, and sometimes even modesty; but I do not know whether that virtue may not be properly called frugality, which has a more confined meaning with the Greeks; for they call frugal men χρησίμους, which implies only that they are useful: but our name has a more extensive meaning; for all abstinence, all innocency, (which the Greeks have no ordinary name for, though they might use the word ἀβλάβεια, for innocency is that disposition of mind which would offend no one,) and several other virtues, are comprehended under frugality; but, if this quality were of less importance, and confined in as small a compass as some imagine, the surname of Piso would not have been in so great esteem. But as we allow him not the name of a frugal man (frugi), who either quits his post through fear, which is cowardice; or who reserves to his own use what was privately committed to his keeping, which is injustice; or who fails in his military undertakings through rashness, which is folly; for that reason the word frugality takes in these three virtues of fortitude, justice, and prudence, though it is indeed common to all virtues, for they are all connected and knit together. Let us allow, then, frugality itself to be another and fourth virtue; for its peculiar property seems to be, to govern and appease all tendencies to too eager a desire after anything, to restrain lust, and to preserve a decent steadiness in everything. The vice in contrast to this is called prodigality (nequitia). Frugality, I imagine, is derived from the word fruge, the best thing which the earth produces; nequitia is derived (though this is perhaps rather more strained, still let us try it; we shall only be thought to have been trifling if there is nothing in what we say) from the fact of everything being to no purpose (nequicquam) in such a man; from which circumstance he is called also Nihil, nothing. Whoever is frugal, then, or, if it is more agreeable to you, whoever is moderate and temperate, such a one must of course be consistent; whoever is consistent, must be quiet; the quiet man must be free from all perturbation, therefore from grief likewise: and these are the properties of a wise man; therefore a wise man must be free from grief.