

Fragment 32 -- The "Shouting To All Greeks And Non-Greeks That Virtue Is Not The Goal" Passage

Post by "Cassius" of September 11, 2025 at 10:03 AM

This passage came up in discussion last night and I want to ask a question about it:

[Quote from Fragment 32 - MFS Translation](#)

Fr. 32

... [the latter] being as malicious as the former.

I shall discuss folly shortly, the virtues and pleasure now.

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.

Each (virtue?) therefore means of (?) ... just as if a mother for whatever reasons sees that the possessing nature has been summoned there, it then being necessary to allow the court to asked what each (virtue?) is doing and for whom [We must show] both which of the desires are natural and which are not; and in general all things that [are included] in the [former category are easily attained]

Fr. 32 lower margin (Epic. Sent. 6, 😊)

[For the purpose of gaining security from men government and kingship are a natural good, so long as] this end can be procured [from them].

No pleasure is intrinsically bad; but the] means for achieving some pleasures [involve disturbances] that are far, [outweigh the pleasures.]

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A question has been raised about the meaning of the underline section. I've always thought this was worded in a difficult way, and it is not entirely clear whether the point is to state that virtue exists only in humans, or that every animal has its own set of virtues that do not desert that animal or act other than for the benefit of that animal (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)

My interpretation is that the Epicurean position is that "virtue" is a generic term that applies to the "strengths" or "excellences" or the particular activities of a thing that keep it alive and allow it to flourish. As such, not only humans but also any other animal can be thought of as having its own virtues. I see that as a subset of the larger point that virtues do not exist in the air or as ends in themselves or as created by gods, but are simply a word we use to describe the methods and tools by which a thing thrives.

But that's not the only way to read this, and it really doesn't flow as I would expect it to from the paragraphs before it -- especially the question about asking what or who the virtues benefit, which is apparently being held up as an obviously stupid question to ask. Why is it obviously stupid? *Because* there is no god or other purpose for pursuing virtue? I can see an Epicurean saying that, very definitely, but I am not sure i would have called it a naive question given the way most of the world thinks.

Any thoughts on the best translation of this? Could MFS have translated it differently?