

Episode 302 - TD30 - Epicurus and Roads Paved With Good Intentions

Post by “Cassius” of October 14, 2025 at 4:34 PM

In this episode, one of the arguments that Joshua raised from Thomas Moore's "Utopia" in defense of Pleasure-based ethics deserves to be remembered. I'm therefore pasting this excerpt from the transcript with the important point underlined so it is easier to find in the future. Talking about Thomas Moore, this is what Joshua said:

Joshua: He's working through this stuff in his own mind, and now he has a safe way to explore these ideas without committing to them. On the subject of the chief Good and on pleasure, Thomas Moore says this. He says,

Quote

The Utopians say that the first dictate of reason is the kindling in us of the love and reverence for the divine Majesty to whom we owe both all that we have and all that we can ever hope for. In the next place, Reason directs us to keep our minds as free from passion and as cheerful as we can, and that we should consider ourselves as bound by the ties of good nature and humanity, to use our utmost endeavors to help forward the happiness of all other persons.

For there has never been a man who was such a morose and severe pursuer of virtue, such an enemy to pleasure, that though he set hard rules for men to undergo much pain, many watchings, and other rigors, yet did not at the same time advise them to do all they could in order to relieve and ease the miserable, and who did not represent gentleness and good nature as amiable dispositions. And from this the Utopians infer that if a man ought to advance the welfare and comfort of the rest of mankind, there being no virtue more proper and peculiar to our nature than to ease the miseries of others, to free from trouble and anxiety, in furnishing them with the comforts of life in which pleasure consists. Nature much more vigorously leads us to do all of these things for ourselves. A life of pleasure is either a real evil, and in that case we ought not to assist others in their pursuit of it, but on the contrary, to keep them from it.

All we can as from that which is most hurtful and deadly. Or if for life of pleasure is a good thing, so that we not only may, but ought to help others to it, why then ought not a man to begin with himself? So we have that question first of all. If virtue means, at least in part, easing the misery and pain of others, why is it not virtuous to ease our own misery and pain?

This is in Thomas Moore's Utopia. This is how they get to pleasure, and he expresses it even more clearly than this. He says:

Quote

Since no man can be more bound to look after the good of another than after his own. For nature cannot direct us to be good and kind to others and yet at the same time to be unmerciful and cruel to ourselves. Thus, as the Utopians define virtue to be living according to nature, so they imagine that nature prompts all people on to seek after pleasure as the end of all they do.

Joshua: Now, that is not at all a bad starting place if you're interested in identifying the chief good. And you could imagine reading some of this directly out of Torquatus or something that virtue means living according to nature, and nature prompts all people on to seek after. Pleasure is the end of all they do. That's why pleasure is the chief good. And moreover, since virtue means to ease the pain and hardship of others, it's also must be virtuous to ease our own pain and hardship.