

Current Series - Summarizing Epicurean Answers to Academic Questions

Post by “wbernys” of February 6, 2026 at 10:25 PM

[Quote from Patrikios](#)

Could you provide your definitions for these terms, or is there an Epicurean text that groups these 4 virtues as essential?

Even though Epicurus himself didn't list these virtues both Torquatus and Philodemus both mention all these virtues (Philodemus mentioning even more) as essential. Torquatus chiefly mentions the four cardinal virtues as essential and gives detailed reasons to why from an Epicurean lens and Philodemus list these as essential but doesn't really give detailed reasons beyond avoiding pain. DeWitt and Philodemus list of virtues is what inspired my own recent list.

Philodemus lists all of these essential in "On Choices and Avoidances" (From Twentiers website) saying: it is impossible for one to live pleasurably) without **living prudently** and **honourably** and **justly**, and also without **living courageously** and **temperately** and **magnanimously**, **and** without **making friends** and without **being philanthropic**, and in general without having all the other virtues. For the greatest errors in choices and avoidances occur when some men perform each action while holding the opposite views, and thereby while being constrained by evils.

For Wisdom (Prudence) is the source of enlightenment and the guide to tranquility Torquatus says: **For it is wisdom alone which expels sorrow from our minds, and prevents our shuddering with fear: she is the instructress who enables us to live in tranquility, by extinguishing in us all vehemence of desire.**

Epicurus describes Prudence as the source of every other virtues saying: **Practical wisdom is the foundation of all these things and is the greatest good. Thus practical wisdom is more valuable than philosophy and is the source of every other excellence, teaching us that it is not possible to live joyously without also living wisely and beautifully and rightly, nor to live wisely and beautifully and rightly without living joyously For the excellences grow up together with the pleasant life, and the pleasant life is inseparable from them.**

For Temperance, is it considered the thing which protects us from recklessness and ensures long term pleasure from indulging in bad desires. Torquatus says: **For temperance is that which warns us to follow reason in desiring or avoiding anything. Nor is it sufficient to decide what ought to be done, and what ought not; but we must adhere to what**

has been decided. But many men, because they are enfeebled and subdued the moment pleasure comes in sight, and so are unable to keep and adhere to the determination they have formed, give themselves up to be bound hand and foot by their lusts, and do not foresee what will happen to them; and in that way, on account of some pleasure which is trivial and unnecessary, and which might be procured in some other manner, and which they could dispense with without annoyance, incur terrible diseases, and injuries, and disgrace, and are often even involved in the penalties of the legal tribunals of their country.

For Courage: Torquatus says it is the ability to endure pain for the sake of greater pleasures and be brave in the face of death, holding to true reason saying: **These considerations prove that timidity and cowardice are not blamed, nor courage and endurance praised, on their own account. The former are rejected because they bring pain, and the latter are coveted because they bring pleasure.**

For Justice: Torquatus describes as a pact of agreeableness and ability to live securely and with goodwill among your neighbors saying: **Men of sound natures, therefore, are summoned by the voice of true reason to justice, equity, and honesty. For those without eloquence or resources, dishonesty is not a good policy, since it is difficult for such men to succeed in their designs, or to retain their gains when once achieved. On the other hand, even for the rich and clever, generous conduct is more in keeping, because liberality wins them affection and good will, the surest means to a life of peace. Even more, there really is no motive for transgression, since the desires that spring from nature are easily gratified without doing any man wrong, while those desires that are imaginary can be resisted**