

Stoic Challenges To Epicurean Philosophy - 8 - Objection to the Epicurean Doctrine That Virtue Is only of Value as An Instrumentality to achieve Pleasure

Post by "Cassius" of March 11, 2017 at 3:55 PM

[Cassius Amicus](#)

[March 7 at 7:08pm](#)

****Stoic Challenges To Epicurean Philosophy**** (8) Seneca and others also object to the Epicurean doctrine that makes virtue of value only instrumentally, as a means to attaining pleasure, as follows. (Again, some modern Epicureans may dispute this interpretation of Epicurus, although others tell me they accept it and agree with it as a philosophy of life.) Someone who acts bravely for the sake of a reward, arguably isn't really brave at all. (Again, some people will accept this particular moral intuition, others will not.) To endure danger for money isn't real bravery, it's just greed. And the same would apply to rewards such as pleasure: acting bravely to win some reward as a consequence isn't really what we mean by bravery, on reflection. The same would apply to the virtue of temperance.

Not snacking on chips for a week because someone's offered me a million dollars to do so, wouldn't, on the face of it, constitute praiseworthy (virtuous) self-mastery. It's the ability to control our desires in the **absence** of a strong reward for doing so that's actually required for the virtue of temperance. What about justice, kindness, and fairness? If I'm only treating other people kindly and fairly because I believe I'm going to gain some reward for so doing then arguably that's not really the virtue of justice at all. Doesn't the same apply if I see justice as indifferent in itself, and only of value as a means to obtaining "pleasure" (in the Epicurean sense)? So the Stoics, and others, argue that our preconceptions about virtue separate it from people acting in similar ways for personal gain, or pleasure. Someone who wants to preserve that conception of virtue but also professes to follow the Epicurean doctrine is arguably going to have to reconcile those two things somehow or accept that they're in contradiction.

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Alexander Rios or type unknown

Alexander Rios Before we begin, somebody please tell my why Stoics pursue virtue. If a virtuous action is not rewarded by our biology or some other external entity, at some future/present time then why do stoics (or people) spend so much matter/motion pursuing it?

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Ron Warrick or type unknown

Ron Warrick "Virtue is its own reward." But if there is a foreknown reward, it isn't virtue!

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Cassius Amicus type unknown

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Alexander Rios

Alexander Rios Courage is bravery in the face of fear or a threat. Usually we do it to preserve or save something we hold dear. Something or someone whom we prefer to have in our life. The thought of losing it or them is painful, and so we take the risk of some pain or loss now in order to secure peace, safety, and happiness in the future. Taking the risk of endangering ourselves in the process of doing so is considered bravery.

It is not brave to risk our peace, safety, health or happiness for something or somebody that we don't care about. It is foolish. For example I would not risk my safety or health to save POTUS45. I would be pleased if he were gone. I see no nobility in saving him, and much happiness in his removal.

The standard Epicurean responses follow. Courtesy of Torquatus.

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Alexander Rios

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Alexander Rios

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Michael Carteron Image not found or type unknown

Michael Carteron Yes, all of these things being "good in themselves" seems absurd. Ask people why they are honest, kind, or whatever. The answer would invariably be along the line of "Because it's better when people act this way" when pressed, i.e. it's pleasing and leads to happiness. I fail to see why that makes this not "really" honest, kind, etc.

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Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus At this moment I can't think of much to add to what Alexander and Michael wrote. The question clearly captures the Stoic position that virtue is an end in itself, and quite clearly implies or states explicitly that happiness / pleasure is irrelevant, and if present are indeed factors that make the act of virtue ignoble or less praiseworthy. And there are still people who like to argue that the goal of Stoicism is happiness? I give credit to Donald Robertson that he (and at least a segment of his modern Stoics) do not engage in that sleight of hand.

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Hiram Crespo Image not found or type unknown

[Hiram Crespo](#) Many worship at the altar of Virtue but few stop to inspect the pedestal on which she stands. -- A Few Days in Athens

If bravery does not lead to a life of pleasure, why worship at its altar? Same with temperance! And wealth / money. Most of us will need a natural measure of these "virtues" in life at some point or another, depending on our circumstances. That's fine. They are not ends in themselves: they have value in accordance to their advantages.

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[Jason Baker](#) image not available or type unknown

[Jason Baker](#) It was mentioned in another thread recently that Stoics are always preparing for their world to be turned upside down so that they might survive any trouble with indifference. What a meager ration! Flourishing is my aim, not mere survival.

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Cassius Amicus

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[Hiram Crespo](#)

[Hiram Crespo](#) Let us use a real world example. In some muslim countries, and now in britain and elsewhere, fathers and brothers sometimes engage in "honor killings" of their daughters if they dare choose their own husbands, dress like Westerners or listen to Western music. Anyone who submits this to hedonic calculus can see the disadvantage and the suffering this generates, and how unnecessary this suffering is. But they are called "honor killings" because there is a code of honor that somehow links the manhood of relatives to women being treated like children. Once again, ***if we lose sight of the end that our own nature seeks, all virtue comes to nothing*** and Polystratus says it degenerates into arrogance (fanaticism) and superstition. Without aligning our values with nature, with reality and with real world repercussions, there can be no virtue.

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[Jimmy Daltrey](#) image not available or type unknown

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) How do you get from Hellenistic virtues (which Epicurus adopted as a means to pleasure) to honour killings? Killing your relatives in recompense for perceived shame...i dont get the link. Sounds more like lunacy than philosophy.

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[Hiram Crespo](#) or type unknown

[Hiram Crespo](#) Well, these men think they are virtuous. Manhood is related to virtue for many, and in fact the particle vir relates to virility and virile. So notions of manhood, however antiquated, get tied up in what is meant. Virtue and honor, without a clear definition, can be misused by authoritarian religions and cultures, and the military also exploits these and patriotism. The key is that they have to be understood as means to pleasure. But that is not what is usually or necessarily meant in everyday conversation.

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[Jimmy Daltrey](#) or type unknown

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) I don't see the resemblance. Hellenistic virtues are quite tightly defined, they are all forms of prudence really. Practical wisdom.

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[Jimmy Daltrey](#)

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) Izzat, honour, as seen in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh is something distinct, and not specific to any religious philosophy and certainly absent from the Hellenistic traditions.

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[Hiram Crespo](#)

[Hiram Crespo](#) The problem we have is that we seek to have values aligned with nature and to avoid cultural corruption. So what does an Epicurean do with PD 5 in light of honor killings? We will always choose nature, that is, pleasure. And we have to mistrust people who define living honorably by culture and not by nature. Nature is not Hellenistic, it's transcultural.

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[Jason Baker](#)

[Jason Baker](#) "I say both now, and always, shouting out loudly, to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that pleasure is the highest end of life!" - D of O

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[Elli Pensa](#) or type unknown

[Elli Pensa](#) What does mean do your DUTY according to an AUTHENTIC MORAL VIRTUE ?? Who is that person - as an authority - who could set to us what is our DUTY to go in line with an AUTHENTIC MORAL VIRTUE ? And what is the criterion in order to

determine correctly THE DUTY and the VIRTUE in accordance to our nature and the social phenomena, such as they are evolving according to the whole Nature ?

Example : If someone in the past, did adultery in Greece, the police caught him in "flagrante delicto", wearing only his briefs because he did not live in accordance to an AUTHENTIC VIRTUE. Now this has been changed.

How do you understand the whole issue you from the stoicism?? I would like to know better !! In an entire planet and in all these social systems and the phenomena, you do say that the human being is a rational moral being living in accordance to an authentic VIRTUE ? This is the GENERAL PICTURE you've got ?

In this way you study the Nature rightly ??

And the ISIS say, that they do their DUTY in accordance to an Authentic moral virtue !!

And a christian priest of our parish, is telling us IF we do our DUTY and live in accordance to his AUTHENTIC VIRTUE, we will be good and having good souls...Frankly, I can't hear the same things again and again.

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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) Elli, I agree with everything you say, however you are not describing any system of Hellenistic virtue ethics. Arete is personal, there is no system of rules or authority or judgement. Epicurus adhered to the same arete, and said happiness was impossible without it.

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Elli Pensa

[Elli Pensa Jimmy](#), Nature is not any system is only the Nature. And when we study her with our senses we realize that all Nature's creatures pursue the pleasure and avoid pain. Virtues are already in my mind as prolepsis/anticipations or preconceptions. And I do...[See More](#)

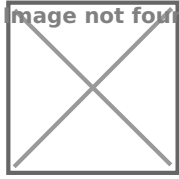
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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) I am not sure why you keep coming back to authority, we are

discussing arete <https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%...KO58WB3DxmKDnn0>

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[Arete \(moral virtue\) - Wikipedia](#)

, this notion of excellence was ultimately bound up with the notion of the fulfillment of purpose...

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Elli Pensa

[Elli Pensa](#) Jimmy Daltrey Arete...eudaimonia... ataraxia... aponia and so on, well, IF you do not connect them with something pretty clear and a faculty given to you by Nature for your survival, and just for the purpose to live a pleasant life... then bit all these words farewell as empty of meaning.

Since, Fg. 221. A philosopher's words are empty if they do not heal the suffering of the man. For just as medicine is useless if it does not remove sickness from the body, so philosophy is useless if it does not remove suffering from the soul. Epicurus.

Ok arete... let's say the arete of justice as a preconception or anticipation that created through your experiences and their consequences, and still are created in your life. What was your criterion of truth to judge RIGHTLY who was fair and who was unfair in your life? Who is lying and who is not ? And which of his actions are beneficial or not beneficial for you ? How you judge all the things around you in accordance with Nature and you nature ? Please, do not say me of what makes me happy and what is not., because if you ask a donkey that is climbing a hill full loaded in his back, that donkey maybe would say to you that is extremely happy.

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Frankly, I do not blame that donkey for that, since he does not examine who is saying lies and who is not, he does not study the Nature, he does not fear death, he does not know that one day will die. But if you load his back with a heavy load, yammering would say to you : Hey mister you actions were against my nature : I am not pleased....I pain (thrice I PAIN). and that poor creature will fall down in pains.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/140-stoic-challenges-to-epicurean-philosophy-8-objection-to-the-epicurean-doctrine-t/>

But what I say now ? Epictetus when he was a slave, as they say, he was tortured by his master Epaphroditus who twisted his leg. Enduring the pain with complete composure, Epictetus warned Epaphroditus that his leg would break, and when it did break, he said, 'There, did I not tell you that it would break?'

Well, frankly THIS IS NOT the arete of pride of the Greeks. This is not the pride of the Spartans and Leonidas who fought the persians for the purpose to win and live their children a free and pleasant life. This is not the self respect of a man who studies the Nature expressing his fellings of pleasure and pain. This is not greek philosophy !!! This is an oriental cunning!!! This is a philosophy for SLAVES who are under the heavy load of Fate and Destiny living in fully apathy. These are not free and dignity men who want to live pleasantly their life Full stop.

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Cassius Amicus

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Cassius Amicus

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