

# Thoughts on Prudence and the Virtues in the Letter to Menoecus

**Post by "Root304" of August 1, 2022 at 2:06 AM**

"Now, the beginning and the greatest good of all these things is prudence, on which account prudence is something more valuable than even philosophy, inasmuch as all the other virtues spring from it, teaching us that it is not possible to live pleasantly unless one also lives prudently, and honourably, and justly; and that one cannot live prudently, and honestly, and justly, without living pleasantly; for the virtues are allied to living agreeably, and living agreeably is inseparable from the virtues."- Letter to Menoecus

Not sure on the "honourably" versus "honestly" switch. A lot of sites I looked at for this passage had that discrepancy.


Anyway, in following the recent discussions on epistemology in the podcast and in the forums, this passage brought up some thoughts for me. Is this talk of prudence being more valuable than philosophy a way of using the language of virtue ethics (which I gather he didn't think much of), to bring it back to the notion of anticipations being a core feature of his epistemology? Am I conflating the concepts of foresight and shrewd judgement in the idea of "Prudence", with notions of predictability associated with "anticipations"? I also need to look more into other discussions here on the forums for what Epicurus actually thought of the Virtues, as my current thinking is to include them in his "vain ideals."

Also I found it interesting in knowing a bit more about Epicurean philosophy, to try to unpack the use of the words prudently, honourably/honestly and justly in the passage rather than just seeing a bunch of "yay!" words strung together. Prudently potentially being a reference to his epistemology rather than to the virtues per se. Justice in Epicureanism being based on convention and contract, and the material conditions that bring about those conventions. Honourably/honestly being central to issues of reputation, and the potential for friendship and the security for living pleasantly that it brings.

The final part about "agreeably" and virtue is beyond my capability of analyzing. 😊 Cheers!

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**Post by "Root304" of August 1, 2022 at 4:04 AM**

I got obsessed, found [Don](#) 's awesome translation work of the Letter and got a bit into the weeds. Need to stop before I get out the pins, string and cork board. Haha! Had a great time.  


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### **Post by “Don” of August 1, 2022 at 7:12 AM**

Welcome to the rabbit hole LOL!

I hope I didn't use honorably/honestly?! Καλώς had a LOT of synonyms, but switching between two words in the same paragraph in a translation certainly isn't recommended when the same Greek word is used.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 1, 2022 at 7:14 AM**

(Root304 just as an aside I edited your post to take out the hard-coded font and color which probably were there because you pasted your comment from another editor. We try to avoid that because some people use dark themes and a hard-coded dark font is impossible to read with dark themes. No problem - just noting why I did that.)

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 1, 2022 at 7:17 AM**

As for "agreeably" I get the idea that was intended just to be a synonym of "pleasantly" without intending much of a distinction. I don't think I recall anyone asserting that anything significantly different was intended.

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### **Post by “Don” of August 1, 2022 at 8:00 AM**

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

As for "agreeably" I get the idea that was intended just to be a synonym of "pleasantly" without intending much of a distinction. I don't think I recall anyone asserting that anything significantly different was intended.

Exactly. They're all translating ἡδέως which is just the adverb of "pleasant."

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, ἡδύς](#)

PS: Translators' choices like using "agreeably" stem from an uneasiness or dislike in calling "pleasure" pleasure, in my opinion. A puritanical mindset seems to pervade some earlier translators' approach and persists to the present. They may feel "pleasure" isn't high-minded enough and they need to obfuscate or otherwise dilute that idea.

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### **Post by “Root304” of August 2, 2022 at 6:30 PM**

Sorry about the copying and pasting. I'll refrain from that in the future. And sorry that this thread ultimately was "Root realizes he needs to look at better translations."

Just found and read through Kungi's Welcome thread. Lots off good stuff there. Hadn't realized there already was active discussion on the topic of virtues to look at.

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### **Post by “Don” of August 2, 2022 at 7:25 PM**

@Root304 , no apologies necessary at all 😊

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 2, 2022 at 8:20 PM**

Yes no apologies necessary. I think we get at least as much out of covering basic issues, and improving our ability to articulate them, as we do in some our speculations about things that we don't have enough information to know about.