

If We Agree For The Sake of Argument That "The Perfect Should Not Be The Enemy of The Good," then let's ask "What **Should** We Consider To Be The Proper Relationship Between The Perfect And The Good?"

Post by "Cassius" of February 26, 2024 at 4:43 PM

This thread is to discuss the question in the title.

It seems to me that this aphorism, which most of us seem to agree is a good one, needs to be followed up with more explanation of what exactly **is** the proper way for us to view the "perfect" in relationship to "the good?"

Let's also presume that we don't immediately jump to the reductionist "there is no perfect" and "there is no good," although that may be a perfectly reasonable option that we can include in the discussion.

Presuming we are talking to non-philosophers and want to give people practical advice, would we start with something like:

"The 'perfect' of a thing is a concept that we use to visualize what the 'best' of that thing would be, and by visualizing that concept of the 'best' of that thing, we can more easily work toward our target of approximating it. And even though we know from the start that the 'perfect' is not attainable for us, it still serves as a very valuable tool for us in calculating out actions, because there is no way we can hope to come close to a goal unless we start out knowing what the goal is."

I think we will see in discussing [Cicero's objections to Epicurean philosophy](#) that a lot of it amounts to stressing "the perfect" in a way most of us will consider to be unattainable. What then would we expect the ancient Epicureans to have said about this topic?

Post by "Pacatus" of February 26, 2024 at 6:13 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

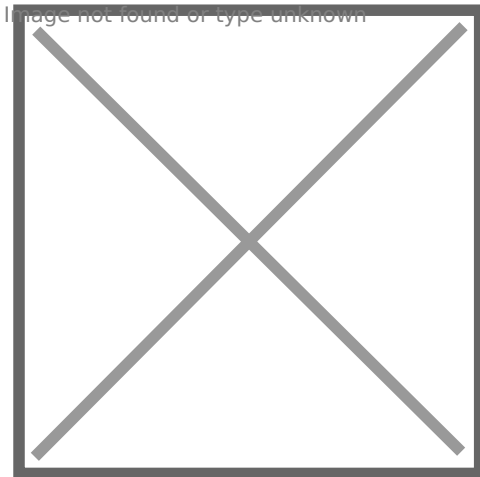
"The 'perfect' of a thing is a concept that we use to visualize what the 'best' of that thing would be, and by visualizing that concept of the 'best' of that thing, we can more easily work toward our target of approximating it. And even though we know from the start that the 'perfect' is not attainable for us, it still serves as a very valuable tool for us in calculating out actions, because there is no way we can hope to come close to a goal unless we start out knowing what the goal is."

I like that. I would see it then as an "ideal" **not** in the sense of Platonic idealism but more like:

Ideal

2: one regarded as exemplifying an ideal and often taken as a model for imitation

3: an ultimate object or aim of endeavor : [GOAL](#)



Definition of IDEAL

of, relating to, or embodying an ideal; conforming exactly to an ideal, law, or standard : perfect; existing as a mental image or in fancy or imagination only;...

www.merriam-webster.com

Epicurus' living as a god?

Or a telos -- a la eudaimonia?

Post by "Bryan" of February 26, 2024 at 6:19 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3731-if-we-agree-for-the-sake-of-argument-that-the-perfect-should-not-be-the-enemy-of/>

"The 'perfect' of a thing is a concept that we use to visualize what the 'best' of that thing would be, and by visualizing that concept of the 'best' of that thing, we can more easily work toward our target of approximating it. And even though we know from the start that the 'perfect' is not attainable for us, it still serves as a very valuable tool for us in calculating out actions, because there is no way we can hope to come close to a goal unless we start out knowing what the goal is."

Really, I think this is an excellent response! I would perhaps just want to add: the perfect is not *always* attainable for us. We are capable of feeling perfect/complete pleasure. If not in our whole body (περι όλον τὸ ἄθροισμα) at least in the mind, which is the most important part of the body (τὰ κυριώτατα μέρη τῆς φύσεως).

Post by “Cassius” of February 26, 2024 at 6:41 PM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

the perfect is not *always* attainable for us

Absolutely right and very important as a part of the puzzle.

Maybe we should add the corollary:

...And the good is not the enemy of the perfect, either, if the limits of the idea of perfection are properly understood....

Post by “Don” of February 26, 2024 at 11:01 PM

Quote from Cassius

If We Agree For The Sake of Argument That "The Perfect Should Not Be The Enemy of The Good," then let's ask "What *Should* We Consider To Be The Proper Relationship Between The Perfect And The Good?"

I'm sorry to be pedantic, but - same as the other thread - I think that's an improper way of thinking about the question. The aphorism is indeed "The Perfect Should Not Be The Enemy of

The Good." However, a better way to think of this is "The Perfect Should Not Be The Enemy of *The Good Enough*." I don't think this saying has anything to say about The Good (telos, tagathon) in the philosophical sense. From my perspective, it has to do with procrastinating in action until a "perfect" solution or course of action or choice can be devised. To me, it says we can't wait around for the "perfect" but should take action where a "good enough" course can be charted. There's time to revise, regroup, rethink later. Get on with it! It's better to have a working solution than to wait until all the planets align and a perfect course is laid. There is no such as perfection in our human world. Don't waste time waiting around for it.

Post by “DavidN” of February 28, 2024 at 2:51 AM

If gods are suppose to be perfect, at least [epicurean gods](#). should you not look to epicureans utility of the gods for there utility towards perfection.

Post by “Eikadistes” of February 28, 2024 at 10:20 AM

[Quote from DavidN](#)

If gods are suppose to be perfect, at least [epicurean gods](#). should you not look to epicureans utility of the gods for there utility towards perfection.

I meant to propose the *same* point: when I think of "perfect" in the context of Epicurean philosophy, the first thing that comes to mind is the blameless, incorruptible, divine nature, which is also an example of an existence that truly enjoys *The Good*, *The Good* that is pure pleasure.

[Quote from Bryan](#)

he perfect is not **always** attainable for us.

I recall Epicurus reinforcing this point about describing the exclusive categories of "gods" and "mortals", and emphasizing that the two cannot be the same. We can approximate the perfection of a god-like existence, but we are still mortals with health problems and we can only do our best.

These are good points that you both shared, and I think key to discussing Epicurean "perfection".

Post by "Cassius" of February 28, 2024 at 11:40 AM

[DavidN](#) it appears to me that your wording that Nate quoted might be a little unclear, and not just as to needing "their" rather than "there" and lack of an apostrophe. I think your point is understandable but for others reading could you check that wording?

(I say this as the King of Typos myself but this is important enough to be clear on 😊)

I am thinking the sense of what you are saying is something like:

If gods are supposed to be perfect, as an Epicurean should you not look to the [Epicurean gods](#) for their utility in steering your own movement towards perfection?

Post by "Don" of February 29, 2024 at 12:22 AM

To me, VS33 speaks to this "perfection" of the gods, using Zeus as the stand-in for the divine nature. To me, VS33 doesn't speak to the perpetuity of feeling not hungry, not thirsty, not shivering in the cold; BUT if you have experienced the state of being satisfied - not being hungry, thirsty, or shivering in the cold - you have competed with Zeus for well-being.

VS 33. The body yells out not to be hungry, not to be thirsty, not shuddering in the cold; for anyone who has these things and who has confidence in continuing to have them in the future, they may compete with Zeus for well-being. (my own translation)

σαρκὸς **φωνή** τὸ μὴ πεινῆν, τὸ μὴ διψῆν, τὸ μὴ ῥίγοῦν· ταῦτα γὰρ ἔχων τις καὶ ἐλπίζων ἔξειν [hope or expect to have] κἄν <διὸ [dative of Zeus]> ὑπὲρ εὐδαιμονίας **μαχέσαιτο**. [contend/compete]

φωνή f (genitive φωνῆς); first declension

- sound
- Usually of the human voice: voice, cry, yell
- The voice or cry of animals

- Any articulate sound (especially vowels)
- speech, discourse; language

εὐδαιμονίας - eudaimonias "well-being" (usually rendered "happiness" but I don't like that 😊)

μάχομαι

- (with dative) I make war, fight, battle
- I quarrel, wrangle, dispute
- I contend, compete

μαχέσαιο appears to me to be "[The POTENTIAL OPTATIVE expresses the opinion of the speaker about the possibility or likelihood of an action](#)"