

# Episode 267 - Virtue Is Not Absolute Or An End In Itself - All Good And Evil Consists In Sensation.

**Post by "Cassius" of January 17, 2025 at 8:19 AM**

Welcome to Episode 267 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the most complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

**Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where we discuss this and all of our podcast episodes.**

This week we are continuing our review of the key doctrines of Epicurus that are featured here at Epicureansfriends on the front page of our website.

This week we will address "[Virtue Is Not Absolute Or An End In Itself - All Good And Evil Consists In Sensation.](#)"

Our discussion outline (work in progress!) will be [here](#).

[media]<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/64342358/media>

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**Post by "Cassius" of January 22, 2025 at 10:19 PM**

In preparation for this coming weekend's recording of episode 265, I thought I would see if anyone had any suggestions for texts to include on the specific topic of the competition between virtue and pleasure for the title of "highest good."

While the letter to Menoecus and the Principle Doctrines (for example, [PD05](#)) mention specific virtues like justice and honor and wisdom, I am looking for texts that specifically contrast the competition between "virtue" as a category vs "pleasure" as a category for the top role.

Diogenes Laertius' inscription contains the "shouting" fragment that the end of life is pleasure and not virtue, and Torquatus goes on at length about this precise competition.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4227-episode-267-virtue-is-not-absolute-or-an-end-in-itself-all-good-and-evil-consist/>

I think one of the Jefferson letters makes the specific point too.

Those give us most of the material we need, but if anyone remembers anything else referencing virtue vs pleasure on the category level that we should be sure to include, please add to this thread.

There's lots of material in praise of pleasure from which we can choose as needed, and many references to *particular* virtues like justice. But if anyone remembers any specific comparisons of pleasure vs virtue in any of the secondary literature (other works of Cicero, works of Plutarch, or Philodemus, etc,) please post in the thread and i will add it to the discussion outline [here](#).

Thanks!

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of January 23, 2025 at 9:56 AM**

"Of all this the beginning and the greatest good is prudence. Wherefore prudence is a more precious thing even than philosophy: for from prudence are sprung all the other virtues, and it teaches us that it is not possible to live pleasantly without living prudently and honorably and justly, (nor, again, to live a life of prudence, honor, and justice) without living pleasantly. For the virtues are by nature bound up with the pleasant life, and the pleasant life is inseparable from them." - Letter to Menoecus

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"Yes, just as we regard with favour the physician's skill not for his art's sake merely but because we prize sound health, and just as the pilot's art is praised on utilitarian and not on artistic grounds, because it supplies the principles of good navigation, so wisdom, which we must hold to be the art of living, would be no object of desire, if it were productive of no advantage; but it is in fact desired, because it is to us as an architect that plans and accomplishes pleasure." - Cicero "On Ends" Torquatus section.

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of January 24, 2025 at 7:42 PM**

Here is another way to word the title of this episode:

"Virtue is a means for pleasure, and not an end in itself."

- and -

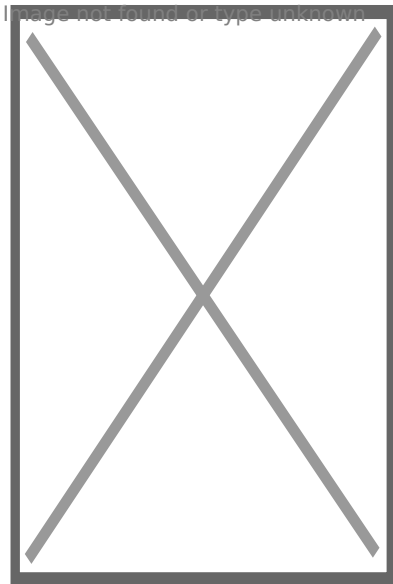
"Good is that which causes pleasure or is pleasurable, evil is that which causes pain or is painful"

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## Post by "Matteng" of January 26, 2025 at 2:02 AM

Very exciting for me ☐☐

The Stoics who I challenge to convince me that Virtue is the only good point always to Platos Socrates Euthydemus( maybe the points which there are mentioned could be challenged):



[Euthydemus](#)

[www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org)

- Virtue is in our power Pleasure/ Tranquility depends on Externals (only true for bodily Pleasure, not so much for Mental Pleasure I think, that is an „Internal“ or ?)

-Without Virtue nothing is good

-Only with Virtue things can be used useful

Another point:

Ataraxia is Peace of mind, confidence, fearlessness etc ....

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4227-episode-267-virtue-is-not-absolute-or-an-end-in-itself-all-good-and-evil-consist/>

But ok I can have peace of mind / tranquility in ignoring troubling facts, taking tranquilizers or ( with virtue ) fulfilling your values, duties, confronting uncomfortable things/ situations.

The Epicureans are often accused of the first. (Defense: you need to live wise, ->honourable<-, justly to live pleasurable)

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### **Post by “Cassius” of January 26, 2025 at 6:17 AM**

Thank you Matteng!

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### **Post by “Cassius” of January 26, 2025 at 8:02 AM**

To repeat, Matteng, this post is very helpful. We have some sickness that is going to cause us to delay this episode for a week. That will give us time to take up this suggestion, and address the major arguments that Stoics and Platonists make for this position.

If anyone has other specific "virtue-is-in-itself-the-highest-good" arguments let us know and we'll try to include them - even if it takes us more than one episode to do so.

This is no doubt one of the most profound division points of all, so it will be good to cover it is strongly as we can.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of January 26, 2025 at 8:11 AM**

I presume that the pro-virtue argument is stated succinctly by Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus as well, so if anyone knows particularly pithy citations to parts of their work that we should consider including as well, please post.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of January 26, 2025 at 8:27 AM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4227-episode-267-virtue-is-not-absolute-or-an-end-in-itself-all-good-and-evil-consist/>

Using Deepseek here is a preliminary list. I doubt this is by any means the best, but it is a good list of names:

The Stoics, a school of Hellenistic philosophy, firmly believed that **virtue** (moral excellence) is the highest good and the key to a flourishing life. They argued that virtue is sufficient for happiness and that external things like wealth, fame, and pleasure are indifferent. Below are some of the most famous quotes from ancient Stoics in support of virtue being the highest good:

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## 1. Marcus Aurelius

Marcus Aurelius, the Roman Emperor and Stoic philosopher, emphasized the importance of virtue in his personal writings, *Meditations*.

Quote

*"Waste no more time arguing about what a good man should be. Be one."*  
— *Meditations*, Book 10

Quote

*"The happiness of your life depends upon the quality of your thoughts: therefore, guard accordingly, and take care that you entertain no notions unsuitable to virtue and reasonable nature."*  
— *Meditations*, Book 5

Quote

*"Just that you do the right thing. The rest doesn't matter."*  
— *Meditations*, Book 12

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## 2. Epictetus

Epictetus, a former slave turned Stoic teacher, focused on the importance of aligning one's will with virtue and reason.

Quote

*"First say to yourself what you would be; and then do what you have to do."*  
— *Discourses*, Book 3

Quote

*"Virtue is the only good. There is no other good, neither early nor late, neither great nor small, neither in the living nor in the dead."*  
— *Discourses*, Book 2

Quote

*"Wealth consists not in having great possessions, but in having few wants."*  
— *Discourses*, Book 2

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### 3. Seneca

Seneca, the Roman Stoic philosopher and statesman, wrote extensively about the importance of virtue and the dangers of vice.

Quote

*"Virtue is nothing else than right reason."*  
— *Letters to Lucilius*, Letter 66

Quote

*"The greatest good is virtue; the next, liberty; the third and last, the necessities of life."*  
— *Letters to Lucilius*, Letter 74

Quote

*"It is not the man who has too little, but the man who craves more, that is poor."*  
— *Letters to Lucilius*, Letter 2

## 4. Zeno of Citium

Zeno of Citium, the founder of Stoicism, laid the groundwork for the Stoic emphasis on virtue.

Quote

*"Happiness is a good flow of life."*  
— Zeno (as reported by Diogenes Laërtius)

Quote

*"The goal of life is living in agreement with nature, and virtue is the harmony between the will and nature."*  
— Zeno (paraphrased from Stoic teachings)

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## 5. Cleanthes

Cleanthes, the second head of the Stoic school, reinforced the idea that virtue is the only true good.

Quote

*"Lead me, Zeus, and you too, Destiny, to wherever your decrees have assigned me. I follow readily, but if I choose not, wretched as I will be, I must follow still."*  
— Hymn to Zeus

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## 6. Musonius Rufus

Musonius Rufus, a Roman Stoic philosopher, emphasized the practical application of virtue in daily life.

Quote

*"Virtue is not only an ability but also a disposition to act in accordance with reason."*  
— Lectures, Lecture 1

## Quote

"The human being is born with an inclination toward virtue."  
— *Lectures*, Lecture 2

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## Summary

The Stoics consistently taught that **virtue is the highest good** and the foundation of a good life. Virtue, for them, meant living in accordance with reason, nature, and moral excellence. External goods like wealth, health, and fame were considered "indifferents"—neither good nor bad in themselves, but only in how they are used.

If you'd like to explore these ideas further, I recommend reading:

- *Meditations* by Marcus Aurelius
  - *Discourses* and *Enchiridion* by Epictetus
  - *Letters to Lucilius* by Seneca
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## Post by “Cassius” of January 26, 2025 at 8:30 AM

Both Plato and Aristotle, two of the most influential philosophers in Western thought, placed great emphasis on virtue as central to a good and flourishing life. While their approaches to virtue differ, they both argued that virtue is essential for achieving *eudaimonia* (happiness or flourishing). Below are some of their most famous quotes in support of virtue being the highest good.

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## Plato on Virtue

Plato, through the voice of Socrates in his dialogues, often explores the nature of virtue (*aretē*) and its role in achieving a just and harmonious soul.

### 1. Virtue as the Health of the Soul

Quote

*"Virtue is the health and beauty and well-being of the soul, and vice is the disease and weakness and deformity of the soul."*

— *Republic*, Book 4 (444e)

## 2. Virtue and Knowledge

Quote

*"No one does wrong willingly. Evil is the result of ignorance. If people knew what was right, they would do it."*

— *Protagoras* (352c)

## 3. The Importance of Virtue

Quote

*"The most important thing is not life, but the good life."*

— *Crito* (48b)

## 4. Virtue as the Highest Good

Quote

*"The good is the end of all endeavor, the object on which every heart is set."*

— *Republic*, Book 7 (505e)

## 5. Virtue and Justice

Quote

*"Justice is the excellence of the soul, and injustice is the defect of the soul."*

— *Republic*, Book 1 (353e)

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## Aristotle on Virtue

Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, provides a systematic account of virtue (*aretē*) as the mean between extremes and the foundation of a flourishing life.

## 1. Virtue as the Highest Good

Quote

*"Happiness is an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue."*

— *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1 (1098a)

## 2. Virtue as a Habit

Quote

*"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."*

— *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 2 (1103a)

## 3. The Golden Mean

Quote

*"Virtue is a mean between two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency."*

— *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 2 (1106b)

## 4. Virtue and Reason

Quote

*"The function of man is to live a certain kind of life, and this activity implies a rational principle, and the function of a good man is the good and noble performance of these."*

— *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1 (1098a)

## 5. Virtue and Happiness

Quote

*"Happiness depends on ourselves, and it is achieved through virtue, which is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean relative to us."*

— *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1 (1106b)

## 6. The Role of Virtue in a Flourishing Life

Quote

"The good for man is an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are many virtues, in accordance with the best and most complete."  
— *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1 (1098a)

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## Key Differences Between Plato and Aristotle

- **Plato:** Virtue is closely tied to knowledge and the harmony of the soul. In the *Republic*, he argues that a just soul, governed by reason, is the key to happiness.
  - **Aristotle:** Virtue is a habit developed through practice and lies in finding the "golden mean" between extremes. He emphasizes that virtue is not just theoretical but must be lived through action.
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## Summary

Both Plato and Aristotle agree that virtue is the highest good and essential for a flourishing life. Plato focuses on the harmony of the soul and the role of knowledge in achieving virtue, while Aristotle emphasizes the practical development of virtuous habits and the importance of reason in guiding ethical behavior.

If you'd like to explore these ideas further, I recommend reading:

- Plato's *Republic* and *Meno*
- Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

Let me know if you'd like more quotes or insights!

I'll combine that with this from ChatGPT;

Here are some notable quotes from ancient Stoics that support the idea of virtue as the highest good:

### 1. **Marcus Aurelius:**

- "If it is not right, do not do it. If it is not true, do not say it." (*Meditations*, Book XII, 17)

- This reflects the Stoic emphasis on virtue as the guiding principle for action and speech, aligning behavior with moral integrity.

## 2. **Epictetus:**

- "Virtue consists in a will which is in agreement with Nature." (*Discourses*, 1.4.11)
- For Epictetus, aligning one's will with nature and reason (the Stoic ideal) is the essence of virtue and the highest good.

## 3. **Seneca:**

- "Virtue is nothing else than right reason." (*Letters to Lucilius*, 66.32)
- This statement underscores the Stoic belief that living in accordance with reason and acting virtuously are inseparable.

## 4. **Cicero** (a Roman statesman influenced by Stoicism):

- "The good life is not possible without virtue, and virtue itself is sufficient for happiness." (*De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*, Book III)
- Cicero emphasizes the Stoic principle that virtue alone is both necessary and sufficient for achieving true happiness.

## 5. **Zeno of Citium** (founder of Stoicism):

- "Happiness is a good flow of life, and this can only be achieved through the possession of virtue." (Fragment cited by Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, VII.88)
- Zeno defines happiness as living in accordance with nature and virtue, highlighting the centrality of virtue to the Stoic conception of the good life.

These quotes illustrate the Stoic doctrine that virtue is the ultimate good, and other aspects of life (such as health, wealth, or pleasure) are secondary or indifferent in comparison.

Here are some significant quotes from **Plato** and **Aristotle** that emphasize virtue as the highest good:

## **Plato**

1. **"The soul of the man who lives justly and who is dear to the gods is in the best condition."**
  - (*The Republic*, Book X, 613a)
  - Plato connects justice, a core virtue, to the ultimate well-being of the soul, suggesting that virtue leads to the highest good.
2. **"Virtue does not spring from riches, but riches and all other human goods, both private and public, from virtue."**
  - (*The Apology*, 30b)
  - In this statement, Socrates (as Plato's mouthpiece) argues that virtue is the source of all good things, prioritizing it above material wealth and worldly pursuits.
3. **"The life which is unexamined is not worth living."**
  - (*The Apology*, 38a)

- While not directly about virtue, this emphasizes the need for self-reflection and pursuit of wisdom, which Plato associates with living virtuously and achieving the highest form of good.

## Aristotle

1. **"Happiness is an activity of the soul in accordance with perfect virtue."**
  - (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, 1098a16-17)
  - Aristotle defines happiness (eudaimonia), the highest human good, as the practice of virtue in accordance with reason over a complete life.
2. **"The good for man is an activity of the soul in conformity with excellence or virtue."**
  - (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, 1098a7-8)
  - Aristotle ties the highest good to actions performed in line with virtue, emphasizing that virtue is essential for achieving the good life.
3. **"Moral virtue comes about as a result of habit."**
  - (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, 1103a14)
  - Here, Aristotle highlights that virtue is cultivated through habitual practice, making it the foundation of ethical behavior and a life well-lived.
4. **"The best good is happiness, and this is achieved through a life of virtue in accordance with reason."**
  - (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, 1177a12-18)
  - Aristotle argues that human flourishing depends on living virtuously, guided by reason, as the ultimate good.

Both philosophers affirm that virtue is fundamental to achieving the highest good, though Plato views it as a harmony of the soul aligned with the Forms, while Aristotle frames it as the practical realization of reason in human life.

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## Post by "Cassius" of January 26, 2025 at 4:52 PM

Additional from Marcus Aurelius, Diogenes Laertius Book VII (on Zeno of Citium), and Seneca:

Marcus Aurelius, Book IV: 16. Within ten days thou wilt seem a god to those to whom thou art now a beast and an ape, if thou wilt return to thy principles and the worship of reason.

Marcus Aurelius, Book I: 8. From Apollonius I learned freedom of will and undeviating steadiness of purpose; and to look to nothing else, not even for a moment, except to reason....

Marcus Aurelius - In the constitution of the rational animal I see no virtue which is opposed to justice; but I see a virtue which is opposed to love of pleasure, and that is temperance.

Diogenes Laertius, Life of Zeno: 100. The reason why they characterize the perfect good as beautiful is that it has in full all the "factors" required by nature or has perfect proportion. Of the beautiful there are (say they) four species, namely, what is just, courageous, orderly and wise; for it is under these forms that fair deeds are accomplished. Similarly there are four species of the base or ugly, namely, what is unjust, cowardly, disorderly, and unwise. By the beautiful is meant properly and in an unique sense that good which renders its possessors praiseworthy, or briefly, good which is worthy of praise; though in another sense it signifies a good aptitude for one's proper function; while in yet another sense the beautiful is that which lends new grace to anything, as when we say of the wise man that he alone is good and beautiful. 101. And they say that only the morally beautiful is good. So Hecato in his treatise On Goods, book iii., and Chrysippus in his work On the Morally Beautiful. They hold, that is, that virtue and whatever partakes of virtue consists in this: which is equivalent to saying that all that is good is beautiful, or that the term "good" has equal force with the term "beautiful," which comes to the same thing. "Since a thing is good, it is beautiful; now it is beautiful, therefore it is good." They hold that all goods are equal and that all good is desirable in the highest degree and admits of no lowering or heightening of intensity. Of things that are, some, they say, are good, some are evil, and some neither good nor evil (that is, morally indifferent).

And Athenaeus the epigrammatist speaks of all the Stoics in common as follows:[22] O ye who've learnt the doctrines of the Porch And have committed to your books divine The best of human learning, teaching men That the mind's virtue is the only good! She only it is who keeps the lives of men And cities, - safer than high gates and walls. But those who place their happiness in pleasure Are led by the least worthy of the Muses. Diogenes Laertius Book VII

Goods comprise the virtues of prudence, justice, courage, temperance, and the rest; while the opposites of these are evils, namely, folly, injustice, and the rest. Neutral (neither good nor evil, that is) are all those things which neither benefit nor harm a man: such as life, health, pleasure, beauty, strength, wealth, fair fame and noble birth, and their opposites, death, disease, pain, ugliness, weakness, poverty, ignominy, low birth, and the like. Diogenes Laertius Book VII

Pleasure is an irrational elation at the accruing of what seems to be choiceworthy; and under it are ranged ravishment, malevolent joy, delight, transport. Ravishment is pleasure which charms the ear. Malevolent joy is pleasure at another's ills. Delight is the mind's propulsion to weakness, its name in Greek (τέρψις) being akin to τρέψις or turning. To be in transports of delight is the melting away of virtue. Diogenes Laertius Book VII

"And yet what reason is there that he should provide a living? For if it be to support life, life itself is after all a thing indifferent. If it be for pleasure, pleasure too is a thing indifferent. While if it be for virtue, virtue in itself is sufficient to constitute happiness. Diogenes Laertius Book VII

Seneca's Letters - To Lucilius - 66.45: "What can be added to that which is perfect? Nothing otherwise that was not perfect to which something has been added. Nor can anything be added to virtue, either, for if anything can be added thereto, it must have contained a defect. Honour, also, permits of no addition; for it is honourable because of the very qualities which I have mentioned.[5] What then? Do you think that propriety, justice, lawfulness, do not also belong to the same type, and that they are kept within fixed limits? The ability to increase is proof that a thing is still imperfect.

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## Post by "Cassius" of February 1, 2025 at 4:48 PM

Regretfully I am going to have to announce another one week postponement of this episode. Several additional conflicts have developed that cause the prudent course to be to record this on February 9th rather than February 2nd.

I have, however, made further progress on the discussion outline, so feel free to reference it here:

[Virtue Is Not Absolute Or An End In Itself Because All Good And Evil Consists In Sensation](#)

As you'll see if you click over there, I've already collected far too many citations to cover in a single episode.

As I see it the most important thing for us to cover as an introductory discussion for new students of Epicurus (and remember, that's our target audience, not professional academics) boils down to something like:

*Plato and Aristotle had held that virtue is essential to a happy life, but they defined happiness in terms of rationality or piety to the gods. The Stoics went further and held virtue to be an end in itself, and the same for all people at all times and places. Epicurus rejected virtue as an end itself, or the same for all, but instead held that virtue is a necessary and inseparable tool, to be applied contextually, for achieving the best life - a life of pleasure.*

Also let me repeat that I invite anyone to suggest issues to cover, [as did Matteng in post 5 above.](#)

Matteng's suggestions from Stoic criticisms are good general aspects such as:

- Virtue is in our power but pleasure/tranquility depends on externals
- Without Virtue nothing is good

- Only with virtue can anything be useful

Feel free to add to our list and we'll try to cover them.

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### Post by “Don” of February 1, 2025 at 5:33 PM

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Regretfully I am going to have to announce another one week postponement of this episode.

You're just building anticipation 😊

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### Post by “Matteng” of February 2, 2025 at 3:07 PM

Take your time, for me it is as you say one of the most important subject to distinguish Epicureanism vs the other ancient schools especially Stoicism which I followed in the past.

Quality first ☐☐

In addition, it is precisely on this topic that the harshest criticism of Epicureanism is voiced. For example the critics say that where Virtue is instrumental for Pleasure, this Virtue wouldn't be Virtue at all or only a weak form of it and Pleasure enslaved.

( Often the division of Pleasure of Body and Mind is not considered, for Peace of Mind/Tranquility it often makes sense to not pursue bodily Pleasures, and for the subject of bad consequences of things which bring Pleasure like addiction, Epicurus has his answers like sober reasoning, hedonic calculus, what brings more pain than pleasure should be avoided....)

The Stoics accept only a perfected rational joy(chara). But even this they would not see as the end of the happy life but Virtue (Maybe because you can get to a form of Tranquility with ignorance and in running from challenges/duties ( another critic), but this is not sustainable/honorable/just/prudent(defense).

A perfect Peace of Mind is only available for a perfect Sage and with Virtue (The Stoics say) (

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maybe an unlimited desire for limitless self improvement ? )

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### **Post by “Cassius” of February 2, 2025 at 3:48 PM**

We're looking to get Joshua back in action and happily we are hoping for Don to participate so we should be ready with all guns blazing for the recording next week!

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### **Post by “Cassius” of February 3, 2025 at 8:05 AM**

One more thing about planning for this program.

We have lots of citations we can go through with various perspectives on whether virtue is the goal of life, the same for all, its own reward, etc.

But I think we need to start out with some basic issues to set the stage for all the rest, such as:

### **What Is Virtue?**

- How do we know what is virtuous and what is not?
- Can the same action be virtuous in one situation and not virtuous in another?
- If so, how do we distinguish between the two actions in different contexts?
- What is the source of "virtue"?
  - The gods?
  - Ideal forms?
  - Rationality?
  - Nature? Does nature tell us somehow what is virtuous?
  - Our minds? Is virtue simply what we say it is?

I've added that to the discussion outline as the place to start:

[Virtue Is Not Absolute Or An End In Itself Because All Good And Evil Consists In Sensation](https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4227-episode-267-virtue-is-not-absolute-or-an-end-in-itself-all-good-and-evil-consist/)

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### **Post by “Don” of February 3, 2025 at 8:28 AM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4227-episode-267-virtue-is-not-absolute-or-an-end-in-itself-all-good-and-evil-consist/>

I think you have to start even more basic.

*What is virtue?*

Αρήτη (arete) means something wider than what we tend to think of as "virtue."

And Latin *virtus* is bound up with being "manly" being a *vir*.

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## Post by “Cassius” of February 3, 2025 at 8:54 AM

Yes - just constantly referring to lists like this one does not answer the question or tell us what we need to know.

And remember, about half of what we need to address is what Epicurus said about it, but maybe more than half of what we need to do is cut through the image of virtue that most people think of today given the Stoic/Religious perspective.

The four classic [cardinal virtues](#) are:<sup>[4]</sup>

- [Prudence](#) (φρόνησις, *phrónēsis*; [Latin](#): *prudentia*; also [Wisdom](#), [Sophia](#), *sapientia*), the ability to discern the appropriate course of action to be taken in a given situation at the appropriate time.
- [Fortitude](#) (ἀνδρεία, *andreía*; [Latin](#): *fortitudo* 😞 also termed courage, forbearance, strength, endurance, and the ability to confront fear, uncertainty, and intimidation.
- [Temperance](#) (σωφροσύνη, *sōphrosýnē*; [Latin](#): *temperantia* 😞 also known as restraint, the practice of self-control, abstinence, discretion, and moderation tempering the [appetition](#). Plato considered *sōphrosynē*, which may also be translated as sound-mindedness, to be the most important virtue.
- [Justice](#) (δικαιοσύνη, *dikaíosýnē*; [Latin](#): *iustitia* 😞 also considered as fairness;<sup>[5]</sup> the Greek word also having the meaning of righteousness.

This enumeration is traced to Greek philosophy and was listed by [Plato](#) who also added [piety](#) (ὁσιότης, *hosiotēs*) and replaced prudence with [wisdom](#).<sup>[6]</sup> Some scholars consider either of the above four virtue combinations as mutually reducible and therefore not cardinal.<sup>[7]</sup>

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## Post by “Don” of February 3, 2025 at 12:23 PM

APETH (my misspelling previously)

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

Virtus

[Charlton T. Lewis, Charles Short, A Latin Dictionary, virtūs](#)

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### **Post by “Cassius” of February 3, 2025 at 2:01 PM**

Thanks Don --- the second link worked fine but not the first -- looks like there's maybe an error in "entry=a)reth" in that link?

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### **Post by “Don” of February 3, 2025 at 2:17 PM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Thanks Don --- the second link worked fine but not the first -- looks like there's maybe an error in "entry=a)reth" in that link?

Try it now. Thanks!

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### **Post by “Cassius” of February 3, 2025 at 2:19 PM**

Don -- I guess we don't have the Greek to compare to this, but whatever the ambiguity of the word virtue is, it looks like the dispute crystallized, maybe after Epicurus himself was dead, into what Diogenes of Oinoanda is discussing at [Fragment 32](#). I note that the word is used in the plural in this translation. I am thinking that this aspect (which is the means and which is the end) is what people most want us to discuss. Also, I've never been entirely sure whether these European quote marks << >> are supposed to indicate quotes within the text, or missing data which Martin Ferguson Smith has reconstructed. In this case I don't gather that its

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4227-episode-267-virtue-is-not-absolute-or-an-end-in-itself-all-good-and-evil-consist/>

reconstructed, but rather intended to set off certain sections of text as being referenced rather than being the words of Diogenes himself, but I'm just not sure.

#### Quote

Fr. 32

... [the latter] being as malicious as the former.

I shall discuss folly shortly, the virtues and pleasure now.

If, gentlemen, the point at issue between these people and us involved inquiry into «what is the means of happiness?» and they wanted to say «the virtues» (which would actually be true), it would be unnecessary to take any other step than to agree with them about this, without more ado. But since, as I say, the issue is not «what is the means of happiness?» but «what is happiness and what is the ultimate goal of our nature?», I say both now and always, shouting out loudly to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that pleasure is the end of the best mode of life, while the virtues, which are inopportunately messed about by these people (being transferred from the place of the means to that of the end), are in no way an end, but the means to the end.

Let us therefore now state that this is true, making it our starting-point.

Suppose, then, someone were to ask someone, though it is a naive question, «who is it whom these virtues benefit?», obviously the answer will be «man.» The virtues certainly do not make provision for these birds flying past, enabling them to fly well, or for each of the other animals: they do not desert the nature with which they live and by which they have been engendered; rather it is for the sake of this nature that the virtues do everything and exist.

Each (virtue?) therefore ..... means of (?) ... just as if a mother for whatever reasons sees that the possessing nature has been summoned there, it then being necessary to allow the court to asked what each (virtue?) is doing and for whom ..... [We must show] both which of the desires are natural and which are not; and in general all things that [are included] in the [former category are easily attained] .....

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### Post by “Cassius” of February 3, 2025 at 2:22 PM

Works great -- thanks ----

Also, we crossposted so please note my comment about Oinoanda.

Another general comment --

in discussing "virtue" as a collective noun vs "the virtues" as particular virtues, I am afraid we are back in the territory of the relationship between "the one" and "the many" in terms of what is it that all virtues share that makes them virtuous.

There's way too much to cover in one episode but in terms of what virtue is, I suppose that's one way of getting at the question: what is it that all "the virtues" share that makes them "virtue"?

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### **Post by “Don” of February 3, 2025 at 2:35 PM**

Just finishing lunch at work. For later reference...

[DCLP/Trismegistos 865216 = LDAB 865216](#)

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### **Post by “Bryan” of February 3, 2025 at 2:59 PM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

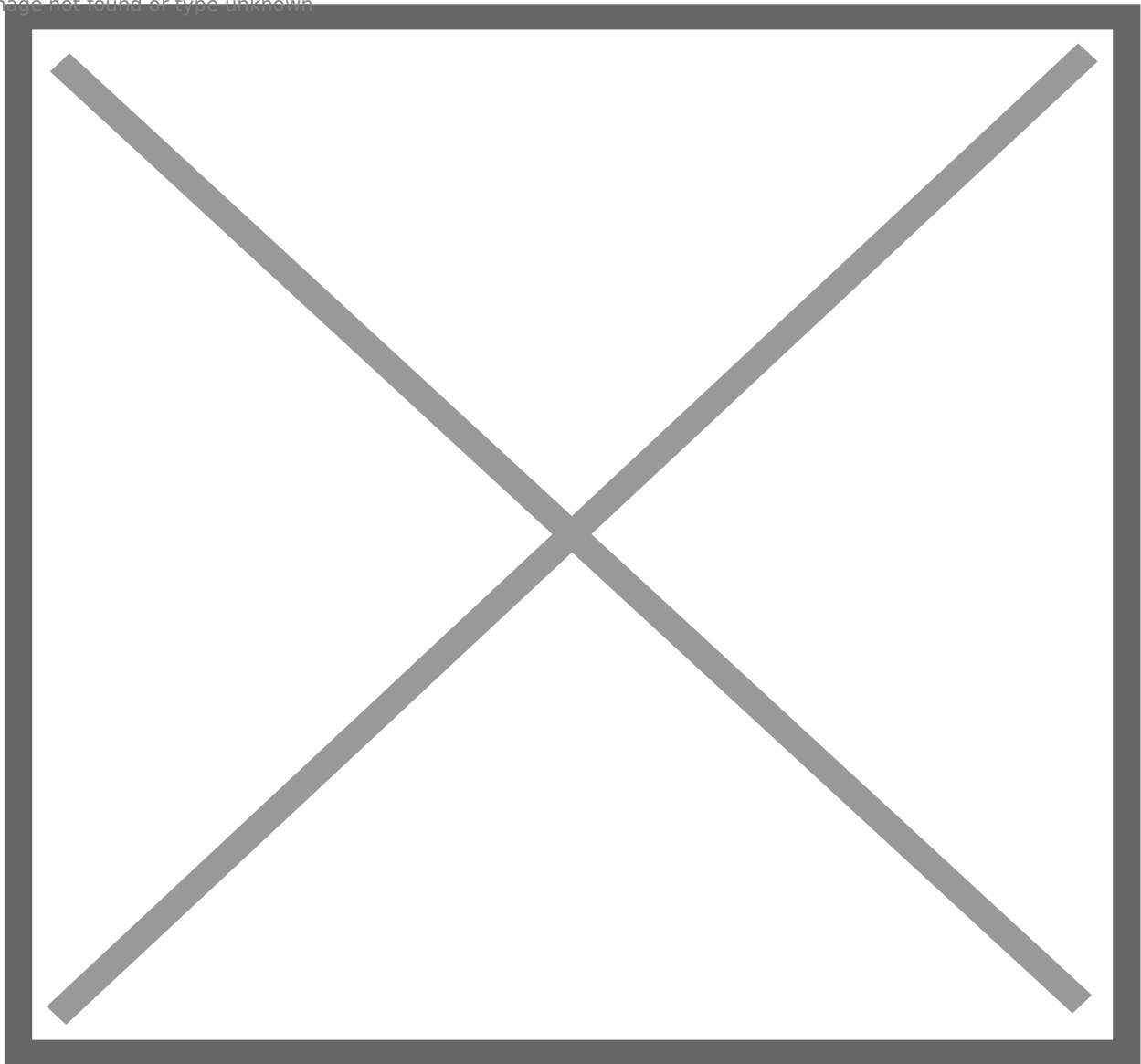
In this case I don't gather that its reconstructed, but rather intended to set off certain sections of text as being referenced rather than being the words of Diogenes himself, but I'm just not sure.

That is correct, this is a well preserved section. There are a few letters missing here and there, but what is in quotes is present in the ancient Greek.

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### **Post by “Don” of February 6, 2025 at 7:49 AM**

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### [Against Cicero](#)

Why Cicero's Critique of Epicureanism Misses the Mark (And Why Modern Stoics Should Know Better)

[open.substack.com](https://open.substack.com)

An interesting take on Cicero's criticism a regards virtue

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**Post by “Cassius” of February 6, 2025 at 8:27 AM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4227-episode-267-virtue-is-not-absolute-or-an-end-in-itself-all-good-and-evil-consist/>

Yes it is an interesting take, and well written, focused more on the military aspect of Rome than you usually see. He's more negative on the military aspect than I would be, but those issues are certainly debatable. Someone is going to feel a lot differently about Rome's military depending on whether they are Roman or Carthaginian.

I suspect that going too far in trying to take social positions ends up being more of a debate about Greco Roman politics than about philosophy. That's one reason I hesitate to weigh in on the dispute between Julius Caesar and Cassius Longinus. There seem to have been Epicureans on both sides of the civil war, and I am not sure which side I would take personally - probably that's another example of how contextual so many issues are. There seem to be Epicurean texts saying kingship *can* be ok and democracy not so ok.

It's all well and good to focus on local community welfare when you have a stable society, but when the Persians are on the march to Greece, or some Ghengis Khan or fundamentalist religion tries to conquer your society by force, then it's nice to have a viable military.

Good food for thought about the contextual nature of Virtue.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of February 8, 2025 at 4:14 PM**

About 17 hours from now we will be recording our "Virtue" extravaganza episode. We'll be talking live so there's no telling what topics the final episode will cover, but I've further refined the "talking points" I'd *like* to see us cover at the link below. If anyone has any last minute quotations to submit or suggestions for topics, there's still time to let us know in this thread.

[Virtue Is Not Absolute Or An End In Itself Because All Good And Evil Consists In Sensation](#)

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### **Post by “Don” of February 8, 2025 at 4:59 PM**

fwiw - Here is my (on-going!) look at Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics in light of Epicureanism:

[Epicurean Sage - Nichomachean Ethics Book 1](#)

< Back to Nichomachean Ethics homepage  
Nicomachean Ethics starts out with: “Every art and every investigation, and likewise every practical pursuit or...  
sites.google.com

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4227-episode-267-virtue-is-not-absolute-or-an-end-in-itself-all-good-and-evil-consist/>

For example, (an excerpt):

#### Quote

At 1097b, Aristotle states “What is always chosen as an end in itself and never as a means to something else is called final in an unqualified sense. This description seems to apply to happiness above all else: for we always choose happiness as an end in itself and never for the sake of something else. Honor, pleasure, intelligence, and all virtue we choose partly for themselves – for we would choose each of them even if no further advantage would accrue from them – but we also choose them partly for the sake of happiness, because we assume that it is through them that we will be happy. On the other hand, no one chooses happiness for the sake of honor, pleasure, and the like, nor as a means to anything else.”

First, the word translated happiness here is εὐδαιμονία eudaimonia which I prefer to translate as “well-being.” LSJ provides various translations within its short entry: prosperity, good fortune; true, full happiness. The interesting issue is that Epicurus also made liberal use of the word eudaimonia as well. But did he identify it with The Good or the ultimate, final end? A quick search of writings brings up:

Vatican Saying 33. The body cries out to not be hungry, not be thirsty, not be cold. Anyone who has these things, and who is confident of continuing to have them, can rival the gods for happiness. σαρκὸς φωνὴ 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 μαχέσαιο. [contend/compete]

Fragment 548. Happiness and bliss are produced not by great riches nor vast possessions nor exalted occupations nor positions of power, but rather by peace of mind, freedom from pain, and a disposition of the soul that sets its limits in accordance with nature. τὸ εὐδαιμον καὶ μακάριον [happiness and blessedness, latter same word as in PD1] οὐ χρημάτων πλῆθος οὐδὲ πραγμάτων ὄγκος οὐδ’ ἀρχαί τινες ἔχουσιν οὐδὲ δυνάμεις, ἀλλ’ ἀλυπία καὶ πραότης παθῶν καὶ διάθεσις ψυχῆς τὸ κατὰ φύσιν ὀρίζουσα.

...[and so on with several other Epicurean citations, commentary, etc.]

And on a later page in my admittedly snarky commentary...

#### Quote

Aristotle then gets to the heart of his definition of virtue, quoting Ostwald:

"Virtue or excellence is a characteristic involving choice, and that it consists in observing the mean relative to us, a mean which is defined by a rational principle, such as a man of practical wisdom would use to determine it. It is the mean by reference to

two vices: the one of excess and the other of deficiency... virtue is a mean, but in regard to goodness and excellence it is an extreme. " (1106b-1107a)

LOL! There is SO much that is problematic here from my perspective. Allow me to break down my issues with Aristotle's exhortations.

He defines "virtue" (excellence, ἀρετή arete) as a characteristic/disposition (ἕξις hexeis) which remember is a "trained habit, skill, state or habit of mind" determining the choice of actions. We choose actions all the time! Epicurus puts great importance on our responsibility to choose our actions and that which we reject. The "choice" Aristotle uses here is προαίρεσις (proairesis), 'choice' or 'purpose', which he discusses in Book 3.2. It is obviously connected with the the word Epicurus uses, haireisis, but we'll leave more discussion until Book 3. So, the fact that "virtue" is connected with choices, yeah, okay, that seems mildly non-controversial. Go on...

But the mean/middle is "defined" (and we're using that word loosely, Aristotle) by a "rational principle" such as a person using practical wisdom would use to determine it! LOL! So, virtue is something that we choose by using practical wisdom - phronesis? So, far, I don't think we've defined practical wisdom either. Epicurus also places great importance on practical wisdom: It's one of the three things without which we can't experience a pleasurable life. It helps us make prudent decisions on which actions to choose and which to avoid. But Aristotle is going MUCH further in defining "virtue" in relation to this without even giving as much description as Epicurus!

And I love the last part! Virtue is a mean between extremes BUT "in regard to goodness and excellence it is an extreme"! Aristotle is attempting once again of trying to have it both ways. It sounds circular, self-refuting, and ridiculous. I am not impressed.

The next part makes me laugh as well! He goes to great length here of trying to define virtue as that elusive mean (that is actually an extreme of goodness remember) between two extremes, but then says...

"Not every action nor every emotion admits of a mean... Some actions and emotions "whose very names connote baseness, e.g., spite, shamelessness, envy; and among actions, adultery, theft, and murder."

Those are just actions to my understanding. He's trying to say you can't "virtuously" commit adultery, theft, and murder. Duh! Epicurus would say those things do harm to others and so aren't just. They disrupt society or harm relationships. However, is it just to steal bread to feed your starving children? Is it "murder" if you kill someone while defending yourself? Someone may still have to be punished for the good of society BUT maybe not? Context and social contracts are key to Epicurus's discussion of justice... I'm not as sure he's getting hung up on "virtue."

Aristotle goes on to list some of these extremes, means, and deficiencies (1107b), but - egads! - "many virtues and vices have no name" as in not all excesses or deficiencies actually have a name. So, he's going to make up things that have no name, are not referred to in regular speech, don't actually exist, but for the sake of his argument, we're supposed to pretend they exist. Methinks he's starting to use unicorns and centaurs.

Display More

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### Post by "Cassius" of February 8, 2025 at 6:38 PM

That's consistent with my current understanding that the real problem here got launched by the Stoics, which is a point that Cicero seems to me in *On Ends*, where his treatment of Stoicism is pretty slashing.

Aristotle's problem doesn't seem to be so much an overfocus on virtue but his supernatural prime mover orientation and evasion of pleasure as the basis of happiness.

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### Post by "Don" of February 9, 2025 at 8:55 AM

KD 17 Ὁ δίκαιος ἀταρακτότατος, ὁ δ' ἄδικος πλείστης ταραχῆς γέμων.

One who is just, moral, and virtuous has peace of mind; but one who is unjust is overflowing with agitation, confusion, and uncertainty. (ταραχῆς, i.e., the opposite of ἀταραξία).

This Principal Doctrine just makes sense. If you are just in your dealings with other people, moral in your actions, and do your best to display fair behavior, you have no need to be troubled. You've done your best. Don't get me wrong. Bad things will happen to you, and some people still won't like you. But you don't control that. Your mind can be at peace. On the other hand, if you treat people poorly, display amoral behavior, and are basically an objectively poor excuse for a human being, you have reason to be troubled! People will be out to get you. If you're the latter, you need to have some frank speech with yourself and get on the right track. To paraphrase Wil Wheaton: Don't be a jerk! If you take his advice, you and all of us who interact with you will be the better for it.

## Post by “Joshua” of February 9, 2025 at 11:17 AM

Show Notes

Serafino de' Serafini, Allegory of St. Augustine as Master of the Order

[St. Augustine as Master of the Order](#)

Nature's God; The Heretical Origins of the American Republic

[Nature's God: The Heretical Origins of the American Republic](#)

Cicero, *On Ends*

### Quote

It is however my opinion that if I shew there is something moral, which is essentially desirable by reason of its inherent qualities and for its own sake, all the doctrines of your school are over- thrown. So when I have once briefly, as our time requires, determined the nature of this object, I will touch upon all your statements, Torquatus, unless perchance my recollection fails me. Well, by what is moral we understand something of such a nature that, even if absolutely deprived of utility, it may with justice be eulogized for its own qualities, apart from all rewards or advantages. Now the nature of this object cannot be so easily understood from the definition I have adopted (though to a considerable extent it can) as from the general verdict of all mankind, and the inclinations and actions of all the best men, who do very many things for the sole reason that they are seemly, right and moral, though they see that no profit will follow.

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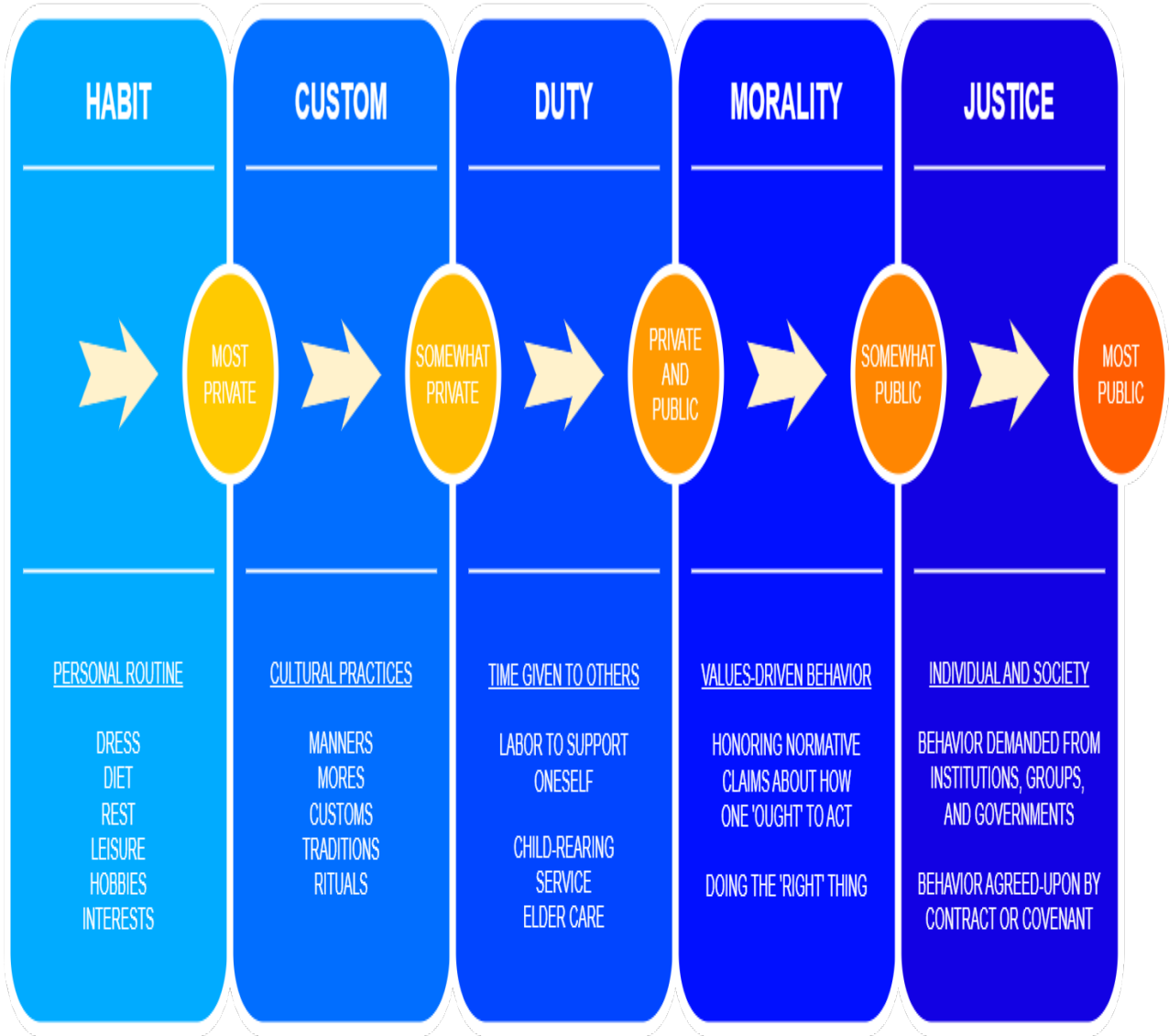
‘How I wish, said he, ‘that you had felt a bent towards the Stoic school! It was surely to be expected of you, if of any one, that you would place in the category of good nothing but virtue.’ ‘Look well to it, said I; ‘perhaps it was rather to be expected of you, inasmuch as your views substantially agreed with mine, that you would not force upon the doctrines new titles. Our principles are at one, and only our language is at variance.’ ‘Our principles are very far from being at one,’ said he, ‘for whatever that thing may be over and above morality, which you declare to be desirable, and reckon among things good, you thereby quench morality itself, which we may liken to the light cast by virtue, and virtue too you utterly overthrow.’ ‘ Your words, Cato,’ said I, ‘are

grandiose; but do you not see that you share your high- sounding phraseology with Pyrrho and Aristo, who are thorough- going levellers? I should like to know what you think of them.' 'Do you ask what I think of them?' said he. 'I think that all the good staunch upright soberminded statesmen of whom we have been told, or whom we have ourselves seen, who without any learning and merely following nature's guidance, have performed many meritorious exploits, were better trained by nature than they could possibly have been trained by philosophy, if they had accepted any other doctrine than that which regards nothing save morality as belonging to the category of good, and as belonging to the category of evil nothing save baseness; as to the remaining philosophical systems which, no doubt in different degrees, but still all of them to some extent count as good or as evil some object unconnected with virtue, they, as I think, not only fail to aid us or strengthen us in the struggle to become better, but actually corrupt nature.

-Translated James Reid

[My chart on Ethics](#)

# ETHICS AND VIRTUE COMPARED



VIRTUE AS UNDERSTOOD BY ANCIENT THINKERS IS NOT SYNONYMOUS WITH MORALITY AS WE UNDERSTAND IT. TO THE STOICS, VIRTUE IS TIED UP WITH EVERY ASPECT OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR. CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING;

## VIRTUE AND HABIT

*It is a mark of want of intellect to spend much time in things relating*

## VIRTUE AND CUSTOM

*For where our interest is, there, too, is piety directed. So that whoever is careful to regulate his*

## VIRTUE AND DUTY

*Yet we never give anything with more care, we never take such*

## VIRTUE AND MORALITY

*In the practice of these things*

## VIRTUE AND JUSTICE

*Usage is the first ground of justice*

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4227-episode-267-virtue-is-not-absolute-or-an-end-itself-but-is-a-way-to-good-and-evil-consist/>

## Diogenes of Oenoanda

### Quote

If, gentlemen, the point at issue between these people and us involved inquiry into «what is the means of happiness?» and they wanted to say «the virtues» (which would actually be true), it would be unnecessary to take any other step than to agree with them about this, without more ado. But since, as I say, the issue is not «what is the means of happiness?» but «what is happiness and what is the ultimate goal of our nature?», I say both now and always, shouting out loudly to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that pleasure is the end of the best mode of life, while the virtues, which are inopportunately messed about by these people (being transferred from the place of the means to that of the end), are in no way an end, but the means to the end. Let us therefore now state that this is true, making it our starting-point.

Suppose, then, someone were to ask someone, though it is a naive question, «who is it whom these virtues benefit?», obviously the answer will be «man.» The virtues certainly do not make provision for these birds flying past, enabling them to fly well, or for each of the other animals: they do not desert the nature with which they live and by which they have been engendered; rather it is for the sake of this nature that the virtues do everything and exist.

Diogenes of Oinoanda Fragment 32 (Martin Ferguson Smith)

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### **Post by “Cassius” of February 12, 2025 at 11:26 AM**

Episode 267 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. Today's episode is entitled: "[Virtue Is Not Absolute Or An End In Itself - All Good And Evil Consists In Sensation](#)"

[media]<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/64342358/media>

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### **Post by “Cassius” of February 12, 2025 at 1:57 PM**

You know in listening to this episode and particularly our discussion of [PD05](#) as compared with Torquatus' statements about how his own family's exploits can be reconciled with pleasure as

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4227-episode-267-virtue-is-not-absolute-or-an-end-in-itself-all-good-and-evil-consist/>

the goal:

I think sometimes it might be tempting to think that every moment of living prudently, honorably, and justly can somehow be a kind of pleasure in itself. Just as some people see "absence of pain" as a special kind of pleasure, it might be tempting to say that every moment of "living justly" is somehow pleasurable.

But I think Torquatus' examples make very clear is that while the \*end result\* is more pleasure or less pain, there are certainly times when you are acting virtuously that those experiences are in themselves painful.

Certainly the Torquatus ancestor who executed his own son for disobeying orders was not experiencing some kind of transcendent pleasure at the moment of watching his son's execution.

I make these comments because it seems very clear that pursuing pleasure as the goal of life is a "NET / ON BALANCE" affair -- we can't expect that every moment of physical and mental experience is to be pleasurable, but what we can expect is that "on balance" the pleasures of life (both stimulative and non-stimulative) will outweigh the pains.

So anyone who thinks that there it makes sense to calculate every mental and physical action - for example by living as minimally and ascetically as possible so that you never experience even the briefest moments of pain -- is not on the right track. To pursue such a path ignores how it is right and proper that we sometimes choose pain to live the most pleasant life possible to us.

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### **Post by "Godfrey" of February 12, 2025 at 2:29 PM**

The word "utilitarian" was used in the podcast regarding this particular Torquatus ancestor's action. (I think this was in a translated quotation.) To me, this word was well chosen, and is a good launching pad for further discussion. Such a discussion could include the utility of pleasure, as well as how EP and Utilitarianism aren't the same thing.

Excellent episode!