

Cicero Fighting It Out "Horse And Foot" With Epicurus (Cicero's References to Epicurus in "On Duties")

Post by "Cassius" of July 23, 2025 at 12:29 PM

Our "friend" Cicero says:

*Now that these schools are out of date, Epicurus has come into vogue—an advocate and supporter of practically the same doctrine. **Against such a philosophy we must fight it out "with horse and foot," as the saying is, if our purpose is to defend and maintain our standard of moral rectitude.***

[Quote from Cicero - On Duties - Gutenberg - Miller Edition](#)

116 XXXIII. We have still left our fourth division, comprising propriety, moderation, temperance, self-restraint, self-control.

Can anything be expedient, then, which is contrary to such a chorus of virtues? And yet the Cyrenaics, adherents of the school of Aristippus, and the philosophers who bear the name of Anniceris find all good to consist in pleasure and consider virtue praiseworthy only because it is productive of pleasure. Now that these schools are out of date, Epicurus has come into vogue—an advocate and supporter of practically the same doctrine. Against such a philosophy we must fight it out "with horse and foot," as the saying is, if our purpose is to defend and maintain our standard of moral rectitude.

117 For if, as we find it in the writings of Metrodorus, not only expediency but happiness in life depends wholly upon a sound physical constitution and the reasonable expectation that it will always remain sound, then that expediency—and what is more, the highest expediency, as they estimate it—will [399]assuredly clash with moral rectitude. For, first of all, what position will wisdom occupy in that system? The position of collector of pleasures from every possible source? What a sorry state of servitude for a virtue—to be pandering to sensual pleasure! And what will be the function of wisdom? To make skillful choice between sensual pleasures? Granted that there may be nothing more pleasant, what can be conceived more degrading for wisdom than such a role?

Then again, if anyone hold that pain is the supreme evil, what place in his philosophy has fortitude, which is but indifference to toil and pain? For however many passages there are in which Epicurus speaks right manfully of pain, we must nevertheless consider not what he says, but what it is consistent for a man to say who has defined

the good in terms of pleasure and evil in terms of pain.

And further, if I should listen to him, I should find that in many passages he has a great deal to say about temperance and self-control; but "the water will not run," as they say. For how can he commend self-control and yet posit pleasure as the supreme good? For self-control is the foe of the passions, and the passions are the handmaids of pleasure.

118 And yet when it comes to these three cardinal virtues, those philosophers shift and turn as best they can, and not without cleverness. They admit wisdom into their system as the knowledge that provides pleasures and banishes pain; they clear the way for fortitude also in some way to fit in with their doctrines, when they teach that it is a rational means for looking with indifference upon death and [401]for enduring pain. They bring even temperance in—not very easily, to be sure, but still as best they can; for they hold that the height of pleasure is found in the absence of pain. Justice totters or rather, I should say, lies already prostrate; so also with all those virtues which are discernible in social life and the fellowship of human society. For neither goodness nor generosity nor courtesy can exist, any more than friendship can, if they are not sought of and for themselves, but are cultivated only for the sake of sensual pleasure or personal advantage.

Let us now recapitulate briefly.

119 As I have shown that such expediency as is opposed to moral rectitude is no expediency, so I maintain that any and all sensual pleasure is opposed to moral rectitude. And therefore Calliphon and Dinomachus, in my judgment, deserve the greater condemnation; they imagined that they should settle the controversy by coupling pleasure with moral rectitude; as well yoke a man with a beast! But moral rectitude does not accept such a union; she abhors it, spurns it. Why, the supreme good, which ought to be simple, cannot be a compound and mixture of absolutely contradictory qualities. But this theory I have discussed more fully in another connection; for the subject is a large one. Now for the matter before us.

120 We have, then, fully discussed the problem how a question is to be decided, if ever that which seems to be expediency clashes with moral rectitude. But if, on the other hand, the assertion is made that pleasure admits of a show of expediency also, there can still be no possible union between it and moral rectitude. For, to make the most generous admission [403]we can in favour of pleasure, we will grant that it may contribute something that possibly gives some spice to life, but certainly nothing that is really expedient.

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Post by “Cassius” of July 23, 2025 at 12:52 PM

"...brave he surely cannot possibly be that counts pain the supreme evil, nor temperate he that holds pleasure to be the supreme good."

From Part 1:

Quote

5 Moreover, the subject of this inquiry is the common property of all philosophers; for who would presume to call himself a philosopher, if he did not inculcate any lessons of duty? But there are some schools that distort all notions of duty by the theories they propose touching the supreme good and the supreme evil. For he who posits the supreme good as having no connection with virtue and measures it not by a moral standard but by his own interests—if he should be consistent and not rather at times over-ruled by his better nature, he could value neither friendship nor justice nor generosity; and brave he surely cannot possibly be that counts pain the supreme evil, nor temperate he that holds pleasure to be the supreme good.

Reasons for choice of subject and authorities.

6 Although these truths are so self-evident that the subject does not call for discussion, still I have discussed it in another connection. If, therefore, these [9]schools should claim to be consistent, they could not say anything about duty; and no fixed, invariable, natural rules of duty can be posited except by those who say that moral goodness is worth seeking solely or chiefly for its own sake. Accordingly, the teaching of ethics is the peculiar right of the Stoics, the Academicians, and the Peripatetics; for the theories of Aristo, Pyrrho, and Erillus have been long since rejected; and yet they would have the right to discuss duty if they had left us any power of choosing between things, so that there might be a way of finding out what duty is. I shall, therefore, at this time and in this investigation follow chiefly the Stoics, not as a translator, but, as is my custom, I shall at my own option and discretion draw from those sources in such measure and in such manner as shall suit my purpose.

Post by “Cassius” of July 23, 2025 at 12:55 PM

This Stoic-sounding statement is very much like Cicero's position that all disturbance should be avoided as stated in Tusculan Disputations:

Quote

69 Again, we must keep ourselves free from every disturbing emotion, not only from desire and fear, but also from excessive pain and pleasure, and from anger, so that we may enjoy that calm of soul and freedom from care which bring both moral stability and dignity of character. The retired life. But there have been many and still are many who, while pursuing that calm of soul of which I speak, have withdrawn from civic duty and taken refuge in retirement. Among such have been found the most famous and by far the foremost philosophers[P] and certain other[Q] earnest, thoughtful men who could not endure the conduct of either the people or their leaders; some of them, too, lived in the country and found their pleasure in the management of their private estates. **70** Such men have had the same aims as kings—to suffer no want, to be subject to no authority, to enjoy their liberty, that is, in its essence, to live just as they please.

Post by “Bryan” of July 23, 2025 at 2:11 PM

The Loeb version of De Officiis says this about Epicurus -- about as accurate as AI.

Post by “Cassius” of July 23, 2025 at 2:37 PM

Also, I see that the original Latin may not imply "foot and horses" but "*men* and horses"

Cum his "viris equisque" ut dicitur, si honestem tueri ac retinere sententia est, decertandum est.

With [this footnote from the Peabody edition](#):

Quote

Latin, *viris equisque*, literally, with men and horses, i. e. in full military array, with all the strength that I can muster, with might and main.

I'd say that's a quote that's highly relevant to keep in mind as we read Cicero.

When you're fighting someone *with all the strength you can muster*, sometimes you're going to fight up front and honestly, and sometimes you're going to fight by deception.

Post by “Bryan” of July 23, 2025 at 5:59 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

the philosophers who bear the name of Anniceris

I never think of the Annicerian school!

The Suda says Anniceris was an Epicurean, which is a bit confusing. [Link Here](#)

"A Cyrenean, a philosopher, who became an Epicurean despite being an acquaintance of Paraebatus, the student of Aristippus. Anniceris also had a brother by the name of Nicoteles, [sc. also] a philosopher, and his student [was the] famous Posidonius. The sect called Annicerian [sc. originates] from him. He lived at the time of Alexander [sc. the Great]."

Diogenes Laertius says this (2.96):

"The school of Anniceris in other respects agreed with them [sc. The school of Hegesias], but admitted that friendship and gratitude and respect for parents do exist in real life, and that a good man will sometimes act out of patriotic motives. Hence, if the wise man receive annoyance, he will be none the less happy even if few pleasures accrue to him.

The happiness of a friend is not in itself desirable, for it is not felt by his neighbour. Instruction is not sufficient in itself to inspire us with confidence and to make us rise superior to the opinion of the multitude. Habits must be formed because of the bad disposition which has grown up in us from the first.

A friend should be cherished not merely for his utility – for, if that fails, we should then no longer associate with him – but for the good feeling for the sake of which we shall even endure hardships. Nay, though we make pleasure the end and are annoyed when deprived of it, we shall nevertheless cheerfully endure this because of our love to our friend."

Post by “Cassius” of July 23, 2025 at 6:49 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4635-cicero-fighting-it-out-horse-and-foot-with-epicurus-cicero-s-references-to-epicu/>

[Quote from Bryan](#)

I never think of the Annicerian school!

Thank you. All of that is new to me too!