

Current Series - Summarizing Epicurean Answers to Academic Questions

Post by “Cassius” of January 30, 2026 at 10:15 AM

Audio Version:

https://youtu.be/_zP-JBC900M

As I write this on January 30 we are planning to proceed with Episode 319 as an opening introduction to Cicero's Academic Questions. I note however that in Episode 318 we read and commented to the end of Tusculan Disputations, but we did not attempt to provide an overview of the full book. We'll need some time to put together notes and thoughts before we devote an episode to that, and the purpose of this thread is to make some notes to get us ready. As a start, here is an outline of what we need to summarize in one final Tusculan Disputations episode. Everyone should feel free to make comments in this thread as the following outline is a pretty good summary of some very major issues:

Epicurean Answers To Tusculan Questions

I. Book One: On Death

A. The basic question posed by the student: Is death an evil?

B. Cicero's proposed answer from the Academic Skeptic/Stoic perspective: Death is not an evil because either the soul survives death and continues to exist (perhaps in a better state), or death brings complete annihilation of consciousness, in which case there is no sensation and therefore no capacity for misery.

1. Major points cited by Cicero in favor of this position:

- If the soul is immortal, death liberates it to contemplate truth and ascend to celestial regions
- If death brings total extinction, there is no feeling or consciousness remaining to experience evil
- The insignificance of earthly pleasures we lose makes death less fearful
- Many historical figures would have been better off dying earlier, avoiding greater evils
- Fear of death stems from superstition about underworld punishments, which are merely myths

C. The answer to the question as provided by Epicurus as Cicero presents it: "When we exist, death is not present; when death is present, we do not exist." Therefore [death is nothing to us](#), since when death arrives we no longer have any sensation or existence to be affected by it.

1. Major points cited by Cicero in opposition to Epicurus:

- If death is truly nothing, why does Epicurus spend so much effort discussing and preparing for it?
- The Epicurean position seems to make the preparation for death unnecessary
- Epicurus's emphasis on pleasure makes his dismissal of death as "nothing" seem inconsistent
- The teaching appears to trivialize death rather than addressing it philosophically
- Epicurus relies too heavily on the annihilation view without considering soul immortality

D. The Correct Epicurean response to this question:

1. Death ends all sensation, so there is literally nothing to fear about the state of being dead
2. The "symmetry argument": we didn't suffer before birth, so why fear non-existence after death?
3. Fearing death interferes with present happiness, which is the actual evil
4. Understanding the nature of the soul (as atomic and mortal) eliminates superstitious fears
5. A life well-lived according to nature's limits makes death acceptable whenever it comes

II. Book Two: On Physical Pain

A. The basic question posed by the student: Is pain the greatest of all evils?

B. Cicero's proposed answer from the Academic Skeptic/Stoic perspective: Pain is not the greatest evil (infamy is worse) and can be overcome through fortitude, patience, and mental strength. The wise person's virtue enables them to endure physical suffering without losing happiness.

1. Major points cited by Cicero in favor of this position:

- Avoiding infamy is more important than avoiding pain (student admits this)
- Historical examples show brave individuals enduring extreme pain for noble causes
- Mental attitude significantly affects how pain is experienced
- Training in virtue builds capacity to resist pain
- If pain were the greatest evil, no one could be happy, since anyone might experience it

C. The answer to the question as provided by Epicurus (as Cicero presents it):

Epicurus claims the wise person under torture can say "How little I regard it!" and be happy even while being burned or tortured. Pain is managed by the maxims: "If severe, it is short; if long-lasting, it is bearable."

1. Major points cited by Cicero in opposition to Epicurus:

- This seems absurd coming from one who calls pain the greatest evil
- It's inconsistent to define good as pleasure yet claim happiness under torture
- If pain is the supreme evil, the wise person should do anything to avoid it, including shameful acts
- Epicurus's position makes happiness impossible since anyone can experience pain
- The claim that severe pain is always brief is empirically false

D. The Correct Epicurean response to this question:

1. Mental pleasures can be used to counterbalance physical pains - memory of past and anticipation of future goods
2. The wise person's understanding of nature provides mental pleasure that outweighs bodily distress
3. Severe pains are typically brief; chronic pains are usually bearable and allow for happiness
4. There are many other sources of pleasure - including friendship, philosophical inquiry, and other pleasures that are generally readily available, which can provide pleasures that sustain happiness through pain
5. There are many practical paths for making sure that our actions generate more pleasure than pain

III. Book Three: On Mental Pain

A. The basic question posed by the student: How can mental distress and grief be alleviated?

B. Cicero's proposed answer from the Academic Skeptic/Stoic perspective: Grief is an irrational "disease of the soul" caused by false judgment that something bad has occurred. It should be eliminated entirely through reason, recognition that misfortunes are common to humanity, and understanding that grieving accomplishes nothing.

1. Major points cited by Cicero in favor of this position:

- Grief can be postponed in times of danger, showing it's under rational control

- Grief is often performed for social expectations rather than genuine feeling
- Understanding that misfortune is universal helps put personal loss in perspective
- Anticipating possible calamities prepares the mind and reduces their impact
- The truly wise person recognizes that only vice is worth grieving over

C. The answer to the question as provided by Epicurus (as Cicero presents it): The cure for grief is to call the mind away from dwelling on troubles and redirect it toward contemplating pleasures and good things.

1. Major points cited by Cicero in opposition to Epicurus:

- This is mere distraction therapy, not genuine philosophical cure
- It doesn't address the root causes of grief in false judgments
- The approach is inconsistent with Epicurean hedonism if we can't agree on what is truly good
- It treats symptoms rather than correcting underlying beliefs
- The Epicurean therapy lacks the systematic rigor of Stoic approaches

D. The Correct Epicurean response to this question:

1. Grief arises mostly from false opinions about goods and evils - correcting these false opinions greatly reduces suffering
2. Memory of past pleasures and anticipation of future goods counterbalances mental pain
3. Learning to pursue pleasure rationally reduces occasions for grief
4. Friendship is generally readily available and provides both immediate comfort and long-term resilience against grief
5. Recognizing that many supposed goods (wealth, status) are not what is important in life liberates us from grief over the times they are not available.

IV. Book Four: On Strong Emotions

A. The basic question posed by the student: How should we understand and manage all the perturbations of the soul (emotions/passions)?

B. Cicero's proposed answer from the Academic Skeptic/Stoic perspective: All passions are diseases of the soul arising from false judgments about good and evil. They fall into four categories: grief, fear, excessive joy, and immoderate desire. All should be eliminated entirely through recognizing that only virtue is good and only vice is evil.

1. Major points cited by Cicero in favor of this position:

- Emotions are based on false beliefs about what constitutes good and evil

- Systematic classification reveals the cognitive structure underlying all passions
- Complete elimination of passions leads to true tranquility (apatheia)
- The passionless state allows reason to guide all actions
- Only by viewing virtue as the sole good can one achieve immunity from emotional disturbance

C. The answer to the question as provided by Epicurus (as Cicero presents it): Some emotions and desires are natural and necessary, others natural but unnecessary, still others neither natural nor necessary. Only the vain and empty desires should be eliminated.

1. Major points in opposition to Epicurus:

- This doesn't go far enough in controlling the passions
- The distinction between types of desires is unclear and subjective
- Allowing "natural" emotions still leaves one vulnerable to disturbance
- The Epicurean approach is too permissive and insufficiently rigorous
- Their emphasis on pleasure actually encourages certain passions

D. The Correct Epicurean response to this question:

1. Mental pleasure and pain are not false beliefs but are provided by Nature as guidance for how to live.
2. Limitless and unnecessary pleasures are not required for happiness and in fact produce more pain than pleasure
3. The pursuit of desires without limit (such as for unlimited wealth, power, fame) will bring more pain than pleasure and can easily be eliminated
4. Proper understanding of nature's limits allows us to eliminate excessive fear and desire while still pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain rationally toward the true goal of pleasure.
5. The goal of life is happiness through a predominance of pleasure over pain, not complete elimination of all disturbance and feeling, which are in fact provided by Nature and required for happy living.

V. Book Five: Is Virtue Sufficient for Happiness?

A. The basic question posed by the student: Is virtue the only true good, and alone sufficient to produce a happy life, or are there other goods (health, wealth, etc.) which are also necessary?

B. Cicero's proposed answer from the Academic Skeptic/Stoic perspective: Virtue is entirely sufficient for happiness under all circumstances. The wise person is happy even in poverty, exile, blindness, pain, and torture. Happiness depends solely on character, not

external circumstances, and virtue is the only true good.

1. Major points cited by Cicero in favor of this position:

- If happiness required external goods, virtue would be discredited as insufficient
- Historical examples show virtuous people happy despite terrible circumstances
- Vice produces misery; therefore virtue (its opposite) must produce happiness
- External goods are indifferent - neither truly good nor evil
- The wise person's happiness is invulnerable to fortune's changes

C. The answer to the question as provided by Epicurus (as Cicero presents it):

Pleasure is the supreme good and the goal of life. The wise person is nearly always happy because they can maintain mental pleasure even under adversity, but in this Epicurus is inconsistent because he claims the wise person is always happy while making pleasure depend on circumstances.

1. Major points cited by Cicero in opposition to Epicurus:

- Epicurus makes happiness too dependent on external circumstances and fortune
- How can one be happy under torture if pleasure is the good?
- The claim contradicts Epicurus's own definition of good as pleasure
- It's inconsistent to say pain is the greatest evil yet the wise person is happy in pain
- The Epicurean position lacks the logical rigor of the Stoic view

D. The Correct Epicurean response to this question:

1. Prudence (practical wisdom) is the greatest virtue and enables the wise person to be happy in nearly all circumstances
2. Mental/spiritual pleasures (friendship, philosophy, memory) far outweigh bodily pleasures or pains
3. The wise person's happiness is secure because he can be confident that he will always be able to obtain pleasures that will outweigh pains, and in the event that pain becomes overwhelming, such pain can be ended by death.
4. A true understanding of the nature of things allows us to see that many of our worst fears (such as about death of capricious gods) are false suppositions, that it is readily possible to secure a life of happiness in which pleasure predominates over pain, and that we need not live forever to experience a happy life.
5. Understanding that the goal of life is happiness through pleasure allows us to see that virtue is necessary for happiness, but that understanding what virtue means is essential, in that virtue is not a set of absolute that is the same for all people in all places and at all times, but that virtue is contextual and is in fact whatever conduct that in practice leads to living happily.

Post by “DaveT” of January 30, 2026 at 2:20 PM

[Cassius](#) This closing item in the post seems so important to me. I'd like to pose questions on it BUT since you asked for comments on your summary, perhaps my reply ought to be somewhere else. Please move it if you think appropriate

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Understanding that the goal of life is happiness through pleasure allows us to see that virtue is necessary for happiness, but that understanding what virtue means is essential, in that virtue is not a set of absolute that is the same for all people in all places and at all times, but that virtue is contextual and is in fact whatever conduct that in practice leads to living happily.

Understanding that the goal of life is happiness through pleasure allows us to see that virtue is necessary for happiness, but that understanding what virtue means is essential, in that virtue is not a set of absolute that is the same for all people in all places and at all times, but that virtue is contextual and is in fact whatever conduct that in practice leads to living happily.

As I read the Summary, I looked for some sort of amalgam or a way to build Cicero's Virtues into the above quote. For example, let me pose this question: What were Academic/Stoic Virtues? The Internet tells me they were Wisdom (prudence), Courage, Temperance, and Justice. I agree these virtues can change with cultures. Yet, in our school, we certainly must look to the culture we are actually living in for the definition of OUR virtues. A person won't get far using deeply personal antisocial interpretations of virtues for himself and still find happiness via acquiring pleasure. More likely that person will end up incarcerated by the larger community.

So, given our Western Industrialized Educated Rich Democratic culture, which sets the guidelines for our behavior, assume that the four virtues are uniformly agreed upon. Now, can we not agree that those four virtues are the necessary, and I mean necessary, virtues we each need to pursue in order to find happiness as Epicurus defined it?

This gives us each an indispensable mechanism to pursue pleasure. It uses the virtues to help us define and use to acquisition of pleasure. Epicurus, as far as I understand him, has no problem acknowledging the usefulness of the virtue of Prudence to achieve his definition of happiness. So would he not object to the following statement?

As a practical matter, the Epicurean pursuit of pleasure DEPENDS on each of us gaining some measure of the four virtues in our private lives in order to experience pleasure.

Post by “Cassius” of January 30, 2026 at 2:33 PM

This is exactly the kind of conversation I'd like to have here to help us prepare for when we record the summary, so this is a fine place for it. I may need to ask you to be a little more clear as to what you are saying however. I picked out this sentence as potentially the focus (?)

[Quote from DaveT](#)

Now, can we not agree that those four virtues are the necessary, and I mean necessary, virtues we each need to pursue in order to find happiness as Epicurus defined it?

When you say "those" are you saying that when you are living in a particular culture that defines virtue in a particular way, that it is necessary for happiness to comply with that culture's view of the virtues? I can certainly see the likelihood that "When in Rome Do As The Romans Do" is a good idea to "keep the peace" with your neighbors. On the other hand if someone objects to the culture strongly enough it's generally possible to go somewhere else.

So that's why it might be good to clarify what you are saying. I think most of us agree that Epicurus clearly held that virtue is a requirement for happy living, and that the real issue is what is meant by "virtue." Complying with the majority's definition is clearly one method of defining virtue, but of course Epicurus himself moved several times and I don't get the impression at all that Epicurus simply deferred to the majority on the key issues of life on which he considered clarity was essential to happiness (such as to death or as to the gods).

So I apologize that perhaps i am overlooking the obvious intent of what you are saying, but could you restate your ultimate conclusion or question?

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 30, 2026 at 7:45 PM

[Quote from DaveT](#)

Wisdom (prudence), Courage, Temperance, and Justice.

I don't think that even in the US there is just one absolute definition of what these are. And these labels are only understood in contrast to their opposites, as well as requiring an examination of specific actions and specific situations. For an "absolute" understanding we would have to be able to consistently describe what perfect prudence would look like, and what

would perfect courage look like...etc.

[PD05](#) - "It is not possible to live pleasantly without living prudently, honorably, and justly, [nor again to live a life of prudence, honor, and justice] without living pleasantly. And the man who does not possess the pleasant life is not living prudently, honorably, and justly, [and the man who does not possess the virtuous life] cannot possibly live pleasantly."

And [PD17](#) - "The just man is most free from trouble; the unjust most full of trouble."

Post by “DaveT” of January 31, 2026 at 9:26 AM

[Cassius Kalosyni](#) I'm glad for the questions since it helps me clarify my own thinking.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

could you restate your ultimate conclusion or question?

I guess it is my inclination to look for clarity for modernity's application of the ancient wisdoms that engendered my post. My tentative conclusion/question is: Why can't we clearly state and attribute Epicurus' teaching to his synthesis of the Greek culture he was raised in with his process of taking that culture of the ancient Virtues to the next level of WHY and HOW we attain happiness via minimizing pain and maximizing pleasure?

As Kalosyni pointed out in the Principal Doctrine she cited, there is no conflict in recognizing the Virtues of the ancients (and any virtues recognized by ourselves) and adhering to the Epicurean WHYS and HOWs to be happy.

You both do a wonderful job of clarifying the distinctions between the schools, full stop! Your work on the podcasts with [Joshua](#) illuminates so much for me and most likely many others. There's so much there to learn about.

It bothers me somewhat to hear criticism of the other schools with a broad brush in response to their attacks on Epicurean thought. It might sound odd coming from a retired lawyer, but resolving one dispute needn't solely focus on the misstatements and accusations of the opponents. That leads to arguments that never end (except in courtrooms where judgements can be final!)

So, my conclusion/question is the hope that we can sharpen the incorporation of virtues as described by the ancient Greeks with Epicurus' concepts; how he took their ideas to the next step in the universally shared search for happiness for mankind. This, I hope, can happen by

acknowledging how we simply can't fully pursue pleasure unless we learn and incorporate the virtues of the society we choose to live in (or adapt for ourselves).

Wisdom (Prudence), Courage, Temperance, and Justice are ESSENTIAL root-tools for us to regulate our desires. We can recognize this and reject that they are eternal forms existing outside of the material world. That recognition is the genius of Epicurus, as he synthesized the earlier schools, taking what he agreed with and discarding the rest.

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 31, 2026 at 11:46 AM

[Quote from DaveT](#)

You both do a wonderful job of clarifying the distinctions between the schools, full stop! Your work on the podcasts with Joshua illuminates so much for me and most likely many others. There's so much there to learn about.

It bothers me somewhat to hear criticism of the other schools with a broad brush in response to their attacks on Epicurean thought. It might sound odd coming from a retired lawyer, but resolving one dispute needn't solely focus on the misstatements and accusations of the opponents. That leads to arguments that never end (except in courtrooms where judgements can be final!)

I think that comparing and contrasting between ancient schools provides a lens for learning about Epicurean philosophy and there are still aspects of Platonism/Aristotelian thinking in the modern world -- and by thinking through things at the abstract level we can avoid delving into current events or current politics.

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 31, 2026 at 12:22 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

and there are still aspects of Platonism/Aristotelian thinking in the modern world

Perfectionism and black-and-white thinking (and other problems).

Post by “Godfrey” of January 31, 2026 at 12:49 PM

My understanding is that it's essential not to separate virtues from living pleasantly, and that in [PD05](#) Epicurus spells out the key virtues. We all agree that EP is a philosophy of personal responsibility and not of absolutes, and this must be kept in mind for a full understanding of his view of virtues.

If I'm attempting to live "prudently, honorably and justly" yet find myself angry and miserable in doing so, that is an instance of my Feelings telling me to pause and look deeper. If I'm living a life of pleasure but feel something missing, it might be constructive for me to examine whether and/or how I'm living prudently, honorably and justly. You might say that the Feelings and the stated virtues are checks and balances for each other.

Each of these central virtues obviously means different things to different people and cultures, and they don't preclude additional virtues. The ultimate arbiter is inside each of us and not in a government, a political party, a social group or in an absolute something-or-other.

Post by “DaveT” of February 1, 2026 at 8:19 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Perfectionism and black-and-white thinking (and other problems).

This quote from your post refers to Platonism/Aristotelianism. Indeed so! And can we agree though, that on some occasions we benefit from the black and white when we need to make a decision? Philosophically speaking I also find a significant degree of Epicureanism in Western culture, too. For instance modern clinical psychology's use of cognitive therapy and even the mindfulness culture focus on reducing pain (suffering) by focusing on being "in the present moment" to avoid dwelling on the past or being anxious about the future. I wonder how many other ways our culture encourages Epicurean lifestyles without naming it as such? Perhaps it would be an interesting exercise /discussion to make a list.

Post by “Patrikios” of February 6, 2026 at 7:11 PM

[Quote from DaveT](#)

Wisdom (Prudence), Courage, Temperance, and Justice are ESSENTIAL root-tools for us to regulate our desires

[DaveT](#),

Could you provide your definitions for these terms, or is there an Epicurean text that groups these 4 virtues as essential?

For example, in PD5, as [Kalosyni](#) just cited, we find prudence and justice. But where is temperance required, if I am living prudently, and justly with my neighbors?

I agree that it is good to express and examine our current understanding of the principles. When it comes to listing any 4 virtues as essential for a life of wellbeing, I don't think that is an arbiter which all persons pursuing an Epicurean life would agree upon.

As [Godfrey](#) said

Quote

Each of these central virtues obviously means different things to different people and cultures, and they don't preclude additional virtues. The ultimate arbiter is inside each of us and not in a government, a political party, a social group or in an absolute something-or-other.

Post by “wbernys” of February 6, 2026 at 10:25 PM

[Quote from Patrikios](#)

Could you provide your definitions for these terms, or is there an Epicurean text that groups these 4 virtues as essential?

Even though Epicurus himself didn't list these virtues both Torquatus and Philodemus both mention all these virtues (Philodemus mentioning even more) as essential. Torquatus chiefly mentions the four cardinal virtues as essential and gives detailed reasons to why from an Epicurean lens and Philodemus list these as essential but doesn't really give detailed reasons

beyond avoiding pain. DeWitt and Philodemus list of virtues is what inspired my own recent list.

Philodemus lists all of these essential in "On Choices and Avoidances" (From Twentiers website) saying: it is impossible for one to live pleasurably) without **living prudently** and **honourably** and **justly**, and also without **living courageously** and **temperately** and **magnanimously**, **and** without **making friends** and without **being philanthropic**, and in general without having all the other virtues. For the greatest errors in choices and avoidances occur when some men perform each action while holding the opposite views, and thereby while being constrained by evils.

For Wisdom (Prudence) is the source of enlightenment and the guide to tranquility Torquatus says: **For it is wisdom alone which expels sorrow from our minds, and prevents our shuddering with fear: she is the instructress who enables us to live in tranquility, by extinguishing in us all vehemence of desire.**

Epicurus describes Prudence as the source of every other virtues saying: **Practical wisdom is the foundation of all these things and is the greatest good. Thus practical wisdom is more valuable than philosophy and is the source of every other excellence, teaching us that it is not possible to live joyously without also living wisely and beautifully and rightly, nor to live wisely and beautifully and rightly without living joyously For the excellences grow up together with the pleasant life, and the pleasant life is inseparable from them.**

For Temperance, is it considered the thing which protects us from recklessness and ensures long term pleasure from indulging in bad desires. Torquatus says: **For temperance is that which warns us to follow reason in desiring or avoiding anything. Nor is it sufficient to decide what ought to be done, and what ought not; but we must adhere to what has been decided. But many men, because they are enfeebled and subdued the moment pleasure comes in sight, and so are unable to keep and adhere to the determination they have formed, give themselves up to be bound hand and foot by their lusts, and do not foresee what will happen to them; and in that way, on account of some pleasure which is trivial and unnecessary, and which might be procured in some other manner, and which they could dispense with without annoyance, incur terrible diseases, and injuries, and disgrace, and are often even involved in the penalties of the legal tribunals of their country.**

For Courage: Torquatus says it is the ability to endure pain for the sake of greater pleasures and be brave in the fact of death, holding to true reason saying: **These considerations prove that timidity and cowardice are not blamed, nor courage and endurance praised, on their own account. The former are rejected because they bring pain, and the latter are coveted because they bring pleasure.**

For Justice: Torquatus describes as a pact of agreeableness and ability to live securely and with goodwill among your neighbors saying: **Men of sound natures, therefore, are summoned**

by the voice of true reason to justice, equity, and honesty. For those without eloquence or resources, dishonesty is not a good policy, since it is difficult for such men to succeed in their designs, or to retain their gains when once achieved. On the other hand, even for the rich and clever, generous conduct is more in keeping, because liberality wins them affection and good will, the surest means to a life of peace. Even more, there really is no motive for transgression, since the desires that spring from nature are easily gratified without doing any man wrong, while those desires that are imaginary can be resisted

Post by “Kalosyni” of February 7, 2026 at 9:37 AM

For anyone who is interested in reading the Philodemus text, check out these two posts:

Post

[RE: Tsouna's On Choices and Avoidances](#)

FWIW: 2 editions in 83 libraries

<https://search.worldcat.org/en/title/52572448>



Don

June 7, 2025 at 11:37 PM

and here:

Post

[RE: Tsouna's On Choices and Avoidances](#)

[...]

I found a free, digital copy living [here](#) at the moment.

I've also organized the translation from that text on [twentiers.com](https://www.twentiers.com).



Eikadistes

August 26, 2025 at 1:33 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4928-current-series-summarizing-epicurean-answers-to-academic-questions/>

Post by “DaveT” of February 7, 2026 at 1:35 PM

[Quote from Patrikios](#)

Could you provide your definitions for these terms, or is there an Epicurean text that groups these 4 virtues as essential?

I googled ancient Greek Virtues and came away with those four. The search also identified Prudence as a subset of Wisdom. My personal definitions of those Greek's Virtues? I'm not sure, but I'll take a shot at it. Wisdom includes making choices based on what we've learned from experience to achieve our goals. Courage: the ability to apply what you've learned to achieve your goals even though the choice involves a hardship for yourself or those you act on behalf of. Temperance, I'm not clear how it differs from the first two. Perhaps it means the same as Prudence. And Justice, a recognition of the limits of your community's rules on public behavior and behaving with those rules in mind.

So, Virtues are tools to achieve our goals. They are subject to individual interpretation. And if the way we think and interpret what our senses inform us about the world is shaped by nature and nurture, the process is subjective yet bounded by culture and upbringing, and our biology.

I can easily agree with the statement by @Godfrey that you quoted. Each of us undoubtedly can add virtues we can aspire to. For instance, I would add Kindness, and Empathy.

Post by “Cassius” of February 7, 2026 at 1:54 PM

[Quote from DaveT](#)

I googled ancient Greek Virtues and came away with those four.

[Quote from DaveT](#)

Each of us undoubtedly can add virtues we can aspire to. For instance, I would add Kindness, and Empathy.

I think those two observations are key. There's nothing magic about "virtue" or its classifications. But Epicurus was developing his philosophy in a cultural context in which certain words were used to refer to certain things, so he chose to work within the paradigm so as to be understandable. But the whole concept of virtue is meaningless except in reference to a goal,

and the goal is not virtue itself unless you presume some god or other authority made it so. In our case the guidance of nature is to pursue pleasure and avoid pain, so whatever choices in reality and in total effect achieve that goal should be considered virtuous.

Post by “Kalosyni” of February 7, 2026 at 5:53 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

In our case the guidance of nature is to pursue pleasure and avoid pain, so whatever choices in reality and in total effect achieve that goal should be considered virtuous.

I'm getting hung up on the word "virtue" and it's meaning.

[Cassius](#) it seems like instead of this sentence ending in "virtuous" it could end in the word "good" or "beneficial".

I haven't studied enough to know what all of the various ancient Greek philosophers said, but here are some Wikipedia entries on modern understanding of virtue(s).

Here is Wikipedia on virtue:

Quote

A **virtue** (Latin: *virtus*) is a trait of excellence, including traits that may be [moral](#), social, or intellectual. The cultivation and refinement of virtue is held to be the "[good](#) of humanity" and thus is [valued](#) as an [end purpose](#) of life or a foundational [principle](#) of being. In human practical ethics, a virtue is a disposition to choose actions that succeed in showing high moral standards: doing what is said to be right and avoiding what is wrong in a given field of endeavour, even when doing so may be unnecessary from a [utilitarian](#) perspective. When someone takes pleasure in doing what is right, even when it is difficult or initially unpleasant, they can establish virtue as a habit. Such a person is said to be **virtuous** through having cultivated such a disposition. The opposite of virtue is [vice](#).

[Source](#)

[Prudence](#)

[Courage](#)

[Temperance](#)

[Justice](#)

Post by “DaveT” of February 7, 2026 at 9:50 PM

I also am not well versed in ancient Greek culture. I tend to think the "eternal" Virtues of the ancient Greeks were the product of Socrates, Plato, and the other schools envisioned as eternal forms to guide public life and social structure. The focus on their Virtues would result in a social structure with guard rails designed to preserve what they believed was the unique status of being Greek.

On the other side of it, I tend to think of Epicurus, who preferred to avoid being a public or political person who thought more of virtue as subjective tools designed to improve the individual. Designed to perfect the individual's goal of happiness, rather than perfecting the social welfare of the city states and their colonies.

Am I close on this perspective or missing the mark by a mile?

Post by “Cassius” of February 8, 2026 at 6:39 AM

[Quote from DaveT](#)

I tend to think the "eternal" Virtues of the

In my view, I would expect Epicurus to have been suspicious of anything claiming to be "eternal" by nature, since it's core physics that only the atoms have that attribute, and it appears that the gods only have it "by virtue" of their being able to replace their atoms over time without a time limit. So calling something "imperishable" would fit for the gods and be an allusion to god-like status, but would be allegorical in every other case, especially in terms of "values" or attitudes generated by humans.

And in those definitions Kalosyni cited my understanding of the latin is that "virtus" has a strong implication of "strength" as its core meaning, thus being associated with "men," and so "strength" can refer to any number of things that are effective toward a goal and wouldn't carry any unchanging moral meaning.

Given his view of the nature of the universe I would expect Epicurus' to have rejected the whole idea of morality being unchanging or eternal (meaning virtue with a definition that doesn't change over time, place, or person). The only thing given us by nature is the faculty of pleasure and pain and that seems to me to be almost completely dependent on context. Yes the human body reacts in certain ways to fire, for instance, so at some point fire applied directly to the skin is always going to be painful, but human interactions don't have that same kind of physical inevitability. Humans have "free will" and don't always react the same way.

Post by “DaveT” of February 8, 2026 at 8:00 AM

[Cassius](#) Agreed. I put eternal in quotes in reference to the proponents of eternal forms, etc.