

# Clement on Epicurus' And Other Philosophers Opinions As To The Chief Good

Post by "Cassius" of May 20, 2026 at 7:22 PM

I came across a text today that I would drop in here as it's either totally new to me or I had forgotten it. I don't know whether this translation is reliable either as it seems clunky. But it came to my attention in regard to Hieronymus. It seems very loosely and inaccurately written but it covers a lot of points about chief goods and the lifke. How in the heck did a Peripatetic end up concluding that "absence of pain" should be considered the chief good?

[Quote from Clement on The Philosophers' Opinions On The Chief Good](#)

## Chapter 21. Opinions of Various Philosophers on the Chief Good

[Epicurus](#), in placing [happiness](#) in not being hungry, or thirsty, or cold, uttered that godlike word, saying impiously that he would fight in these points even with Father Jove; teaching, as if it were the case of pigs that live in filth and not that of rational [philosophers](#), that [happiness](#) was victory. For of those that are ruled by pleasure are the Cyrenaics and [Epicurus](#); for these expressly said that to live pleasantly was the chief end, and that pleasure was the only perfect good. [Epicurus](#) also says that the removal of pain is pleasure; and says that that is to be preferred, which first attracts from itself to itself, being, that is, wholly in motion. Dinomachus and Callipho said that the chief end was for one to do what he could for the attainment and enjoyment of pleasure; and Hieronymus the Peripatetic said the great end was to live unmolested, and that the only final good was [happiness](#); and Diodorus likewise, who belonged to the same [sect](#), pronounces the end to be to live undisturbed and well. [Epicurus](#) indeed, and the Cyrenaics, say that pleasure is the first duty; for it is for the sake of pleasure, they say, that [virtue](#) was introduced, and produced pleasure. According to the followers of Calliphon, [virtue](#) was introduced for the sake of pleasure, but that subsequently, on seeing its own beauty, it made itself equally prized with the first principle, that is, pleasure.

But the Aristotelians lay it down, that to live in accordance with [virtue](#) is the end, but that neither [happiness](#) nor the end is reached by every one who has [virtue](#). For the wise man, vexed and involved in involuntary mischances, and wishing gladly on these accounts to flee from life, is neither fortunate nor [happy](#). For [virtue](#) needs time; for that is not acquired in one day which exists [only] in the perfect man since, as they say, a

child is never [happy](#). But [human](#) life is a perfect time, and therefore [happiness](#) is completed by the three kinds of [good](#) things. Neither, then, the [poor](#), nor the mean nor even the diseased, nor the slave, can be one of them.

Again, on the other hand, Zeno the Stoic thinks the end to be living according to [virtue](#); and, Cleanthes, living agreeably to nature in the right exercise of reason, which he held to consist of the selection of things according to nature. And Antipatrus, his friend, supposes the end to consist in choosing continually and unswervingly the things which are according to nature, and rejecting those contrary to nature. Archedamus, on the other hand, explained the end to be such, that in selecting the greatest and chief things according to nature, it was impossible to overstep it. In addition to these, Panætius pronounced the end to be, to live according to the means given to us by nature. And finally, Posidonius said that it was to live engaged in contemplating the [truth](#) and order of the [universe](#), and forming himself as he best can, in nothing influenced by the irrational part of his [soul](#). And some of the later [Stoics](#) defined the great end to consist in living agreeably to the constitution of man. Why should I mention Aristo? He said that the end was indifference; but what is indifferent simply abandons the indifferent. Shall I bring forward the opinions of Herillus? Herillus states the end to be to live according to science. For some think that the more recent [disciples](#) of the Academy define the end to be, the steady abstraction of the mind to its own impressions. Further, Lycus the Peripatetic used to say that the final end was the [true joy](#) of the [soul](#); as Leucimus, that it was the [joy](#) it had in what was [good](#). Critolaus, also a Peripatetic, said that it was the perfection of a life flowing rightly according to nature, referring to the perfection accomplished by the three kinds according to tradition.

We must, however, not rest satisfied with these, but endeavour as we best can to adduce the doctrines laid down on the point by the naturalist; for they say that Anaxagoras of Clazomenæ affirmed [contemplation](#) and the freedom flowing from it to be the end of life; Heraclitus the Ephesian, complacency. The Pontic Heraclides relates, that Pythagoras taught that the [knowledge](#) of the perfection of the numbers was [happiness](#) of the [soul](#). The Abderites also teach the [existence](#) of an end. Democritus, in his work *On the Chief End*, said it was cheerfulness, which he also called well-being, and often exclaims, *For delight and its absence are the boundary of those who have reached full age*; Hecatæus, that it was sufficiency to one's self; Apollodotus of [Cyzicum](#), that it was delectation; as Nausiphanes, that it was undauntedness, for he said that it was this that was called by Democritus imperturbability. In addition to these still, Diotimus declared the end to be perfection of what is [good](#), which he said was termed well-being. Again, Antisthenes, that it was humility. And those called Annicereans, of the Cyrenaic succession, laid down no definite end for the whole of life; but said that to each action belonged, as its proper end, the pleasure accruing from the action. These Cyrenaics reject [Epicurus'](#) definition of pleasure, that is the removal of pain, calling that

the condition of a dead man; because we [rejoice](#) not only on account of pleasures, but companionships and distinctions; while [Epicurus](#) thinks that all [joy](#) of the [soul](#) arises from previous sensations of the flesh. Metrodorus, in his book *On the Source of Happiness in Ourselves being greater than that which arises from Objects*, says: What else is the good of the [soul](#) but the sound state of the flesh, and the sure hope of its continuance?

---

### **Post by “Don” of May 20, 2026 at 8:06 PM**

What's your source for the translation?

PS Never mind. I looked at a bunch of webpages, and they all started out exactly the same way. There must be a readily available public domain translation everyone uses.

---

### **Post by “Cassius” of May 20, 2026 at 9:52 PM**

The link is in the title of the quote box, and I'll repaste it below. I haven't had time to figure out why it reads so poorly. Hopefully there's a better translation but I think this is a reputable website:

[CHURCH FATHERS: The Stromata \(Clement of Alexandria\)](#)

---

### **Post by “Joshua” of May 20, 2026 at 11:03 PM**

What a tedious person. 🙄

Clement of Alexandria, like St. Jerome and St. Augustine, received a classical education in the pagan Greek tradition prior to converting to Christianity, and also like them developed a taste for pagan literature.

Jerome records in a [letter](#) that his own devotion to the works of Cicero earned him a visitation from his god in a dream:

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/5098-clement-on-epicurus-and-other-philosophers-opinions-as-to-the-chief-good/>

## Quote

Asked who and what I was I replied: "I am a Christian." But He who presided said: "Thou liest, thou art a follower of Cicero and not of Christ. For 'where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also.'" Instantly I became dumb, and amid the strokes of the lash—for He had ordered me to be scourged—I was tortured more severely still by the fire of conscience, considering with myself that verse, "In the grave who shall give thee thanks?" Yet for all that I began to cry and to bewail myself, saying: "Have mercy upon me, O Lord: have mercy upon me." Amid the sound of the scourges this cry still made itself heard. At last the bystanders, falling down before the knees of Him who presided, prayed that He would have pity on my youth, and that He would give me space to repent of my error. He might still, they urged, inflict torture on me, should I ever again read the works of the Gentiles. Under the stress of that awful moment I should have been ready to make even still larger promises than these. Accordingly I made oath and called upon His name, saying: "Lord, if ever again I possess worldly books, or if ever again I read such, I have denied Thee." Dismissed, then, on taking this oath, I returned to the upper world, and, to the surprise of all, I opened upon them eyes so drenched with tears that my distress served to convince even the incredulous. And that this was no sleep nor idle dream, such as those by which we are often mocked, I call to witness the tribunal before which I lay, and the terrible judgment which I feared. May it never, hereafter, be my lot to fall under such an inquisition! I profess that my shoulders were black and blue, that I felt the bruises long after I awoke from my sleep, and that thenceforth I read the books of God with a zeal greater than I had previously given to the books of men.

Equally delirious were the fantasies [Confessions](#) of St. Augustine, again by an encounter with Cicero:

## Quote

Among such as these, in that unsettled age of mine, learned I books of eloquence, wherein I desired to be eminent, out of a damnable and vainglorious end, a joy in human vanity. In the ordinary course of study, I fell upon a certain book of Cicero, whose speech almost all admire, not so his heart. This book of his contains an exhortation to philosophy, and is called "Hortensius." But this book altered my affections, and turned my prayers to Thyself O Lord; and made me have other purposes and desires. Every vain hope at once became worthless to me; and I longed with an incredibly burning desire for an immortality of wisdom, and began now to arise, that I might return to Thee. For not to sharpen my tongue (which thing I seemed to be purchasing with my mother's allowances, in that my nineteenth year, my father being dead two years before), not to sharpen my tongue did I employ that book; nor did it infuse into me its style, but its matter.

How did I burn then, my God, how did I burn to re-mount from earthly things to Thee, nor knew I what Thou wouldest do with me? For with Thee is wisdom. But the love of wisdom is in Greek called "philosophy," with which that book inflamed me. Some there be that seduce through philosophy, under a great, and smooth, and honourable name colouring and disguising their own errors: and almost all who in that and former ages were such, are in that book censured and set forth: there also is made plain that wholesome advice of Thy Spirit, by Thy good and devout servant: Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And since at that time (Thou, O light of my heart, knowest) Apostolic Scripture was not known to me, I was delighted with that exhortation, so far only, that I was thereby strongly roused, and kindled, and inflamed to love, and seek, and obtain, and hold, and embrace not this or that sect, but wisdom itself whatever it were; and this alone checked me thus unkindled, that the name of Christ was not in it.

These in turn makes Clement's claim all the more risible:

#### Quote

As Scripture has called the Greeks pilferers of the Barbarian philosophy, it will next have to be considered how this may be briefly demonstrated. For we shall not only show that they have imitated and copied the marvels recorded in our books; but we shall prove, besides, that they have plagiarized and falsified (our writings being, as we have shown, older) the chief dogmas they hold, both on faith and knowledge and science, and hope and love, and also on repentance and temperance and the fear of God — a whole swarm, verily, of the virtues of truth.

If Greek philosophy was 'stolen' from the Hebrews as Clement claims, why do these zealous converts sneak away from the dull boredom of the allegedly genuine in order to delight themselves with the high refinement and polish of the allegedly counterfeit?

Oh, right. They do it because they are *tempted by the Devil*. As I said, tedious.