

Comparison Chart - Epicurean vs Stoic Views of the Goal of Life

Epicurean vs. Stoic and Generic Non-Epicurean Views of The Goal Of Life			
Aspect of "The Goal"	Epicurean View	Stoic View	Generic Non-Epicurean View
What is the goal of life?	Living Pleasurably	Living Virtuously	Living Well (as a "Good" person)
How do we judge whether we are achieving this goal?	We judge that which is pleasant through our natural faculty of feeling mental and bodily pleasure and pain.	We judge that which is virtuous by whether the activity is something that we identify conceptually in our minds as "virtue."	We judge that which is good by whether the activity is something that we identify conceptually in our minds as "good."
How do we obtain this criteria of judgment?	The ability to feel pleasure and pain is a natural faculty which is given to us at birth by nature, and which develops and grows through life experience, but which is ultimately grounded in the natural faculty of pleasure and pain and not in learning from gods, from other people, or from abstract logic or reasoning.	The ability to conceive "virtue" (and "vice") is a mental ability which is not based on pleasure or pain but which we learn from the gods, or from looking at the leading citizens around us, or from abstract logic and reasoning.	The ability to conceive "Good" (and "evil") is a mental ability which is not based on pleasure or pain but which we learn from the gods, or from looking at the leading citizens around us, or from learning through abstract logic and reasoning.
How do we measure how well we are achieving this goal?	A Pleasant Life = Past and present experiences of pleasure – past and present experiences of pain.	The virtuous life = Past and present experiences of virtue – past and present experiences of vice.	The good life = Past and present experiences of being good – past and present experiences of being evil.
Are all "experiences" of this goal equally desirable?	Not all experiences of pleasure are the same, but all pleasures are pleasurable and all pain is painful. Every experience of pleasure or pain has characteristics such as "length of time," "intensity" and "type," but every experience of pleasure is pleasurable, and every experience of pain is painful. There are no other types of experiences other than pleasure and pain, and the greatest experience of pleasure possible to any person is the experience of pleasure unmixed with any simultaneous experience of pain.	Some acts of virtue are "better" (also called "higher" or "more noble" or "more worthy") than others. We determine which virtues are better and which are best either by learning from the gods, or by looking at the leading citizens around us, or by learning through abstract logic. Pursuit of pleasure is ignoble goal and undesirable, and endurance of pain is desirable because it is character-building.	Some acts of goodness are better than others. We determine which actions are better and which are best either by learning from the gods, or by looking at the leading citizens around us, or by learning through abstract logic, without reference to pleasure or pain. Pursuit of pleasure is an unworthy goal (at best), and endurance of pain is praised (even if not desirable) because it is character-building.
Do we choose every possible experience of this goal?	No. Sometimes we choose pain, or we avoid choosing a pleasure, when the choice leads to greater pleasure or the avoidance of worse pain.	Yes. We always choose virtue, and we never choose vice.	Yes. We always choose what is good, and we never choose what is evil.
What is the role of "Virtue" in the goal?	"Virtue" and "The Good" are terms which add nothing to the definition of the goal. "Virtue" and "Good" are empty words which have no meaning other than what we call the correct choice which leads to the preponderance of pleasure over pain.	"Virtue" is the goal of life, and in living virtuously we find the meaning of life.	"Being good" is the goal of life, and in being good we find the meaning of life.
What is the role of "Pleasure" in the goal?	"Pleasurable Living" is the goal of life, and pleasure is the faculty that allows us to know what to pursue as the goal and pain being the faculty that allows us to know what to avoid and the enemy of the goal.	"Pleasure" is a term which describes experiences that appeal to our "flesh" but which distract us from the goal of virtue and lead us toward vice.	"Pleasure" is a term which describes experiences that appeal to our "flesh" but which distract us from the goal of being a good person, and lead us toward evil.
What is the role of "logic" and "reason" in the goal?	"Logic" and "reason" are names given to techniques of analysis which humans employ as tools for the achievement of pleasurable living. The standard of correct analysis, however, is not "reason" or "logic," but the standard provided by the faculties given us by nature: (1) the five senses, (2) the anticipations, and (3) the faculty of pleasure and pain. We use these three faculties intelligently, but with no reference to abstract reason and logic, for the ultimate discovery of how to live pleasurably.	"Logic" and "reason" are techniques of analysis which distinguish us as humans from all other living things. "Reason" should be considered at least semi-divine. We should view reason and logic as the highest means available to man for the discovery of virtue so that we may become virtuous people.	"Logic" and "reason" are techniques of analysis. Some higher animals may have a form of reason, but man is "the rational animal." We should view reason and logic as the highest means known to man for the discovery of what is good so that we may become good people.