

Plan of Life

Aimed at *Aretē* (Excellence or Virtue)

Thanks for supporting the Classics Cave.
You'll find books, readings, workouts, and more at www.theclassicscave.com.
Please visit and support our sponsors listed below.

The following Plan of Life Aimed at *Aretē* (Excellence or Virtue) comes from the Cave's *Aretē: Excellence or Virtue—What the Ancient Greeks Thought and Said about Aretē*.

As with any other plan, a plan of life is made to accomplish many goals or possibly just one significant goal. The following plan presents a plan of life aimed at aretē—a plan representing ancient Greek wisdom and practice from the course of a thousand years.

- 1. Follow the *eudaimonia* (happiness) imperative: Be happy!** Accordingly, realize and be convinced that happiness, the goal of life, is tied to virtue—that to be happy one must *practice* virtue. virtues are related to these four. Observe your own virtues or, perhaps, what *should be* your own (related to your own functions and relationships). Practice them.
- 2. Abide by the *aretē* imperative: Be the best! Be outstanding!** Hear the hero Glaucus: “My father insistently ordered me to always be the best and to stand out among other men.” And wise Nestor: “Old Peleus enjoined Achilles to always be the best and to stand out among other men.” Do *the* best—*your* best. Be your most outstanding self.
- 3. Discover and internalize the general nature of *aretē*.** Know the various meanings of *aretē*—that *aretē* is excellence or virtue; that it is the perfection of a thing; that it is the means by which a thing performs its function well (where a thing's function is that which it alone can do, or what it does better, than anything else); that it is a mean between an excess and a defect; that it follows reason in agreement with nature, skillfully shaping impulse.
- 4. Find out and memorize the specific kinds of *aretē*.** There are four cardinal virtues. They are practical wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice. Other
- 5. Satisfy your desires by means of *aretē* (excellence).** For Homer and other early Greeks, happiness is the satisfaction of desire. Such a satisfaction comes about and is assured by means of excellence (such as battle excellence, valor, or speaking well in the assembly). Know your desires. Cultivate excellences that correspond to their satisfaction.
- 6. Perform your own specific and general human functions well by means of *aretē*.** For Plato and other Greek philosophers, to do or to live well is to be well or to live happily, which is to live virtuously. Virtue is “the means by which a thing performs its function well,” where a thing's function is “that which it alone can do, or what it does better, than anything else.” A thing's function originates in or comes from its nature. So, it is vital to explore and be aware of human nature (including your own specific nature) in order to understand and practice virtue.
- 7. Let reason skillfully shape impulse.** For the Stoics,

PLAN OF LIFE ▪ AIMED AT *ARETĒ* (EXCELLENCE OR VIRTUE)

the virtuous life is a life lived according to reason in agreement with nature. Such a life is a happy life. Though we humans have impulses (innate drives) as other animals do, nature has given us reason to skillfully shape impulse. Know your impulses. Know how they require shaping or formation (by means of education or experience). Then look to reason to perform this happy-making task.

8. **Climb the ladder to *aretē*.** Know where you are on Aristotle's ladder to virtue. If you are at bottom, move from acting on impulse (brutishness) to moral viciousness, where you mistake evil for good. Moving up to moral weakness, you know the good but are unable to pursue it consistently, given your own moral weakness. With long practice, however, you may overcome

various unhealthy desires and come to a place of moral strength. Beyond this is virtue, where unhealthy desires vanish altogether, and good habit is the rule.

9. **Read and memorize sayings related to *aretē* and the good life.** Such sayings serve as short-cut reminders of where you are going and motivators to get you there.

10. **Live by examples. Know your heroes.** Who are your heroes?—those who have struggled to live a virtuous life? Who may serve as examples for you?—those “wise and sensible” men and women who have lived well? Learn about them and live by their example. Avoid others (warnings) who live in an opposite manner.

Thank you for supporting The Classics Cave.

You'll find books, readings, workouts, and more at www.theclassicscave.com. **Do you want to support the Cave's mission?** Let's talk! Contact Tim Young at tim@theclassicscave.com to sponsor or donate to the Cave.

“Virtue is a kind of health and beauty and good condition of the soul.”—Plato

“Virtue is a weapon that cannot be taken away.”—Antisthenes

“Happiness is an activity of the soul that accords with perfect virtue.”—Aristotle

The Classics Cave ▪ www.theclassicscave.com



THE CLASSICS CAVE
The earliest light for a brighter life
www.theclassicscave.com

