

Values and Virtues, Roman.

Roman morality was in decline for much of Rome's history—or so we would infer from a recurrent refrain heard virtually from one end of classical antiquity to the other. Here is one voice among many, the historian Tacitus (c. 56–after 118 CE), drawing a contrast between ancient virtue and subsequent vice (*Annals* 3. 26):

Nor was there need for rewards when honorable ends were by their very nature sought; and since people desired nothing contrary to established customs, they were forbidden nothing through fear of punishment. But after the principle of equality was stripped away, and ambition and force strode about in place of restraint and shame, forms of lordly power arose

For Tacitus, “established customs” guaranteed an unforced virtue, which in turn allowed a cooperative community of just, pious, and rugged equals to flourish spontaneously, needing no reward but the good opinion of their neighbors and fearing no punishment save their disapproval. It was only when those customs—collectively, *mos maiorum*, “the way of the elders”—were trampled underfoot by self-seeking ambition that law became necessary. But by then it was too late for law to undo the damage.

So ran the story the Romans told themselves, though it is very doubtful that the idyllic community of pristine times ever existed as a historical fact. It is far more likely that the Romans wishfully projected their better selves onto an idealized past, where they might live in their imaginations the best human life they could conceive. Considered in that light, the “way of the elders” represented an ethical ideal that people might strive to attain rather than a tradition preserved from generation to generation before it was corrupted. Bundling together the values and virtues that would shape the best sort of life, the ideal remained remarkably stable. In the sections below we will first survey the main components of the ideal, then consider a few of the social and intellectual forces that tended to challenge or undermine it.

“The Way of the Elders”

We can organize our survey by considering the Romans in action *domi militiaeque*—“at home and on campaign”—taking first the virtues on campaign. Here and throughout, we will focus on the views and public behavior of elite adult males; for matters of private morality, especially sexual, and the virtues of women, see the articles on [family, Roman; sexuality, Roman; women, Roman].

The Virtues on Campaign

Rome was a warrior culture. Under the Republic (509–27 BCE), military campaigns were waged virtually every year by armies levied from the ranks of citizens, and until the 1st century BCE the two chief magistrates elected each year (consuls) spent most of their term at the head of armies in the field. Accordingly, military service was both the highest duty of every *vir* (adult male citizen) and the theater in which the most prized ethical quality was most conspicuously displayed: *virtus*, the “quality or trait entailed in being a (real) *vir*,” or “manliness.” If you possessed *virtus*, you had physical courage and so could play the part of the *vir fortis* (“gallant *vir*,” or “hero”) in battle, the most highly valued role the culture had to offer.

Virtus could be displayed in two opposed but complementary ways, aggressively and defensively. Defensive *virtus* was the courage of the infantryman on the battle-line waiting to face the enemy's onslaught; aggressive *virtus* was epitomized by the cavalry officer's charge, as he raced to meet his opposite number in single combat. (Since

mounted officers were drawn from the elite, infantry from the more common citizen-ranks, there was a rough correlation between one's social class and the form of *virtus* one had the opportunity to display.) Each form of *virtus* was also associated with other qualities: defensive courage required endurance (*patientia*), for example, the physical toughness that allowed one to tolerate both the pain of warfare and the sorts of physical discomfort encountered on campaign; aggressive courage is commonly described as "daring" (*audacia*), though the same quality could be condemned as "recklessness," especially when it led to failure. All the more need, therefore, for the commanding officer to display shrewdness or foresight (*prudencia*) in order to enjoy the success (*felicitas*) for which good commanders were rewarded with praise (*laus*) and glory (*gloria*).

The annual campaigns were launched—at least in the Roman view—only upon provocation, when a foreign enemy either threatened the city directly or attacked another people whom Rome was obliged to assist. Ideologically, then, all of Rome's warfare was defensive, undertaken to protect the thing that any Roman prized most highly: the *res publica* ("commonwealth," "republic"), which comprised both the goods and property that the people (*populus*) held in common and all the collective interests of the people more generally—the "people's business." And just as every *vir* was obliged to display his *virtus* on the field of combat in defense of the *res publica*, so it was his obligation take a hand in the people's business in an appropriately "manly" way.

The Virtues of Civic Life

We come, then, to the values and virtues important to the Romans *domi*, "at home," where intense competition for honor was modulated by the equally intense communitarian ethos the *res publica* inspired. Because the *res publica* literally belonged to and concerned all citizens, all (male) citizens were bound to defend it and participate in its management (women, who typically were barred from most aspects of political life, were in principle represented by the participation of their male kin). "All for all" could have been the watchword: concern for the common well-being took precedence over self-interest or the claims of friends and kin (there is more than one edifying legend in which a Roman father puts to death a son who had acted against the *res publica*). This sort of social solidarity, which called for considerable and frequent self-sacrifice, was underwritten by two important and converging ideological elements, "the principle of equality" (as Tacitus called it) and the ethic of frugality.

Though the citizen body was distinguished by a number of hierarchical markers—between "patricians" and "plebeians," between those who were and were not "notables" (*nobiles*), between rich and poor—those distinctions were meant to be muted by the ethical premium placed on thrift and simplicity. Besides restraining a wastrel from squandering his patrimony (a betrayal of family comparable to treason toward the community), such qualities restrained the well-to-do from setting themselves above their neighbors through acts of conspicuous consumption; and that intent was occasionally codified in "sumptuary laws" that limited expenditures on (e.g.) dinners. More important, all citizens were equal before the law and equally entitled to the law's protection: this principle was epitomized by the rule that no citizen could be deprived of his *caput* (literally, his "head" and, metaphorically, his rights as a citizen) without the express judgment of the *populus*. This rule, the Romans believed, distinguished republican

equality both from the oppression they once suffered at the hands of their kings and from the arbitrary exercises of power experienced by their slaves.

Individual and collective freedom (*libertas*) in fact made civic equality possible and was the foundation of all Roman civic values. As the counter-term to *servitus* (“slavery”), *libertas* signified that a person was both *free from* the domination of another’s will and *free to* choose his own projects and commitments. At the same time, certainly under the Republic, “freedom from” and “freedom to” were tied closely to “freedom in”: freedom as a person was the precondition for, and was protected by, membership in the civil community (*civitas*: the same word denoted both the community and membership in it, or “citizenship”). *Civitas* gave individuals’ projects and commitments much of their positive content and united them with all others whose rights were guaranteed and regulated by the same laws. Republican freedom was in this respect the state of being, not a wholly autonomous self, but an engaged citizen embedded in a network of civic relations: *communis libertas*—the freedom you shared with all other free Romans—was the opposite both of the slave’s oppression and of his atomization.

The free Roman’s commitments of course extended not only to the *res publica* but also to his fellow citizens as individuals, in the form of agreements and ongoing relationships. All the most important civic virtues were dispositions that inclined people to keep their commitments. Of these, surely the most important was *fides*, “trustworthiness” (“good faith,” “honesty,” “sincerity,” “loyalty,” “credibility”; also, as a thing offered to another, “promise,” “pledge,” “assurance”). The Romans believed that this quality was uniquely theirs (in fact no Greek word covers quite the same ground), and they regularly depicted their enemies as lacking it: to have *Punica fides* (“the *fides* of a Carthaginian”) meant having no *fides* at all.

Fides made possible all stable human relations and all virtuous political dealings (a magistrate was obliged to act *e re publica fideque sua*, “in accordance with the public interest and his own *fides*”). But several other virtues can be regarded as combining to constitute or support it. To take one example, *fides* is closely aligned with *iustitia* (“justice”), which inclines you to give all people exactly what they are due. For another example, you cannot possess *fides* if you do not also possess *constantia*, which enables you to maintain whatever position you have adopted and act in a way consistent with it, nor can you possess *constantia* if you do not also possess *temperantia* or *continentia*, two names for the sort of self-control that keeps you from surrendering to impulses or appetites that might deflect you from your proper course. And possessing that sort of self-control virtually requires *magnitudo animi* (“largeness of spirit”), the intellectual and emotional resources that enable you to see what is truly important and act accordingly, especially by avoiding behavior that is pusillanimous, petty, and selfish.

Yet such qualities primarily oriented people’s intentions in the right direction and helped maintain the correct orientation: they did not guarantee that people would actually *do* anything. In a culture as action-centered as Rome’s, that plainly was not sufficient, and so the virtues supporting the intention to honor your commitments were joined with virtues concerned to translate intention into action: by displaying *industria* you engaged wholeheartedly in meeting your obligations and so wore the character of an “energetic *vir*” (*vir strenuus*); by displaying *prudencia*, the same sort of shrewd foresight expected of a general in the field (above), you showed that you were an experienced man of affairs;

by displaying *diligentia* (“scrupulousness”) you showed that you were as punctilious in fulfilling your commitments to others as you were in looking after your own affairs.

And yet it is highly unlikely that you would have and display any of these virtues if you did not also have two other, closely related ethical dispositions, *verecundia* and *pudor*. Each is concerned with monitoring the self in interpersonal dealings, and they do their work in complementary ways. *Verecundia* can be described as “social worry”: you display it by showing, through your behavior, that you know where you stand relative to other persons in a transaction, and what claim on your respect the others have. If you and the others are all *verecundi* (persons endowed with *verecundia*), you will each gauge your standing relative to the others; you will each present yourself in a way that at least will not give offense—for example, by confrontation or importunity—and that preferably will signal your full awareness of the others’ “face”—the characters they wear in the transaction and the respect that those characters are due; and you will stop short of overtly pressing your full claims, yet not be excessively self-effacing—not obliterate your own face, the character *you* are wearing and the respect that it is due. As a form of self-consciousness, *verecundia* causes the question “How am I doing?” to form in the back of your mind as you walk the tightrope of each transaction.

The complementary disposition, *pudor*, prompts a complementary question, “What if I fail?,” for it ponders the consequences should you fall from the tightrope. If you are *pudens* (a person endowed with *pudor*), you have what English calls “a sense of shame”: you sense, or imagine, the consequences of an ethical lapse—of failing to display *fides*, say—and in your mind’s eye you see your self being seen in discreditable terms (the same term, *pudor*, can also denote the painful emotion experienced when you have actually been “shamed”). The phrase “see your self being seen” suggests the splitting of the self that occurs when *pudor* is at work, as you see your (potentially) discredited self being discredited at the same time that you are that discredited self. This is *pudor*’s theatrical dimension, which involves your being both the protagonist in a play about virtue and the audience of that play at one and the same time; and given that so much of Roman ethical life was played out in public, with both successes and failures given the widest possible notice, we should understand the theatrical dimension quite literally. Taken together, *verecundia* and *pudor* help to insure that the play comes off smoothly, by constraining your behavior and prompting you to display the virtues appropriate to the scene. And indeed, the two qualities *must* be taken together, for they are hardly separable: it is inconceivable that a person lacking *verecundia* will still be *pudens*, just as it is unlikely that a person with a healthy “sense of shame” will lack *verecundia*.

This account has so far stressed the value that the Romans attached to making and honoring commitments, both to the community and to other individuals; some of the ethical qualities entailed in keeping one’s commitments; and two ethical dispositions that focus awareness on the self and its standing with respect to others. The last major component in our survey follows directly from these elements: the value attached to reciprocity. The sequence would appear quite natural to a Roman, for he would not conceive of any commitment as a one-sided thing. Every commitment that you kept imposed a new commitment on the other party to make an appropriate return, initiating or continuing a cycle that was in principle without end. That cycle pervaded every aspect of Roman life.

At the broadest and most fundamental level, such reciprocity was embedded in the contractualist premises of Roman Republican ideology. Any individual's devotion to the public interest entailed a guarantee of an appropriate return: *do ut des*, "I give so that you give." Under the terms of this contract such devotion should be required, optimally by traditional forms of honor, including public office (the same word, *honor*, denoted both "honor" and "office"), minimally by the protections afforded by the community's laws. Of course, the *vir bonus* ("good *vir*" or "patriot") must still act for the *res publica* even if the actions of *mali* ("bad men" or "subversives") cause the contract temporarily to break down. But the normative expectation was that manly deeds on the commonwealth's behalf would spread your name, causing peers to judge you excellent and posterity to remember you respectfully, forever.

At another level, there were the forms of reciprocity involving other persons. For an adult Roman, the world was divided into two categories of people, those with whom you had an ongoing exchange-relationship, and those with whom you did not. The former category was the center of your attention and comprised two subsets. The first consisted of people with whom you were obliged to exchange good things: these were *amici* ("friends"), and the relationship with them was called *amicitia* ("friendship": *amicitia* in principle existed between peers, but by a polite fiction the same language was used of relations between non-equals involving what we could call "patronage"). The fact that the exchange defined the relationship does not mean that the relationship necessarily lacked the affection that we associate with friendship (*amici* and *amicitia* are built on the same lexical root as *amor*, "love"); but while the amount and kind of affection invested in such relationships could vary considerably, the exchange-obligation remained a constant. The things exchanged, which could be any sort of material good or personal service, fell under two general rubrics, *beneficium* (plural *beneficia*, "kindness(es), favor(s)") and *officium* (plural *officia*, "duty/ies, obligation(s)"). *Beneficia* and *officia* were complementary, in the sense that any *beneficium* I did for you imposed on you the *officium* to make some appropriate return at some appropriate time. The kind and the occasion of the return were normally left unspecified, to be defined as the relationship evolved and the need arose. People involved in long-term relationships of this sort did not typically keep a precise accounting of *beneficia* bestowed and *officia* fulfilled but operated with a general sense of how the balance stood; and among *amici*, it commonly happened that when I did a good turn for you, to discharge what I regarded as an *officium*, you would choose to regard it as a *beneficium*, which would then impose on you the *officium* of making a return. (Compare the discourse of public elections: a candidate for office might present himself as one who "deserved well of the Roman people," that is, had served them well and put them in his debt; but his subsequent election would be spoken of, not as the repayment of the people's debt and the discharge of an *officium*, but as the *beneficium populi Romani*, "the kindness of the Roman people.")

Then there were the people who occupied the other subset of such relationships, those with whom you were obliged to exchange bad things: these were *inimici* ("enemies," literally "not-*amici*"), and the relationship with them was called *inimicitiae* ("enmity, feud"). People became enemies when one did the other an *iniuria* ("wrong"): your enmities, therefore, unlike your friendships, were almost always entered into unwillingly and passively, insofar as others commonly wronged you without provocation whereas of course you hardly ever wronged others yourself. The *iniuria* could take many

forms, ranging from material harm to the sort of insult damaging to a person's reputation. Unless the one who insulted you could plausibly be treated as someone unworthy of notice, the insult, no less than a material harm, obliged you to seek vengeance, which could vary considerably in timing and kind (note, however, that the Romans did not duel); and because the person who offered the original *iniuria* was likely to believe, or claim, that his act was innocent or justified, he would in turn regard your payback as mere aggression that required a response. This cycle of exchange, like the exchange of *beneficia* and *officia*, was open-ended and could continue from one generation to the next; as long as two *inimici* were alive, it could be ended only by a formal reconciliation (*in gratiam redire*, literally "to return to favor"). Yet exchange-obligations with enemies and friends alike took second place to one's obligation to the *res publica*: if one had to choose between advancing the common good and helping a friend or harming an enemy, there was no question what the correct choice was. But to be able to advance the common good while helping a friend and harming an enemy—that was the best circumstance of all.

Beyond the exchange-relationships that structured dealings with friends, enemies, and the *res publica* as a whole, reciprocity was crucial to your relations with two other categories of being, one dead, the other incapable of dying: your ancestors and the gods, toward both of whom you had to display the same attitude—*pietas* ("devotion"). The Romans' relations with their gods form a topic that extends far beyond the confines of this article, but the reciprocal nature of those relations can be stressed briefly here.

Rome was able to thrive only when it enjoyed the *pax deorum* ("peace of the gods"), a condition possible only when human dealings with the gods were conducted in acceptable ways; these included much the same contractual terms as the dealings of one human being with another: *do ut des*, "I give so that you give." On the human side, the giving took the form of sacrificial offerings and votive dedications, both of which kept alive the exchange between the human and divine realms. Sacrifice was a gift that secured divine goodwill for undertakings that ranged from the humbly personal to the grandly communal. A votive dedication fulfilled a sacred promise made at a moment of crisis or decisive action, a vow (*votum*) that you would make a suitable return if a god or gods saw you through the crisis or helped make your action successful.

Where acts of *pietas* toward the gods were largely intended to secure good things in the future, *pietas* toward your ancestors was plainly oriented toward the past. Here you were in the position of being the perpetual debtor. Your ancestors had already given you more than you could ever fully repay, both in the sense of being collectively responsible for your very existence and in the sense of being collectively responsible for much of the social standing and respect that you enjoyed. But being unable to repay the debt just meant that you were always aware of it—such awareness was at the heart of *pietas*—and were always making the attempt. On the level of formal ritual, the attempt was most conspicuously embodied in the annual rites of the Parentalia, Feralia, and Caristia (13–22 Feb.), days of remembrance on which the living made simple offerings to the friendly spirits of their dead, the *di parentes* (literally "ancestor gods"). On the level of everyday behavior, you were expected to honor your ancestors just by living up to the standard they had set: texts commonly represent Romans, poised on the verge of action, reflecting on the course that would be most worthy of their ancestors. If you succeeded in

regulating your life in this way, you could expect that future generations would in their turn fulfill their obligations by honoring you.

If you combined in your life all the vectors of excellence we have surveyed—performing manly deeds while serving the community in war and peace, maintaining your feely chosen commitments by displaying *fides* and the other associated virtues, and fulfilling the many obligations of reciprocity that bound you to the living, the dead, and the divine, all the while regulating your behavior by the promptings of ethical dispositions such as *verecundia* and *pudor*—then you could be said to embody three distinctively Roman qualities. First, you would possess *gravitas* (“weightiness” = “seriousness”) and be spoken of as “weighty *vir*” (*vir gravis*): that is, you had both feet on the ground and were anchored securely in your world, reliably behaving in a consistent and well-balanced way, the opposite of the person whose “lightness” (*levitas*) caused him to behave fecklessly and irresponsibly. As a person of *gravitas* you would also possess *dignitas*, an attribute signifying that you enjoyed a certain standing in the community—both your objective status (e.g., as a magistrate vs. a private citizen, a free man vs. a slave) and the respect others were willing subjectively to grant you—and that you were judged worthy of that standing. And since you possessed both *gravitas* and *dignitas*, you would also inevitably possess *auctoritas*, the quality that caused others to receive your suggestions as though they were binding injunctions and allowed you to gain your aim just because others were inclined to grant it. You would, in short, be living the sort of life that all good men would want to live.

Challenges to “The Way”

Many men aspired to live such a life from one end of antiquity to the other. But there were forces and changes, both specifically political and broadly cultural, that limited in various ways their ability to lead that good life, or radically questioned the definition of the good life itself. We can round off this survey by considering several important challenges.

One grave challenge arose from the Romans’ very success. As we noted at the outset, a perception of moral decline looms large in the Romans’ self-conception, and many sources locate the critical turn at one point or another in the second century BCE, when by conquest or gift Rome seized much of North Africa and mainland Greece and began to gain a foothold in Asia Minor. It was this new dominance of the Mediterranean, the Romans thought, that sent everything spinning in the wrong direction; and in several important respects they were not wrong, though the form of analysis that they used, cast in heavily moralizing terms, is not necessarily our own.

According to this analysis, the passing of the *metus hostilis*—Rome’s fear of her external enemies—and the simultaneous influx of previously unimaginable amounts of wealth from new holdings overseas turned men “soft” (*mollis*) and addicted them to “luxury” (*luxuria*); increased contact with foreign ideas—in the form, especially, of Greek learning—only compounded the effect by undermining ancestral norms. Some of this analysis can in fact be correlated more or less closely with observable changes in the ethos of the elite: for example, service in the cavalry—the form of military service through which male aristocrats had most conspicuously displayed their *virtus* from the late fourth century on—had by the first century BCE been “outsourced” to foreign auxiliaries and ceased to be a feature of elite acculturation. Other elements of the Romans’ analysis can be seen to point toward fundamental challenges to Republican

values lurking just beneath the surface of their moralizing language: the real problem with luxury, we might say, was not that it spurred men to pay exorbitant prices for caviar (an early example of luxury's "corruption": Polybius 31. 25. 3-8) but that it provided a way for men to show that they were their neighbors' superiors, *not* their equals, at the same time that it focused men's attention on themselves and their personal wants, and away from the community and its needs.

Rome's imperial expansion brought the individual to the fore in still more dramatic and consequential ways. Extended military commands and brilliant victories over foreign foes threw a spotlight on a series of individuals who claimed virtually unprecedented glory and *dignitas*, starting in the latter part of the third century BCE with Marcus Claudius Marcellus (c. 265–208 BCE) and the elder Scipio Africanus (236–183 BCE). That such men could loom over the community not only threw out of balance aristocratic competition for *dignitas* within the senate but ultimately brought to the fore a man like Pompey the Great (106–48 BCE), who accumulated unparalleled power and prestige almost completely outside a traditional senatorial career. From there it was a short step—one taken in the civil wars of 49–31 BCE—to the emergence of a single man who both de facto and de iure controlled all the important levers of power by himself: Augustus (63 BCE–14 CE), the first to be acknowledged as *the* "foremost man" (*princeps*) in the community, and the first of the men whom we call "emperors." From the time of Augustus on, all military authority was vested in the *princeps* and delegated to his loyal subordinates, and an administrative system was developed that relied heavily on men below the rank of senator, which had the effect of channeling the emperor's patronage to men directly beholden to him while avoiding reliance on men who were his potential competitors. And at the same time that he controlled the structures of power, the emperor seemed to engross the virtues themselves, identifying himself—on his coinage, on inscriptions, and in other media—with qualities like *pietas*, *aequitas* ("fairness"), and *providentia* ("foresight"). When in January 27 BCE the senate honored Augustus with a golden shield inscribed with four excellences—*virtus*, *iustitia*, *pietas*, and *clementia*—the message conveyed was that the emperor embodied those virtues, not uniquely, but certainly more than anyone else.

By dominating the public sphere the emperor did not foreclose all opportunities for political engagement and public honors of the traditional sort; but the opportunities were more constricted than they had been under the Republic, and the competition for honor was carefully controlled from the top down. In that setting some attraction could be found in what has been called the "privatization of happiness," represented by systems of thought that in various ways denied the value of public honor and located the source of true happiness elsewhere. One such system was founded by Epicurus (341–270 BCE), whose teachings had gained some circulation in Rome by the first century BCE. Epicureanism held that the proper end of life—the only thing to be pursued for itself—was a certain sort of pleasure: not the pleasure of physical sensation, but *ataraxia*, or tranquility, the state of being free from psychic disturbance [x-ref.: Epicureanism]. The pursuit of tranquility hardly seems a subversive goal, but for Epicureans it entailed two positions that emphatically contradicted traditional Roman values. First, the cultivation of *ataraxia* was held to be quite incompatible with a political life, which was an inevitable source of psychic disturbance. Second, the single greatest cause of such disturbance—fear of death—was closely related to fear of the gods, which in turn was based

(Epicureans said) on a fundamental misunderstanding of the gods' nature: for as the perfect embodiments of tranquility, the gods were perfectly uninvolved in human affairs, intervening neither for good nor for ill. Short of actual atheism, no theology could more directly spurn the forms of reciprocity that invigorated Rome's religious traditions.

Where political and divine quietism marginalized Epicureanism at Rome, another philosophical sect—Stoicism—was more in tune with Roman values, at least on the surface: like the *mos maiorum* (and, for that matter, Epicureanism) it promoted a simple and austere lifestyle; it strongly favored cultivation of all the familiar virtues; and most important, because it held that human beings “are born not for ourselves but for others,” it favored political involvement (as an ancient contrast put it, while an Epicurean will not engage in politics unless compelled by circumstances, a Stoic will engage in politics unless prevented by circumstances). As a result, Stoicism was accepted much more readily by the elite than was Epicureanism, and a number of statesmen with strong Stoic leanings were active at Rome in the first century BCE and first century CE, most notably Cato the younger (95–46 BCE) and Seneca the younger (c. 1–65 CE). Yet its fit with the *mos maiorum* was far from perfect: for where Roman tradition located the final human good in a thriving *res publica*, Stoicism's final good was virtue, which was identified not with manly action in the world but with the movement of the human mind in accord with right reason [x-ref.: Stoicism]. That is, though political action was appropriate for a person not barred by circumstances, being thus barred was itself no bad thing—nor, for that matter, was successful political action a good thing. The label “good” or “bad” was appropriately applied, not to any action or its outcome, but to the rational or irrational movements of the mind as it made its judgments and choices: what then actually happened was, literally, a matter of indifference. In other words, while Stoicism favored political engagement, it strictly speaking attached no value to that engagement's outcome.

Explaining why such seemingly paradoxical propositions make sense within the Stoic system viewed as a whole is the task of a different essay: it is enough here to say that much about Stoicism would have struck a conventionally minded Roman as odd, and for much the same reasons that it strikes a modern reader as odd. Yet for all that Stoicism and, still more, Epicureanism diverged from Rome's ethical traditions, they both at least supposed that the final human good could be experienced only in the material universe that informs our lives as humans. Compared with that premise, one other, far more consequential system of thought—Christianity—was not only at odds with Rome's ethical tradition, it aimed to stand that tradition on its head. The story of that challenge to Rome is told elsewhere in this encyclopedia.

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