

How Would Epicurus Account For Depression? - Main Thread

Post by "Cassius" of March 11, 2017 at 6:34 PM

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) [February 22 at 10:58am](#) How would Epicurus account for depression?

AR A disturbed soul (nervous system). A confused soul. A corrupted (miseducated) soul. Nature made. See the letter to Menoecus. See OTNOT on how Nature makes monsters. See how all men cannot be brought to wisdom.

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[Jimmy Daltrey](#) I read the letter, is he saying the depressed should simply kill themselves?

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[Hiram Crespo](#) Image not found or type unknown

Hiram Crespo The 25 th book On Nature deals w moral development and discusses neuroplasticity, including E's view that we should change the structure of our brains. So I think E would encourage practices along those lines that have been shown to change brain structure.

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AR Epicurus is not making a blanket recommendation to suicide. Read Menoecus again. Only life provides the opportunity for happiness. Death is the end of sensation. All good comes through sensation, and recollection of their presentations.

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[Jimmy Daltrey](#) Image not found or type unknown

Jimmy Daltrey Thanks, I'll look at the book. I think what I am getting at, is whether there is a therapeutic practice (beyond medication) that would enable a person to understand how they could, should, address their problem?

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[Jason Baker](#) Image not found or type unknown

Jason Baker It's hard to imagine a practicing Epicurean having the company of fellow Epicureans, living according to nature, ever becoming depressed. Exercise, conviviality, cooperation, autarky... these things don't leave much room for malaise.

Clinical depression is another thing entirely. Pharmacological intervention would likely be necessary before Epicurean philosophy would be of any benefit.

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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) [Jason Baker](#): interesting, however how many Epicureans live in Epicurean communities? I get the point though, it would make for amazing therapy.

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Hiram Crespo

[Hiram Crespo](#) That is true. There are cases that require medical attention. But neuroplasticity shows that long term change is possible so we have to continue supporting the study of nature - scientific research in this regard.


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[AR](#) Image not found or type unknown

[AR](#) Even a depressed person will benefit from practicing all the techniques that Epicurus recommends, such as detecting and avoiding false beliefs, understanding desires and their categories, understanding decision making, understanding reasoning and learn...[See More](#)

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Jason Baker

[Jason Baker](#) You're sitting in the midst of a virtual community, [Jimmy](#)! Not quite the same effect as a physical community, but it has therapeutic value all the same, particularly that frankness that some confuse for unfriendliness. [Image not found or type unknown](#) 

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[Elli Pensa](#) Image not found or type unknown

[Elli Pensa](#) [Jimmy Daltrey](#) who was that philosopher that killed himself ...Epicurus ??? NO ! Zeno died around 264 BC. Laertius reports about his death: "As he left the school, he tripped, fell and broke a toe. Hitting the ground with his hand, he cited words of Niobe: "I am coming, why do you call me thus?" Since the Stoic sage was expected to always do what was appropriate (kathekon) and Zeno was very old at the time, he felt it appropriate to die and consequently strangled himself.

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Elli Pensa

[Elli Pensa](#) - Epicurus : And so he who advises a young man to live well, and an old

man to die well, is a simpleton, not only because life is desirable for both the young and the old, but also because the wisdom to live well is the same as the wisdom to die well. (letter to Menoecus)

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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) [Elli Pensa](#), honestly not interested in discussing Stoics. What is the obsession?

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AR

[AR](#) Also Diogenes's Epicurean Inscription is therapeutic...

It starts as follows.....[See More](#)

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Elli Pensa

[Elli Pensa](#) [Jimmy Daltrey](#) Excuse me, this is not an obsession. It is an answer in your question when you said : "I read the letter, is he (Epicurus) saying the depressed should simply kill themselves?"

Where Epicurus says that ? Why are you drawing so rapid concl...[See More](#)

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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) I'm sorry Elli Pensa, I'm English and if I want to know something, I ask. It has nothing to do with Socrates. If this group is only for people who already know all there is to know, should I leave? I was quiet enjoying the exchange. Perhaps I misunderstood this "Much worse is he who says that it were good not to be born, but when once one is born to pass quickly through the gates of Hades. For if he truly believes this, why does he not depart from life? It would be easy for him to do so once he were firmly convinced" AR directed me to the letter.

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AR

[AR](#) So there, Epicurus is saying that life is preferable, even to that person that says that death is preferable. If they were really convinced they wouldn't be alive now saying so.

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Jimmy Daltrey

Jimmy Daltrey I read it as an exhortation for the miserable to end it all. He says "why does he not", not "why has he not", "would be easier", not "would have been easier"
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AR

AR ok. Epicurus is mostly pro-life. Even when old and very sick, he made the best of every moment by continued practice, until his last moment.
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Jose Torres and or type unknown

Jose Torres Nicely done.
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Jason Baker

Jason Baker **Jimmy Daltrey**, translations and secondary sources have their bugbears. Several members here have collected multiple translations together for study on their web pages outside of FB and published their reasonings on most topics of interest. We're working to make that more accessible to the masses, but in the meantime questions are best framed after studying the material. The premises of many questions dissolve away entirely after doing so.
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Cassius Amicus type unknown

Write a reply...

Elli Pensa

Elli Pensa Against the depression Epicurus said in greek : «παρεγγυῶν τὸ συνεχὲς ἐνέργημα ἐν φυσιολογίᾳ καὶ τοιοῦτῳ μάλιστα ἐγγαληνίζων τῷ βίῳ» that means "I recommend constant activity in the study of Nature and this way more than any other I bring calm to my life". For this purpose, he introduced Κανονικὸν (Canonikon), an empirical methodology of inquiry consisting of observation by the senses and drawing inferences for the unknown based on analogies with the observed. This approach made Epicurean philosophy very comprehensive and among all ancient philosophies by far the most compatible with modern scientific findings. Modern scientific findings means the science of medicine that has a field that is called "Endocrinology" that diagnoses and treats diseases of the endocrine organs or

dysregulation of hormones homeostasis.

The major hormones that create happy feelings are (many of the ones below also act as neurotransmitters):

- **ACETYLCHOLINE:** Alertness, memory, sexual performance, appetite control, release of growth hormone.
- **DOPAMINE:** Feelings of bliss and pleasure, euphoric, appetite control, controlled motor movements, feel focused.
- **ENDORPHINS:** Mood elevating, enhancing, euphoric. The more present, the happier you are! Natural pain killers.
- **ENKEPHALINS:** Restrict transmission of pain, reduce craving, reduce depression.
- **GABA (Gamma Amino Butyric Acid):** Found throughout central nervous system, anti-stress, anti-anxiety, anti-panic, anti-pain; Feel calm, maintain control, focus.
- **MELATONIN:** “Rest and recuperation” and “anti-aging” hormone. Regulates body clock.
- **NOREPINEPHRINE:** Excitatory, feel happy, alert, motivated. Anti-depressant, appetite control, energy, sexual arousal.
- **OXYTOCIN:** Stimulated by Dopamine. Promotes sexual arousal, feelings of emotional attachment, desire to cuddle.
- **PHENYLETHYLAMINE (PEA):** Feelings of bliss, involved in feelings of infatuation (high levels found in chocolate).
- **SEROTONIN:** Promotes and improves sleep, improves self esteem, relieves depression, diminishes craving, prevents agitated depression and worrying.

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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) Cool, where does he say this?

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Jason Baker

[Jason Baker](#) Letter to Herodotus.

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Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

[Elli Pensa](#)

[Elli Pensa](#) In his Canon says this and that. As he gave to the DOCTORS his CANON and this was, is and will be THEIR TOOL and THEIR METHOD to search and confirm (with their senses and their experiment) what is the people's disfunction in the hormones.

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[Luke Kelly](#) Image not found or type unknown

[Luke Kelly](#) There isn't anyone who wouldn't benefit from Epicurean teaching, but in general philosophy is no better for mental illnesses such as depression than it is for physical ailments like a broken leg.

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[Elli Pensa](#)

[Elli Pensa](#) Luke Kelly I disagree with you and your example of a broken leg. When the body suffers the soul suffers too and vice versa. The epicurean philosophy is confirmed by the recent scientific findings in the field of the psychotherapy and psychiatry.

[I ha...](#) [See More](#) Image may contain: text

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Cassius Amicus

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[Shana HT](#) Image not found or type unknown

[Shana HT](#) Stop treating depression as a mental thing, when its a physical one. its all brain chemistry.

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/168-how-would-epicurus-account-for-depression-main-thread/?postID=217#post217>

pre civilized cultures had almost no incidence due to omega 3 rich diet and physical work throuout day.

heal it like any disease, with right medicine, food and excercise.

After going through post partum depression, this is what I learned.

no mumbo jumbo, straight up heal the body

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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) There is a clear interplay between thought (which is physical, chemical and electrical) and brain structure and therapy can and does change brain chemistry and structure. That is just science...

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AR

AR The Epicurean soul is the nervous system. So yes, it is physical. The brain, peripheral nervous system, sensors...

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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) I don't think an immaterial Soul became popular until a lot later. St Paul appears to have thought that the soul was physical, hence the resurrection of dead bodies to everlasting life not a spiritual afterlife (not a Christian btw)

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Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

AR

AR The soul (nervous system) is part of the body. A confused, troubled, or corrupted (miseducated) soul can benefit from Epicurean advice just like a blessed soul can. Yes, nutrition is a part of health, as are other things, and events...

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[Ilkka Vuoristo](#) or type unknown

[Ilkka Vuoristo](#) I'd say he would account it as a medical condition that you should seek a doctor for.

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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) So Epicureanism makes no therapeutic claims? (I really should read up and come back). Does it propose simply propose pleasure as a means to happiness rather than providing a path? Surely advising people to not fear God and death shows that he believes that there is an ideal condition (happiness) to be attained by improvement (addressing fears)

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AR

[AR](#) We are not legally licensed to treat clinical depression, or suicidal thoughts. We can give advice as friends and not as a substitute for medical experts. Don't sue us.

 [Ilkka Vuoristo](#) or type unknown

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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) I'm fine Alexander, just thinking through the implications of a philosophy based on happiness for the unhappy.

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[Ilkka Vuoristo](#) or type unknown

[Ilkka Vuoristo](#) Depression is NOT unhappiness, and should not be treated as such. Depression is an imbalance in the brain chemistry of a person. Unhappiness is the imbalance of pleasure and pain in the life of a person.

It may be true that an informed pursuit of pleasures can help a person with depression, but it should not be the only treatment.

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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) Cognitive treatments appear to work well on depression. Brain

chemistry is certainly affected by experience.

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Jason Baker

[Jason Baker](#) Cognitive treatments may work well but depression research is still in its infancy and therapeutic philosophy may not be the solution for everyone. The tetrapharmakos is strong stuff, but it's no panacea. We're not homeopaths. 1f609.png 😊

Personalized medicine may eventually define depression so narrowly that it's not used colloquially like it is today. In the meantime, we have to be very clear with our definitions in order to avoid confusion.

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Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

AR

[AR](#) Yes. EP is fine for everyone, but if you think you're clinically depressed, or if you're suicidal then please see a doctor, just as you would do if you broke your leg.

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[Matt Jackson](#) or type unknown

[Matt Jackson](#) I agree with [Ilkka](#) and [Alexander](#), the philosophy is designed for a normally functioning brain to seek pleasure and happiness. However if there is a physical and chemical abnormality then the person will not be helped by any philosophy and can only be treated clinically.

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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) However it offers improvement for normal people? I suppose if you were already happy you wouldn't need Epicureanism....

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Matt Jackson

[Matt Jackson](#) I'd say so. If a person is afraid of the supernatural and illusions offered by religion, Epicurus's teachings are designed to alleviate those fears by removing

religion and superstition, of the fear of death. Once gone a person can pursue a life without needless worry.

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Matt Jackson

[Matt Jackson](#) When a person realizes that we exist as animals in a completely naturalist world without any providence or fear of reprisal in the after life we get to reset the game's rules and not play the wrong way.

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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) So what value to an atheist? I have never feared those things.

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Matt Jackson

[Matt Jackson](#) A continued understanding that pleasure is the highest good and that is the only thing to pursue. An atheist might consider Buddhism to be a viable option for their philosophical outlook, but Buddhism isn't seeking pleasure it seeks the middle path and detachment. So Epicurean philosophy would benefit anyone needing a life goal....pleasure.

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Matt Jackson

[Matt Jackson](#) It's like ultimately once it is realized that the hedonistic calculus is all there is then pleasure should be the number one goal.

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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) Rich people aren't always happy...some are downright miserable.

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Matt Jackson

[Matt Jackson](#) True so they could use a philosophy to color their life. Money doesn't equal happiness, so they need something to help illustrate how to be happy.

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AR

[AR Jimmy Daltrey](#)

What benefit to an atheist?

Great question.

Many benefits. I speak from experience. One is proper use of imagination, another is knowing that virtues and scientific mindset are tools to be used towards the goal of happy living, resetting expectations based on experience and knowledge of categories of desires... others too.

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Jason Baker

[Jason Baker](#) Wealth and profligacy are mentioned directly in the [principal doctrines](#), as well as several associated subjects, like fame and status. Philodemus wrote several books on wealth, household management, etc. The limits of pleasure are an important topic in Epicurean philosophy, perhaps even the main reason Epicurus separated himself from his philosophical forebears.

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Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

[Mish Taylor](#) Image failed to load or type unknown

[Mish Taylor](#) As depression can and often does involve 'Anhedonia' - loss of pleasure - A combination of medical and 'Epicurean' lifestyle is in fact what is prescribed now, mindfulness, CBT, walking / living in nature, hobbies / art / creative outlets, talking therapy, avoiding stress / doing things you enjoy & etc.

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Ilkka Vuoristo

[Ilkka Vuoristo](#) Depression is NOT unhappiness, and should not be treated as such. Depression is an imbalance in the brain chemistry of a person. Unhappiness is the imbalance of pleasure and pain in the life of a person.

It may be true that an informed pursuit of pleasures can help a person with depression, but it should not be the only treatment.

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Jimmy Daltrey

Jimmy Daltrey Cognitive treatments work well on depression and experience changes brain chemistry. Who is to say depression isn't an imbalance? Some psychiatrists think that it is a cognitive response to environment.

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Jason Baker

Jason Baker Depression is one of those words that has broadened in meaning to the point of near uselessness except in clinical circumstances. The colloquial and the technical aren't the same thing and we need to be clear which we're discussing.

It's like curing cancer. Which one?

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Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

Haze Elle Profile picture not found or type unknown

Haze Elle As someone who has been depressed (and contemplated suicide for the better part of a year), but isn't now, I think that there are a few things we can glean from Epicurus. 1. removal of painful stimuli. in my case, my depression was highly linked to a class and teacher that made me feel stupid and worthless. removing these helped a lot. 2. knowledge that sensations of pain end. Depression can feel all consuming, and knowing that it will end helps with they. Otherwise I echo that Epicurus would likely recommend treatment based on an investigation of the bodily and social causes of depression.

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Christopher Connolly Profile picture not found or type unknown

Christopher Connolly Depression is much more complex than some folks on here seem to believe. When you are in the grip of suicidal depression you probably wouldn't give a stuff what Epicurus or anyone other philosopher thought about it. It might be all your mind can cope with to to climb off the sofa and turn the TV off.

It can be a reaction to some sad or worrying event or it can come on for no apparent reason at all. I should think that a lifestyle which eschews hedonism in favour of

more simple pleasure and is non-religious is a good defence against becoming depressed, but when it's already happened then the best treatment might be the things that [Mish](#) mentioned, or it might be medication, or it might be a combination of all of them plus the kindness of friends.

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Jason Baker

[Jason Baker](#) I'm not entirely certain who in this discussion group believes depression is simple, the post may have been deleted or edited, can you point to a specific post that supports that premise? An important part of Epicurean inquiry into nature is the multiplicity of explanations for phenomena not fully explored. I don't know of any Epicurean that would claim cognition is an area of science fully explored.

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[Christopher Connolly](#) Image not found or type unknown

[Christopher Connolly](#) I was thinking of the opinion that depression is "a physical thing". That does seem to me to reduce the complexity of depression in an unrealistic fashion. I don't think I used the word "simple" though, [Jason](#). Simple and complex are at different ends of the scale. There is space in between.

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Jason Baker

[Jason Baker](#) You are absolutely correct [Christopher Connolly](#), pardon my divergence from Epicurean multivalent logic into the Aristotelean excluded middle. Long practice has me falling into that trap from time to time.

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Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

[Elli Pensa](#) Image not found or type unknown

[Elli Pensa](#) <<It might be all your mind can cope with to to climb off the sofa and turn the TV off>>.

[Christopher Connolly](#) the above action you described IMO is not an action of depression is a very good action to turn off that stupid box that called TV, then to ...

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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) That is known as the "Stop it" school of mental healthcare. It has had limited scientific results.

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Elli Pensa

[Elli Pensa](#) There is no need of any scientific result how beneficial would be to stop watching that stupid box that is called TV. Here in Greece they are spreading terror through many programmes from the morning till the late hours of the night. To not mention all the stupid stuff for horoscopes and the celebrities. To not mention movies of horror. And all these things to make you to feel stupid, ignorant and depressed.

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Christopher Connolly

[Christopher Connolly](#) My experience from my last period of depression is that I lay on the sofa and watched snooker on the TV. I wasn't previously interested in snooker and I'm not really a fan now either, but at the time it was a nice, easy diversion and I found myself looking forward to it every day.

I honestly think that getting into the snooker championship, and starting to take an interest in it (although I can't remember who won) helped to kickstart my recovery.

So although I agree with Eli about celebs, horror and celebrities the TV can be therapeutic. It depends what's on!

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Jason Baker

[Jason Baker](#) **[Jimmy Daltrey](#)**, reread what Elli wrote. Perhaps there's another way of reading it that jives with your understanding? It would be better to ask **[Elli Pensa](#)** if she is talking about a clinically depressed person before assuming.

Watching television, especially alone, fulfills an unnecessary desire. Turning it off when it imbalances the hedonic scales is something a practicing Epicurean would do. A clinically depressed person isn't likely able to perform the calculus, intervention of some sort is required in that case. Epicurean philosophy places a lot of weight on friendship as a mechanism for healthy living. This is definitely a circumstance where

the support of a friend is warranted.

Christopher Connolly, thanks for sharing that personal experience. It just goes to show that the hedonic calculus is a very personal thing and is going to be different for different people, times and places. The methodology of performing that calculus is going to be the same but the results will vary given different circumstances. I'm glad you were able to find a way out on your own!

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Christopher Connolly

Christopher Connolly Thanks **Jason**

Like · **Reply** · **2** · **February 22 at 5:19pm**

Jimmy Daltrey

Jimmy Daltrey I don't watch TV

Like · **Reply** · **1** · **February 22 at 6:35pm**

Jason Baker

Jason Baker You're in good company **Jimmy**, if I do say so myself.  

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