

Driving Away Bad Habits "Like Evil Men Who Have Long Done Us Great Harm" (Including Addictions)

Post by "Cassius" of April 23, 2025 at 4:17 PM

In the past we have had threads that touched on the issue of pain, pleasure, and addition, such as [this one](#).

In addition, we regularly get questions such as:

I've been rethinking my relationship with XXXXX and how to navigate it in a way that's consistent with a grounded materialist worldview. The religious structure of some self-help programs (like AA in particular) just doesn't seem consistent with what Epicurus would recommend.

First of all, we always remind people that clinical / biological / genetic problems require professional help. No matter what the Stoics might say, you can't through sheer willpower "think" your way out of problems like that. Epicurus is reported by Diogenes Laertius at 117 that "A man cannot become wise with every kind of physical constitution, nor in every nation." It seems to me that that "physical constitution" part definitely includes issues that we'd describe as "clinical."

So the first step in this analysis is always to determine if you have a problem that requires professional help, and then get that professional help if you do.

But if the problem we are talking about is more on the order of "bad habits," then Epicurus definitely had things to say about that, such as:

Quote

VS46. "Let us utterly drive from us our bad habits, as if they were evil men who have long done us great harm." (Bailey)

That certainly seems to indicate that bad habits are to be taken seriously and are to be dealt with vigorously, not because there is anything intrinsically sinful in them, but because they produce great pain.

It's also likely that bad habits and addictions were addressed face to face among the ancient Epicureans, and it's for that reason that we see so much discussion of "frank speech." A personal level of interaction and accountability is very helpful and probably necessary. That's something that probably doesn't exist and probably impossible to get in an online communities.

Also, when we get questions about particular additions or habits, it's helpful to find someone in the community with recovery experience in the precise issue (either firsthand or as a therapist). If someone has experience in that area and is willing to let others know about it, starting a Zoom support group could be a baby step toward a fuller expression of Epicurus' original vision of friendship and support. If this strikes you as something you would be interested in volunteering to do in some capacity, let me know by private conversation and we can explore setting something like that up

We've definitely had people let us know that they've been through tough experiences and would have benefited from support with philosophically like-minded people. So if anyone has any experience or interest in being resources in such situations, again let us know.

So let's use this thread for those who can offer general comments that they've found helpful themselves and that fit within an Epicurean perspective. We'll see what direction this goes, and if we have any people who are interested in volunteering to be resources, let us know.