

What amount of effort should be put into pursuing pleasure or removing pain?

Post by "Cassius" of June 24, 2025 at 9:12 AM

What Don says is true and also a lot turns on what definition you give to "effort." Building a stone wall with an inscription about Epicurus takes a lot of a certain type of effort. So does composing six long books of a poem. So does writing 37 books on Nature and all the rest that Epicurus wrote. So does building a philosophical school that opposes and takes on the majority philosophical and religious orthodoxy.

If effort means intensity of focus and action, then those are examples of people putting tremendous effort into their pursuit of a correct philosophy, on which happiness depends, and I would say you put everything you've got into that effort to find pleasure and be happy.

The pleasures Don lists which can be achieved by "getting out of the way" of them is a valid approach if you are able to maintain those and have confidence in their continuance and your satisfaction with them, but there are also other pleasures that you will never experience if you do not pursue them vigorously. There is no god to tell you whether to pursue them or not, and no "ideal" pattern to follow. You yourself have to decide which to pursue. I would argue that there is no good Epicurean authority for the proposition that everyone should always choose those pleasures which take the least "effort." Epicurus says we will sometime choose pain in order to avoid a worse pain or achieve greater pleasure.

It is also arguable based on the sources that DeWitt cites that even the [Epicurean gods](#) have to take action to maintain their own blessedness, and certainly every Epicurean we know anything about went to lots of effort to promote their philosophy. There are no Epicurean examples I know of who were held up by the Epicureans as pursuing happiness through engaging in minimal effort in all aspects of life.

The reference to the gods needing to act to maintain their deathlessness is in Section 13 part 3 of DeWitt's book, including: "If deathlessness were inherent in their nature, they would be in another class by themselves. Since they do belong in the same class as man, it is a logical necessity to think of their incorruptibility as by some means preserved. Since in the cosmos of Epicurus, unlike that of Plato, this incorruptibility lacked a superior being to guarantee its continuance, the sole possibility was that the gods preserved it for themselves by their own vigilance. Thus it must be discerned that just as the happiness of man is self-achieved, so the happiness of the gods is self-preserved. However astonishing this doctrine may seem, it is well authenticated. Plutarch, for example, who, though hostile, wrote with texts of Epicurus before him, has this to say: "Freedom from pain along with incorruptibility should have been inherent in the nature of the blissful being, standing in no need of active concern." This manifestly implies that the [Epicurean gods](#) were unable to take their immunity from corruption for granted

but must concern themselves for its perpetuation. The incongruity between this selfish concern for their own bodily security and their indifference to the good of mankind was certain to elicit condemnation from believers in divine providence, and this has not escaped record. Thus the Christian Eusebius quotes his Atticus as saying: "According to Epicurus it's good-bye to providence, in spite of the fact that according to him the gods bring to bear all diligent care for the preservation of their own peculiar blessings.")