

Sunday November 9, 2025 - Zoom Discussion 12:30 PM EST - Epicurus on Good And Evil

Post by "Don" of November 10, 2025 at 5:05 PM

This post grew in the writing, so apologies for the length...

[Quote from DaveT](#)

There is nothing to fear from gods or natural phenomenon, yes.

There is no afterlife of which to be suspicious, yes.

Yes, completely agree.

[Quote from DaveT](#)

And Pleasure is easy to obtain, yes, but it's hard to measure.

I'm not sure what you mean by "hard to measure." I've taken this line to mean - at least in part - that pleasure is obtainable if we're open to it, if we're honest with ourselves. It's important to remember that that specific line is (taking the conjunction and connecting particle μὲν):

τάγαθὸν εὐκτῆτον (*tagathon eukteton*) *The Highest Good is easy to get.*

It's not just day-to-day pleasures that the Tetrpharmakos is referring to. It's *The Good*, The Highest Good, the Goal. And The Good is what we're shooting for IF we're open to it and honest with ourselves. It's the final reason - the end point - for all we do all.

[Quote from DaveT](#)

while Pain can be easily endured, no, I'm not willing to acknowledge that this is a universal truth.

I have problems with this line as well. One part of me interprets it in light of the historical period in which it was written. If you have severe pain, chances are you were not being cured and it would be a (relatively) short time until you died. But I will grant that even Cicero disputes that interpretation.

This line, too, is: τὸ δεινὸν εὐεκκατέρητον (*to deinon euekkartereton*) *The Terrible is easily endured.*

I would posit that here, too, we're talking about Pain as The Bad in a theoretical philosophical concept, not day to day pains, as The Good (tagathon < to + agathon) in the previous line. The podcast has been talking about Cicero does not want to concede that pain is an evil.

But that doesn't alleviate my own concerns for people with chronic pain from fibromyalgia, severe arthritis, chronic migraines, etc. I don't want to read Epicurus as being flippant or dismissive, so this line takes some sitting with. PD4 is problematic in the same way: 4. Continuous pain does not last long in the flesh ; on the contrary, pain, if extreme, is present a very short time, and even that degree of pain which barely outweighs pleasure in the flesh does not last for many days together. Illnesses of long duration even permit of an excess of pleasure over pain in the flesh.

Do people with chronic pain have some pleasures in their life? Can they enjoy some things? Maybe. I am not going to speak for them. So, yes, I can understand your concerns with Tetrpharmakos line 4, PD4, etc..

[Quote from DaveT](#)

With respect, your reference to PD 31 doesn't address my question.

This question? (*italics*)

[Quote from DaveT](#)

I start to remember that when we do act for our own good, whether judged by pleasure, or by adhering to Virtues, there sometimes are unintended bad or evil consequences for others. And that leaves me wondering *how to reconcile both Stoic and Epicurean real world consequences of individual as well as communal actions.*

Maybe I don't understand what you're asking. Apologies. I take it that you're asking "*How do we reconcile Epicurean real world consequences of individual as well as communal actions?*"

Let me come at this by responding to post 13 where you wrote:

[Quote from DaveT](#)

for example: Divorce may be a good for each party, yet it just as easily can be a disaster for the other one. That is either an intended or unintended consequence.

If one person is acting unilaterally for their own self-interest *without respect to the consequences to the other person that could come back to harm their own self-interest*, that doesn't strike me as an Epicurean way of making a decision. Others may disagree, but I would think an Epicurean is going to take all those consequences into consideration. I would also think the Epicurean is going to take into consideration those consequences of actions that may lead to a divorce in the first place and avoid them. Not everyone making decisions is making

decisions within an Epicurean paradigm so I don't think all consequences are the result of Epicurean or Stoic decision-making. Not everyone is using prudence in their decisions; in fact, lots of decisions are taken in the heat of the moment, the exact opposite of any philosophical framework. How the decision is made, prudently or otherwise, is directly related to the kind of consequences that could very well ensue.

[Quote from DaveT](#)

Could it be that a weakness in Epicurus' teaching is that it can't apply to any community larger than the Garden?

I think any community of any size would benefit from its citizens/residents applying Epicurean principles to their lives. Epicurean philosophy is applied by the individual to their own lives. Epicurus has something to say about the social contract, about justice (hence my bringing up [PD31](#) and the other latter ones for that matter), and about how to live in a wider society, but the philosophy is lived by individuals.

Your characterization of "everyone out for themselves" doesn't, from my perspective, describe an Epicurean way of living. In many ways, we can only be responsible for ourselves and our own actions. I feel Epicurean philosophy is a philosophy of personal responsibility, taking into account the facts of life that sometimes things do happen by chance. Again, I don't think a stereotypical Epicurean is going to cheat on their taxes or lie for lying's sake because the Epicurean is going to have that nagging doubt about getting caught. Psychopaths, sociopaths, narcissists are going to always exist and to try to get away with what they can. They don't consider the consequences or don't care about them. That has no reflection on Epicurean philosophy.

I may very well be missing your point, but the fact that some decisions have negative consequences doesn't seem to me to impact the overall living of a life based on trying to apply Epicurean philosophy.