

# Is there a notion of cultivating "sensitivity" in Epicureanism?

**Post by "Root304" of May 27, 2022 at 8:34 PM**

I've been engaging with Epicurean literature at the same time as undergoing psychotherapy and somatic therapy - entertaining the idea of the soul being equated with the material systems of the body - and it's got me wondering if Epicureanism encourages the idea of deepening our understanding and conception of ourselves to refine our sense of pleasure though not at all at the expense of disparaging "normal" everyday pleasures. I've mainly been intrigued with the ideas in Internal Family Systems therapy, where the mind is seen as having a multiplicity of personalities that we engage with in a social way in the therapeutic space (the inner critics, the inner children, ect). The angry inner voices are "entities" we should engage with. Also what has come up for me while doing structure integration and body mapping with Hellerwork. I got a lot of pleasure and a settled mind in doing the work, as well as a sort of moralizing effect on me as once I understood and knew the various dimensions of myself and the delicacy it took to perform the therapy I grew in empathy for the depth of being in other people and other forms of life. So I guess the word that I formulated for this was "sensitivity" in that I am able to sense better and interact these different aspects of my being, and it sort of pulls me more toward "religious naturalist" takes on Epicureanism where I set aside ritual space to interact with these parts of myself. Anyway, just looking for some outside perspectives on these ideas.

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**Post by "Cassius" of May 27, 2022 at 8:59 PM**

Most of that is beyond my experience to comment on, but it does call to mind this passage in the biography of Epicurus, which indicates to me that he would be interested in the direction you are studying. Hopefully others who are familiar with some of those therapies will have more helpful comment.

## Epicurean ethics

But as to the conduct of life, what we ought to avoid and what to choose, he writes as follows. Before quoting his words, however, let me go into the views of Epicurus himself and his school concerning the wise man.

There are three motives to injurious acts among men—hatred, envy, and contempt; and these the wise man overcomes by reason. Moreover, he who has once become wise never more assumes the opposite habit, not even in semblance, if he can help it. He will be more susceptible of emotion than other men: that will be no hindrance to his wisdom. However, not every bodily constitution nor every nationality would permit a man to become wise.

Even on the rack the wise man is happy. He alone will feel gratitude towards friends, present and absent alike, and show it by word and deed. When on the rack, however, he will give vent to cries and groans. As regards women he will submit to the restrictions imposed by the law, as Diogenes says in his epitome of Epicurus' ethical doctrines. Nor will he punish his servants; rather he will pity them and make allowance on occasion for those who are of good character.

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### Post by “Kalosyni” of May 27, 2022 at 10:02 PM

Some thoughts regarding the question: "Is there a notion of cultivating "sensitivity" in Epicureanism".

I would say that for myself, I am cultivating the ability to be aware and to reason regarding the nature of pleasure and pain in my body and mind. This would be based on several of the Principle Doctrines.

PD8 -"No pleasure is bad in itself; but the means of paying for some pleasures bring with them disturbances many times greater than the pleasures themselves."

[PD29](#) -"Among desires, some are natural and necessary, some are natural and unnecessary, and some are unnatural and unnecessary (arising instead from groundless opinion).

#### [Quote from Root304](#)

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I am not familiar with this therapy, nor the others you mention.

You might like to look into the writings of Philodemus "On Anger". I haven't studied it, but [Don](#) has, and could point to threads or material to read.

Some further thoughts -- Modern therapy is very different than Epicureanism, and according to this [Wikipedia article on psychotherapy, is thought to have begun in 1879](#). And now there are many new therapies, which may not be "evidence based". I hold a materialist and scientific understanding of the world, and so personally I would avoid any therapy which is not scientifically tested. Here is a website [explaining evidence based therapy](#).

#### [Quote from Root304](#)

I got a lot of pleasure and a settled mind in doing the work,

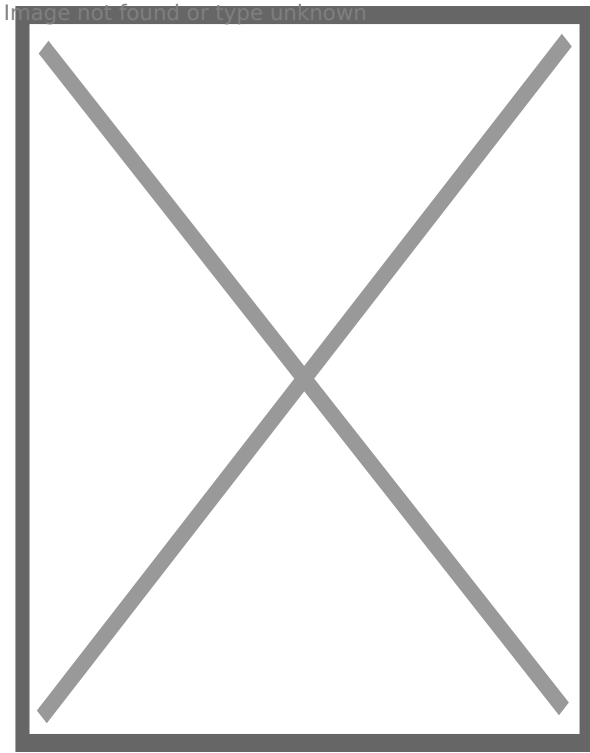
That sounds great! So if you find it is helpful and leads to more enjoyment (and less pain) that sounds like it is good for you. We each find pleasure in many different ways. Others here on the forum have other avenues in which they seek pleasure. Life really presents a "smorgasbord" of pleasure, we just need to open up to it. 😊

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### **Post by “Don” of May 27, 2022 at 10:09 PM**

@Root304 , I'll admit I was unfamiliar with the topics you mentioned. At the risk of simplifying things, for myself and others, here are relevant Wikipedia articles:

[Internal Family Systems Model - Wikipedia](#)



[Somatics - Wikipedia](#)

[en.wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org)

Please feel free to tell me if these are off the mark!

My sense is that anything that truly and honestly makes us more aware of our bodies, our reactions to stimuli, and our feelings of pleasure and pain will make us more able to apply the faculty of choice and rejection. That's a good thing. I get the impression that we all try to lie to ourselves and try to make ourselves believe and/or behave in ways counter to our well-being (eudaimonia) all too often. That's what I believe one of the benefits of the practice of frank speech and correction in the ancient Epicurean community was. You may fool yourself, but you can't necessarily fool your friends or your teacher. You have to be open to correction and direction. Being able to do this yourself would be a boon.

I look forward to hearing more and hope this was helpful.

PS. This is also where the work of Dr. Lisa Feldman Barrett and others comes in, too. Cultivating our sense of interoception allows us to listen closer to our body's signals. I'd suggest checking out her books as well.

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**Post by "Root304" of May 27, 2022 at 10:55 PM**

### [Quote from Don](#)

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Ahhh... 😊 You've expressed precisely what I was reaching for. Marvelously put! \*chef's kiss\*

And also thanks for posting the wikipedia articles! And I'll have to check out Dr. Lisa Feldman Barrett!