

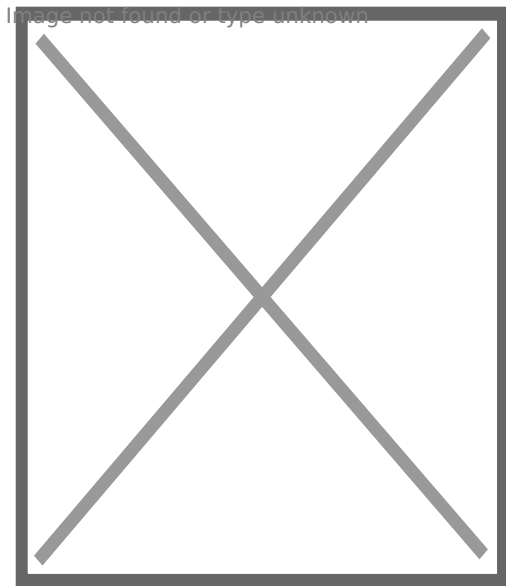
# Response to Pain; Positive Thinking ? Comparision with Cynics and (modern) Stoics

Post by “Matteng” of August 23, 2022 at 5:05 AM

Hi,

In the last time I am interested in the subject of Feeling and Emotions and the differences between the practical philosophies and the Epicurean approach.

What do you think of this article explaining and comparing the Cynics, Stoics and Epicurean attitude to that ?



[The Dispassionate Life by Margaret Graver](#)

This talk was given at Stoicon in Toronto on October 14, 2017. The topic of the conference was “Stoicism in the Workplace.” I would like to thank Don...  
modernstoicism.com

It sounds that Epicureans don't look Pain in the face, like a form of positiv thinking.

My points: First you should do something to change painfull situations (and question the underlying belief and the hedonic calculus). If that is not possible than cognitive methods could help, like memorizing pleasure or to change the attention.

The Stoics method sounds good in the first place to change the belief or value of external things / detachment.

But is devalueing really good ?

The information about value is necessary in life I think and in the end it is like with the Cynics, I feel no affection for example for friends, family, society or to my body (ills) or helpful things (necessary and natural externals) and so feel no pain when loosing it.

But that´s manipulating the signals from nature (and coginitive intuition). So the Stoic Justice is a contradiction or ? To love humanity, friends and so on but don´t value it and get detached.

And that not for pleasure, ataraxia or eudaimonia or a better society (because than virtue would be instrumental for them) but only to value virtue in itself 🤔

So they only value their habit and virtue and values ; in which they value only their virtue ?

So they value nothing ? 🤔

It´s like the buddhist saying: "What distinguishes a dead from an enlightened one ? The enlightened one is warm...."

(I was on a buddhist path, but it´s not my goal in life to become a warm corpse 😊 )

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## Post by "Cassius" of August 23, 2022 at 6:12 AM

You are saying a lot there of which I think I will defer for moment to others to comment on, and I have not read the article, but:

The idea of "detachment" is about as negative and destructive idea toward human life as any I can imagine. Sort of life what was said in the ancient world about the Christians - if you hate this life so much why don't you end yours?

This is where Nietzsche's ""fraud of words"" passage is so directly on point. The Stoics do not want to "follow" Nature - they want to assert their own superiority over nature and tell nature what to do - what to value. And that is indeed well described as "fraud."

Beyond Good And Evil, (Gutenberg edition, translated by Helen Zimmern) Chapter 1, section 9

You desire to LIVE "according to Nature"? Oh, you noble Stoics, what fraud of words! Imagine to yourselves a being like Nature, boundlessly extravagant, boundlessly indifferent, without purpose or consideration, without pity or justice, at once fruitful and barren and uncertain: imagine to yourselves INDIFFERENCE as a power—how COULD you live in accordance with such

indifference? To live—is not that just endeavouring to be otherwise than this Nature? Is not living valuing, preferring, being unjust, being limited, endeavouring to be different? And granted that your imperative, “living according to Nature,” means actually the same as “living according to life”—how could you do DIFFERENTLY? Why should you make a principle out of what you yourselves are, and must be? In reality, however, it is quite otherwise with you: while you pretend to read with rapture the canon of your law in Nature, you want something quite the contrary, you extraordinary stage-players and self-deluders! In your pride you wish to dictate your morals and ideals to Nature, to Nature herself, and to incorporate them therein; you insist that it shall be Nature “according to the Stoa,” and would like everything to be made after your own image, as a vast, eternal glorification and generalism of Stoicism! With all your love for truth, you have forced yourselves so long, so persistently, and with such hypnotic rigidity to see Nature FALSELY, that is to say, Stoically, that you are no longer able to see it otherwise—and to crown all, some unfathomable superciliousness gives you the Bedlamite hope that BECAUSE you are able to tyrannize over yourselves—Stoicism is self-tyranny—Nature will also allow herself to be tyrannized over: is not the Stoic a PART of Nature?... But this is an old and everlasting story: what happened in old times with the Stoics still happens today, as soon as ever a philosophy begins to believe in itself. It always creates the world in its own image; it cannot do otherwise; philosophy is this tyrannical impulse itself, the most spiritual Will to Power, the will to “creation of the world,” the will to the causa prima.

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## Post by “Cassius” of August 23, 2022 at 6:24 AM

As I have time to read it, I see some good material:

### Quote

As an initial exercise, here is another set of words to think about. Where are we on these words?

- unmoved apathetic calm
- impassive serene unflappable
- tranquil unfeeling placid
- unsentimental unemotional unruffled

If you are like me and like my students, you can easily identify several of these words as negative words that you would not want to hear applied to yourself. Others are more complimentary; some might even be neutral. But the point of interest here is that if you make the effort to strip away the positive or negative valence of these words, all of them mean pretty much the same thing: they describe a person who doesn't respond

emotionally in situations where many people would.

He is right - those terms DO evoke the same meaning, and that is why I am convinced that "tranquility" or especially the untranslated "ataraxia\*" and "aponia" are NOT the ultimate descriptions of the Epicurean goal and must be used with great caution: the correct word is "Pleasure."

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### Post by "Cassius" of August 23, 2022 at 6:28 AM

More good material: This Crantor was a smart guy:

Quote

philosopher by the name of Crantor, put the case *against* the dispassionate life in terms we can all recognize. Crantor was writing around 300 B.C., in a consolatory essay—that is, a kind of open letter addressed to someone recently bereaved, offering them the comforts of philosophy. Crantor’s consolation must have said, as most of these pieces do, “it’s OK to cry for a while, anyone would”—but then he turns philosopher and adds,

I cannot by any means agree with those who extol some kind of impassivity (*apatheia*). Such a thing is neither possible nor beneficial. I do not wish to be ill, but if I am, and if some part of my body is to be cut open or even amputated, let me feel it. This absence of pain comes at a high price: it means being numb in body, and in mind scarcely human. — Crantor, quoted by Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* 3.10

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### Post by "Cassius" of August 23, 2022 at 6:38 AM

I disagree with this:

Quote

Rather than confronting painful thoughts in an attempt to desensitize oneself, Epicurus favors turning the mind away from them and focusing on the pleasurable elements of our experience.

Yes Epicurus does not advocate desensitization, but No Epicurus does not advocate "turning the mind away from" painful thoughts as if he advocates running from them. He first advocates fixing the problem wherever possible (the purpose of the physics and epistemology) and only where fixing is not possible does he point to the balance of pleasure still being worth the pain that is being endured (as on his last days).

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 23, 2022 at 6:44 AM**

So yep, the article defends what Crantor and I would both say is inhuman lack of emotion:

#### Quote

And for Stoics, that is exactly the problem with the emotions as we know them. Emotions are a way of registering value, but the values they express are mistaken values. They react to external objects as if they were the things that really matter in life, when in fact only features of our own character or conduct are truly good or bad for a person. For that reason, the wise human being of Stoic theory does not ever experience emotions in relation to external objects. He or she is impassive, *apathēs*, toward them.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 23, 2022 at 6:46 AM**

More inhumanity:

#### Quote

Could we not recoil from vice and long for virtue, like the young Alcibiades touched by Socrates' teachings? In the ancient texts, the answer to this question seems to be no. In the few passages I've been able to find where that interesting door is opened a crack, it's immediately shut again. The Stoics reasoned, perhaps, that morally imperfect people don't really have access to the attitudes and feelings of wisdom. Even our best ideas and efforts are still susceptible to error. The joys and sorrows of our present state must be quite different from what a perfect mind would experience.

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## Post by “Cassius” of August 23, 2022 at 6:48 AM

I would hate to be an advocate of a philosophy that constantly needs fundamental "expanding"

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Quote

### Expanding the Ancient View

But this is a place where the modern Stoic might reasonably seek to modify the ancient position. In the last chapter of *Stoicism and Emotion*, I make the case that a view of the emotions that develops on Stoic lines should give some thought to ordinary people's feelings about virtue and vice. Even if the original Stoics didn't go in this direction, we today can expand our notion of dispassionate living to include non-wise versions of the sage's eupathic responses.

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## Post by “Cassius” of August 23, 2022 at 6:51 AM

Pure Ayn Rand Objectivism / Spockian Vulcanism:

Quote

But after the fact, we can review what our complicated and messy emotions are telling us about our evaluative beliefs. We can also work on our reasoning processes themselves. That, I think, is the real task for modern Stoics: not to eliminate the emotions across the board, not to shield themselves from circumstances that tend to trigger emotions, not to retrain themselves through desensitization or visualization exercises, but to purify the emotions by making them rational.

Quote

**The dispassionate life and the life of reason** We hear a great deal about reason in Stoic studies – and as far as I'm concerned we can hardly hear too much. It's a much needed corrective to what's coming at us from the surrounding culture, where appeals to reason are scarcely to be heard anymore. For Stoics, ancient and modern, reason is the most essential of all our capacities. It's the central fact about human nature and the only thing that can make us happy.

## Post by “Cassius” of August 23, 2022 at 6:55 AM

And as usual, the Stoics try to claim Epicurus through "calmness" and this is the hazard of loose thinking about "tranquility" rather than pleasure.

### Quote

The Stoic version of the dispassionate mind has a certain kinship with the Epicurean approach. We've seen how Epicurus taught his followers to use their powers of scientific reasoning to convince themselves that the objects that most frequently give rise to fear, desire, or are not really anything to worry about. Through disciplined application of rational thought, the Epicurean mind becomes like a calm lake with nothing out there to disturb it. In Stoicism, the language of "indifferents" - a constant refrain in both Seneca and Epictetus - is quite similar, in that it appeals to philosophical reasoning to alter the learner's beliefs about what objects merit the emotional response

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## Post by “Cassius” of August 23, 2022 at 6:58 AM

What? Epicurus dismisses the "majority of emotions"??? This kind of misrepresentation is why I have so little tolerance for Stoicism:

### Quote

In essence, both systems dismiss the majority of emotions as arising from false beliefs that can be corrected. Both also make some allowance for emotions that arise from *true* beliefs, though here there is a difference. Epicurus suggests preserving tranquility by “redirecting” the mind away from sources of distress. The Stoics speak of a wise person who is completely serene in the face of externals, but has a lively affective response to aspects of her own character and behavior, seeing them, correctly, as good and desirable or (potentially) bad and to be avoided. For similar reasons, modern Stoics can find a role for truth-based emotions even among the non wise.

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## Post by “Cassius” of August 23, 2022 at 7:03 AM

His conclusion? Dispassionate living IS happiness:.

#### Quote

..thoughts, perhaps, about being calm and focused on what you're trying to achieve; thoughts about your own abilities and the things you can control; thoughts about fairness, courage, intelligence, and strength. Dispassionate living is all of that; and if the ancient philosophers we've looked at here have it right at all, then it's happiness as well.

This comes awfully close to a denunciation of pleasure and to what amounts to wishing one had never had to endure any pleasure at any cost - and from the Epicurean perspective of pleasure as the goal of life it is as much of a denunciation of "humanity" as any form of eastern religion.

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#### **Post by "Don" of August 23, 2022 at 8:37 AM**

Hmmm. Lots to react to, both in the article and in [Cassius](#)'s response. That'll be for later this evening (I do not know how [Cassius](#) can go from not having read the article to having long, thoughtful passages in a couple hours! That's genuinely impressive!)

My first reaction is that this is a Stoic writing a Stoic perspective for a Stoic audience. That's gonna leave a mark.

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#### **Post by "Godfrey" of August 23, 2022 at 3:55 PM**

##### [Quote from Matteng](#)

It sounds that Epicureans don't look Pain in the face, like a form of positiv thinking.

My points: First you should do something to change painfull situations (and question the underlying belief and the hedonic calculus). If that is not possible than cognitive methods could help, like memorizing pleasure or to change the attention.

This is spot on to me. The EP worldview, from top to bottom, is about understanding and working with reality. Part of that understanding is to get to know your pain, perhaps quite

intimately. Only then can you work toward a deep and lasting pleasure.

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### **Post by “Matteng” of August 23, 2022 at 4:49 PM**

Thanks for the responses.

2 things come now to my mind.

1. There are still wrong prejudices about Epicurean Philosophy floating around (especially in stoic groups)
2. Modern Stoicism tries to become more natural and borrows parts of Epicurean ideas.

For example, that "non-wise" Stoics can feel joy or between the lines you can read that virtue brings good things like tranquility or improves the common good but very fast there comes the statement "virtue is its own reward".

I thought that pleasure was at least a "preferred indifferent" and pain "dispreferred" for them. But now I read that pleasure/pain is complete indifferent for Stoics.

And in their "physics" most modern Stoics give up pantheism, the Stoic god or teleology.

But ok, it's good to find more truthful beliefs, so congratulations 😊

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 23, 2022 at 5:01 PM**

#### [Quote from Don](#)

(I do not know how Cassius can go from not having read the article to having long, thoughtful passages in a couple hours! That's genuinely impressive!)

It's not a talent - you'll eventually do the same thing when you've read several of their articles. Their train of reasoning is remarkably similar from article to article. That's probably one of the main reasons you and I have a different reaction to the "tranquility" word. Not that I am an expert on Stoicism by any means, but you'll see the same argument over and over and over. The stoics try to defend their ancient views by disassociating themselves from anything implying "apathy" or even "indifference" by calling Epicurus to their defense and arguing that

the two schools are essentially the same. I predict with confidence that the more of their articles you read, the more you'll see the pattern.

### [Quote from Matteng](#)

2. Modern Stoicism tries to become more natural and borrows parts of Epicurean ideas.

The Modern Stoics would probably be much better off if they would just drop the "Stoic" history and name and admit that they are an "ultra-passivist" or even a "Buddhist" form of Epicureanism. And that is why the interpretation of Epicurus' views is so controversial. That's exactly what they are trying to allege - that their stoic-lite / buddhist-lite is what Epicurus taught. And in defense of my position I would call to the witness stand the ancient stoics themselves, as they would be the first to denounce the muddying of the goal of life away from "virtue" (and they would also object to the essential "passivism" that the modern stoics are promoting). The ancient stoics may have been hypocrites in what they said they were pursuing, but at least they tried to pursue their goals with energy and vigor and even "hard work."

It almost makes me a little sympathetic to some of the modern stoics. They are trapped in the contradiction that they really don't believe in "virtue" as the ultimate good, yet they cannot come to admit that "pleasure" is the ultimate good. So they are left like wandering shades in the underworld that we've been discussing lately, unable to come to terms with what they really are, because they are aghast at the word "pleasure" and they want to be so much "better" than that.

That Nietzsche "fraud of words" passage I keep quoting is really spot on.

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## **Post by "Don" of August 24, 2022 at 12:20 AM**

Okay, for the sake of curiosity, I'm going to try and pull out some excerpts that intrigued/bothered me in the article. I'm not reading ahead so if I react to something the author clarifies later, I'll admit that. Bear with me if you like. If you're looking for well-crafted, thought-out prose, you won't find it here. I fully realize this post went way too long. Just sayin' All quotes are from there unless otherwise noted:

Quote

This talk was given at Stoicon in Toronto on October 14, 2017. The topic of the conference was "Stoicism in the Workplace."

Right of the bat, I'm expecting a less-than-reliable portrayal of Epicurus and his philosophy. Go on...

#### Quote

- unmoved apathetic calm
- impassive serene unflappable
- tranquil unfeeling placid
- unsentimental unemotional unruffled

If you are like me and like my students, you can easily identify several of these words as negative words that you would not want to hear applied to yourself. Others are more complimentary; some might even be neutral. But the point of interest here is that if you make the effort to strip away the positive or negative valence of these words, all of them mean pretty much the same thing: they describe a person who doesn't respond emotionally in situations where many people would.

Okay, this annoys me and seems to be a strawman argument. There's a reason we have different words in English. Each may be similar but there are shades of meaning that are important. Otherwise, we wouldn't bother with different words! The author's point of "if you make the effort to strip away the positive or negative valence of these words" is counterproductive and disingenuous. They're basically saying "if you make the effort to strip away the definitions of these words and let me substitute my own watered down meaning." By Zeus, I'm not even past the first paragraph.

#### Quote

bringing oneself closer to the dispassionate life

If the author is trying to say Epicureanism is a "dispassionate life," I will not be onboard with that. In fact, Diogenes Laertius relates that "(Epicurean) Sages are greatly affected by the pathē (i.e., more so than other people) but this doesn't hinder their progress to wisdom."

#### Quote

We're going to need some terminology. Our word "emotion" is a class term, it names the category whose members are anger, grief, fear, delight, eagerness, and whatever else we think is of that kind. If we look for equivalent words in Greek as spoken in the fourth century BCE, we find two possibilities. One is pathos, 'a way of being affected';

corresponding to the Latin word affectus. The other is tarachē, ‘a disturbance’, for which the Latin equivalent is perturbatio. I do not intend to make any distinction between these two terms. Some authors favor one or the other, but the meaning is the same, or at least near enough to allow for the comparisons I’ll be making here.

Okay, gritting teeth again. There's a reason there were different words! So, there's a reason that "some authors favor one or the other"! Is the author going to equate apatheia with ataraxia? I can see it coming. Go on...

#### Quote

The same goes for two related words that alternate in the record for the Greek philosophies we’ll be looking at. From pathos was derived the term apatheia, the a-prefix indicating a lack or absence. That one I’ll usually translate “impassivity.” And similarly, the word tarachē gets an a prefix and becomes ataraxia, which I’ll usually translate “non-disturbedness”. Either way, we have a word tied to the idea of a life without emotion, without yet specifying what exactly such a life might be.

AND there it is! I would not define ataraxia as "the idea of a life without emotion"! Isn't joy an emotion? Is the author ruling out feeling joy later on?

#### Quote

Crantor’s consolation must have said, as most of these pieces do, “it’s OK to cry for a while, anyone would”—but then he turns philosopher and adds,

*I cannot by any means agree with those who extol some kind of impassivity (apatheia). Such a thing is neither possible nor beneficial. I do not wish to be ill, but if I am, and if some part of my body is to be cut open or even amputated, let me feel it. This absence of pain comes at a high price: it means being numb in body, and in mind scarcely human. — Crantor, quoted by Cicero, Tusc. Disp. 3.10*

It's actually Tusc. Disp. Book 3.6 not 10. And I'm always skeptical of someone saying "X must have said" when we don't have any access to X. Here's the full context of that citation...

#### [Cicero’s Tusculan Disputations, On the Nature of the Gods, On the Commonwealth](#)

#### Quote from Cicero in Tusculan Disputations 3.6

Crantor, who was one of the most distinguished men that our Academy has ever produced, say this amiss: “I am by no means of their opinion who talk so much in praise of I know not what insensibility, which neither can exist, nor ought to exist”. “I would choose,” says he, “never to be ill; but should I be so, still I should choose to

retain my sensation, whether there was to be an amputation or any other separation of anything from my body. For that insensibility cannot be but at the expense of some unnatural ferocity of mind, or stupor of body."But let us consider whether to talk in this manner be not allowing that we are weak, and yielding to our softness. Notwithstanding, let us be hardy enough, not only to lop off every arm of our miseries, but even to pluck up every fibre of their roots. Yet still something, perhaps, may be left behind, so deep does folly strike its roots: but whatever may be left it will be no more than is necessary. But let us be persuaded of this, that unless the mind be in a sound state, which philosophy alone can effect, there can be no end of our miseries. Wherefore, as we began, let us submit ourselves to it for a cure; we shall be cured if we choose to be. I shall advance something further. I shall not treat of grief alone, though that indeed is the principal thing; but, as I originally proposed, of every perturbation of the mind, as I termed it; disorder, as the Greeks call it: and first, with your leave, I shall treat it in the manner of the Stoics, whose method is to reduce their arguments into a very small space; afterward I shall enlarge more in my own way.

I'll admit I skipped the Cynics section.

Now, the author begins to paint Epicurus with the "emotionless" brush.

#### Quote

The goal of Democritus's ethics was a good state of mind, *euthumia*, defined as "a calm and stable existence, not disturbed by any fear or superstition or any other emotion" (Diogenes Laertius 9.45)

Okay, so *euthumia* was Democritus's *telos* or goal, not Epicurus's. And did not Epicurus call Democritus the *Lerocritus* (the nonsense-monger)? That said I'm curious about the author's citation of Democritus in DL IX.45:

#### Quote from Diogenes Laertius IX.45 on Democritus

[45] All things happen by virtue of necessity, the vortex being the cause of the creation of all things, and this he calls necessity. The end of action is tranquillity, which is not identical with pleasure, as some by a false interpretation have understood, but a state in which the soul continues calm and strong, undisturbed by any fear or superstition or any other emotion. This he calls well-being and many other names. The qualities of things exist merely by convention ; in nature there is nothing but atoms and void space. These, then, are his opinions.

The author makes mention of Epicurus's nautical and water-based metaphors, which I do find interesting. Tell you what, it's getting late. I'm going to hold off commenting on the remainder of the article until tomorrow... Stay tuned.

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## Post by “Cassius” of August 24, 2022 at 5:52 AM

It is very tempting to try to read these ancient Stoics as being against "disturbing" (negative) emotions while at the same time embracing "happy" (positive) emotions, and I think that is what the modern stoics try to imply in general discussion. But the problem is that that's just not true - because the Stoics identified "virtue" as the goal above all else, they included the positive emotions in with the negative, and saw ALL emotions as things to be avoided. I would say what they were promoting was much in the Spock / Vulcan model we are familiar with from the TV show. Spock does not appear to be a caricature, but an accurate representation of what their Stoic goal really was. And to come to terms with that is to ultimately - for most of us - is to reject it. Stoicism = Theistic Vulcanism.

And when we do come to terms with anti-emotion as core to Stoicism and the like, I think that helps us see that the same goal is even more repelling when we dress it up, stand its originator on his head, and try to call it "Epicurean." Even the ancient Stoics in opposing Epicurus did not stoop to that kind of gross misrepresentation. At least in accusing Epicurus of pursuing pleasure to excess and immorally, the ancient Stoics still acknowledged that "pleasure" as the word is commonly understood was his goal.

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## Post by “Don” of August 24, 2022 at 6:36 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Stoicism = Theistic Vulcanism



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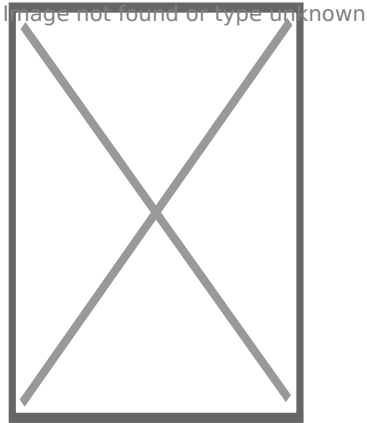
## Post by “Don” of August 24, 2022 at 7:17 AM

I don't want to derail this thread but thought [Cassius](#) might be interested in these:

["Stoicism & Star Trek: Think like Spock - Act like Kirk" by Jen Farren](#)

Stoicism & Star Trek Jen Farren Kirk (left) & Spock (right) The original Star Trek of 1966 was a TV show with big philosophical ideas. The show's creator,...  
modernstoicism.com

[Star Trek's Stoics: The Vulcans | Issue 106 | Philosophy Now](#)



[as Philosophy: Spock as Stoic Sage](#)

It has been suggested that Gene Roddenberry, the creator of the original Star Trek series (TOS), more or less consciously built the equivalent of a...  
link.springer.com

Plus there appear to be a lot more of the like our there!!

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### **Post by “Don” of August 24, 2022 at 11:14 AM**

Here's a review of a book by the article's author on emotions and classical Stoics

[Stoicism and Emotion – Bryn Mawr Classical Review](#)

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### **Post by “Don” of August 24, 2022 at 11:18 AM**

My only goal in those posts is to make sure we're not arguing against a Stoic strawman. Just as we're not keen on people stereotyping or willfully misrepresenting Epicureanism, I think it behooves us to be sure not to do the same to the rivals of the school.

I'll admit I know too little of the classical Stoics. I'm much more familiar with the stereotypes.

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2640-response-to-pain-positive-thinking-comparision-with-cynics-and-modern-stoics/>

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## Post by “Don” of August 24, 2022 at 1:35 PM

### [Quote from Don](#)

Tell you what, it's getting late. I'm going to hold off commenting on the remainder of the article until tomorrow... Stay tuned

I've decided to not respond to the remainder of the article. It seems an exercise in frustration, so I'll decide the pain is not going to lead to more pleasure for me.

What it has inspired in me is a desire to delve into the nautical and aquatic metaphors and connotations in the Epicurean texts. The word that sealed that for me is γαλήνη. Stay tuned for a new thread at some point.