

How Does An Epicurean Feeling Overwhelmed Or Depressed Overcome That Feeling?

Post by “Pacatus” of June 13, 2023 at 3:40 PM

[EDIT FROM CASSIUS: I am copying this post into a new thread to address the topic now listed as the thread title: "How Does An Epicurean Feeling Overwhelmed Or Depressed Overcome That Feeling?" The first three posts are from [another thread entitled "Does the Philosophy Change You?"](#) but these posts set up the topic very nicely. We're not talking here about clinical depression or generalized anxiety but the normal ups and downs of everyday life, when the obstacles (real and not imagined) seem overwhelming. Maybe at some point we can set up a wiki-like summary - or I can just use this first post in that way - to bring together the major categories of responses, such as:

- *Get back to / study Nature;*
- *Consult your friends for support;*

We also need something to the effect that we're not talking "Pleasure" in the abstract as an antidote to pain, but the real feelings of pleasure that are particular to the individual concerned, such that we focus on seeking out things that are pleasurable to person feeling overwhelmed.

end of edit]

I was raised in a milieu of Christian/Stoical/Kantian “virtue moralism” that I liken to a Pavlovian programming that leaves an array of reactive triggers in your subconscious – that can grab you decades later (at least for me). All of that was in continual struggle with my inherent tendency toward hedonism (as opposed, here, to asceticism); and an unchecked, rebellious hedonism led to borderline addictive tendencies.

Unfortunately, all of the philosophical/spiritual avenues that I explored and studied seemed arrayed on the side of that latent moralistic programming. And so, life remained a struggle most days, well beyond my midlife years – even with help from friends and a wise therapist. (I am nothing if not stubborn! 😡😭)

Epicurus has finally given me some ease in all that – with a rational therapy that goes beyond mere intellectual philosophy (in the modern academic sense) and offers the practical means for a healthier hedonism (without the old guilt). 1/

I still struggle: those subconscious triggers still rear their hooded heads. But the old reactions are short-lived. Life is easier, serenity is more readily available on a daily basis.

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1/: I am reminded, in my random brain, of some lines by Rumi:

“As always, we wake anxious and afraid.

“Don’t go into the library!

“Take down your lute and play ...”

Post by “Little Rocker” of June 13, 2023 at 6:45 PM

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

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Yeah, in my experience it never goes away....it just gets muffled.

Post by “Eoghan Gardiner” of June 14, 2023 at 3:58 AM

[Quote from Little Rocker](#)

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

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Yep same for me, at times it becomes overwhelming.

Post by "Cassius" of June 14, 2023 at 6:19 AM

Seems appropriate on the topic that it's a constant struggle -

Lucretius 6 / 43 (Munro)

[I have willed at the same time] to explain all the other things which mortals observe to go on upon earth and in heaven, when often they are in anxious suspense of mind, and which abase their souls with fear of the gods and weigh and press them down to earth, because ignorance of the causes constrains them to submit things to the empire of the gods and to make over to them the kingdom. For they who have been rightly taught that the gods lead a life without care, if nevertheless they wonder on what plan all things can be carried on, above all in regard to those things which are seen overhead in the ethereal borders, are borne back again into their old religious scruples and take unto themselves hard taskmasters, whom they poor wretches believe to be almighty, not knowing what can, what cannot be, in short on what principle each thing has its powers defined, its deep set boundary mark; and therefore they are led all the farther astray by blind reason.

[68] Now unless you drive from your mind with loathing all these things, and banish far from you all belief in things degrading to the gods and inconsistent with their peace, then often will the holy deities of the gods, having their majesty lessened by you, do you hurt; not that the supreme power of the gods can be so outraged that in their wrath they shall resolve to exact sharp vengeance, but because you will fancy to yourself that they, though they enjoy quiet and calm peace, do roll great billows of wrath; nor will you approach the sanctuaries of the gods with a calm breast, nor will you be able with tranquil peace of mind to take in those idols which are carried from their holy body into the minds of men as heralds of their divine form. And what kind of life follows after this, may be conceived.

Post by "Cassius" of June 14, 2023 at 9:10 AM

You know this topic - the feeling of getting overwhelmed and falling back into "the norm" is a problem that deserves lots of attention.

Seems pretty clear that at the very least Epicurus was advising:

- "getting back to nature" or "studying nature" as a way to build confidence,

[PD12](#). A man cannot dispel his fear about the most important matters if he does not know what is the nature of the universe, but suspects the truth of some mythical story. So that, without

natural science, it is not possible to attain our pleasures unalloyed.

But also:

- surrounding yourself with like-minded friends who can help talk through and in other ways assist in bad times.

Lots of references to that:

[PD27](#). Of all the things which wisdom acquires to produce the blessedness of the complete life, far the greatest is the possession of friendship.

[PD28](#). The same knowledge that makes one confident that nothing dreadful is eternal or long-lasting also recognizes, in the face of these limited evils, the security afforded by friendship.

Seems as true today as ever that while we can do a lot "on our own" in terms of studying nature, in the end living the best life possible is a "team sport" that requires constant reinforcement both in ourselves and through friends.

Hopefully we can help a little with both here with this forum.

Post by “Godfrey” of June 14, 2023 at 3:20 PM

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

We also need something to the effect that we're not talking "Pleasure" in the abstract as an antidote to pain, but the real feelings of pleasure that are particular to the individual concerned, such that we focus on seeking out things that are pleasurable to person feeling overwhelmed.

Enjoy tiny bites of easily obtained pleasure. Even if they're only for a minute or two; gradually build from there. Just a chance to enjoy a moment of respite.

Remember as often as possible that pleasure and pain are the guides, and think about what small (or large) things you can do differently to reduce your pain of overwhelm and increase your pleasure. Understand that working in this way will improve your experience, as well as that of those around you.

Also understand that duty is subservient to pleasure, not the other way around. This may be the most difficult as well as the most important.

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3120-how-does-an-epicurean-feeling-overwhelmed-or-depressed-overcome-that-feeling/>

Post by “TauPhi” of June 14, 2023 at 6:44 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Also understand that duty is subservient to pleasure, not the other way around. This may be the most difficult as well as the most important.

[Godfrey](#) This has to be one of my favourite passages I came across here since I've joined the forum. In the Western World we're all collectively spoon-fed the importance of duty pretty much since day one. Breaking this indoctrination in favour of pleasure would take a gargantuan effort. Personally, I'd probably need an imaginary friend the likes of Tyler Durden from 'Fight Club' if I truly wanted to succeed.

Anyway, if I'm ever in charge of preparing 25th century anniversary album of [Principal Doctrines](#), I'm putting your thought on second LP with outtakes and I'm making it the single to promote the whole thing. I really enjoyed that thought. Thanks for sharing.

Post by “Godfrey” of June 14, 2023 at 9:08 PM

Thanks for that [TauPhi](#) ! Although there might be a more compassionate imaginary friend than Tyler Durden... 😊