

# **Being content in your situation or taking a risk for greater pleasure.**

**Post by “Eoghan Gardiner” of June 15, 2023 at 2:59 PM**

Ultimately this philosophy doesn't prescribe anything we do, yet we must act in order to live pleasurable we are radically free from destiny to see happiness in pleasure. Epicureanism is unfortunately but less so lately marked by an idea of being ascetic and perhaps not taking risks I think Epicurus and his philosophy and Dr Emily's new book challenge that view.

Then the tension arrives, I am generally happy right now my friends but I know I could take a big risk which could bring massive pleasure. Let's say it was entering a relationship well I am guessing we have all known the absolute joy of intimacy, sex but the heart break of the breakup is very painful.

We certainly shouldn't take risks that are likely going to be a failure (put all life savings on red) but also we can't just try live like cowards who allow life happen to them instead of act using our faculties, what do you think?

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**Post by “Cassius” of June 15, 2023 at 3:38 PM**

I think that one of the worst things that can happen to someone is to arrive at the end of life and have to look back and regret that they did not use their best efforts to try to achieve the pleasures that could likely have been obtained at reasonable cost and with reasonable expectation of success. Lot's of good poetic lines that reinforce that sentiment.

You want to be able to say along with Vatican Saying 47 Bailey: “I have anticipated thee, Fortune, and entrenched myself against all thy secret attacks. And I will not give myself up as captive to thee or to any other circumstance; but when it is time for me to go, spitting contempt on life and on those who vainly cling to it, I will leave life crying aloud a glorious triumph-song that I have lived well.”

There aren't any guarantees of success when you try something, but 100% of the attempts you never make are going to fail.

## **Post by “Godfrey” of June 15, 2023 at 9:42 PM**

The biggest risk I ever took in my working life was to leave a very stable job, in which I was miserable, for a life with zero prospects. I was married, with two small children at the time. It took me two years to take action and leave, and after a few months of scraping by I came into an opportunity which forever changed my life, and my family's lives, for the better.

Relationships are an interesting example. Even in a perfect relationship you'll get your heart broken. It's morbid, but you're both going to die and probably not at the same time. But think of the potential for joy in the relationship compared to the grief. Another illustration is to imagine getting a pet: odds are that you'll outlive the pet, and it will break your heart. But would you trade all of the joy, comfort and love to avoid the pain of loss?

This hints at "hedonic calculus", a phrase with which I'm very uncomfortable. Any choice or avoidance is, in the end, based on the faculty of the Feelings and not on any sort of mathematics. So the work is to really search your feelings (and your preconceptions), both positive (pleasure) and negative (pain). Then remind yourself that there's no neutral state, and continue to experience your feelings.

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## **Post by “Kalosyni” of May 21, 2024 at 10:10 AM**

Something that was said recently in a Zoom meeting has me thinking again about "risk-taking", as well as this post [here in another thread](#).

There are activities that come with greater risks, for example riding a motorcycle - here are some statistics:

"The chances of a fatality in a motorcycle accident are approximately 30 times higher than in a car. Motorcycle accidents have a staggering 80% injury or death rate, while car accidents remain around 20%."

"According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, approximately 236 motorcycle crashes result in injuries every day in the United States. In general, the odds of getting into a motorcycle accident are 1 in 100."

Pondering the Hedonic Calculus or prioritizing "smart choices" would lead one to choose less risky activities. As far as preventing an early death, it is really all about using common sense. And if you completely understand that you only have one life to live, then you will be already be increasing the number of prudent pleasures that you are enjoying, so that you will not need to

take up any new risky physical activities, because your life will be full of good stuff and fun stuff.

[Quote from Eoghan Gardiner](#)

We certainly shouldn't take risks that are likely going to be a failure

If the failure is losing a lot of money, then that wouldn't be a good idea.

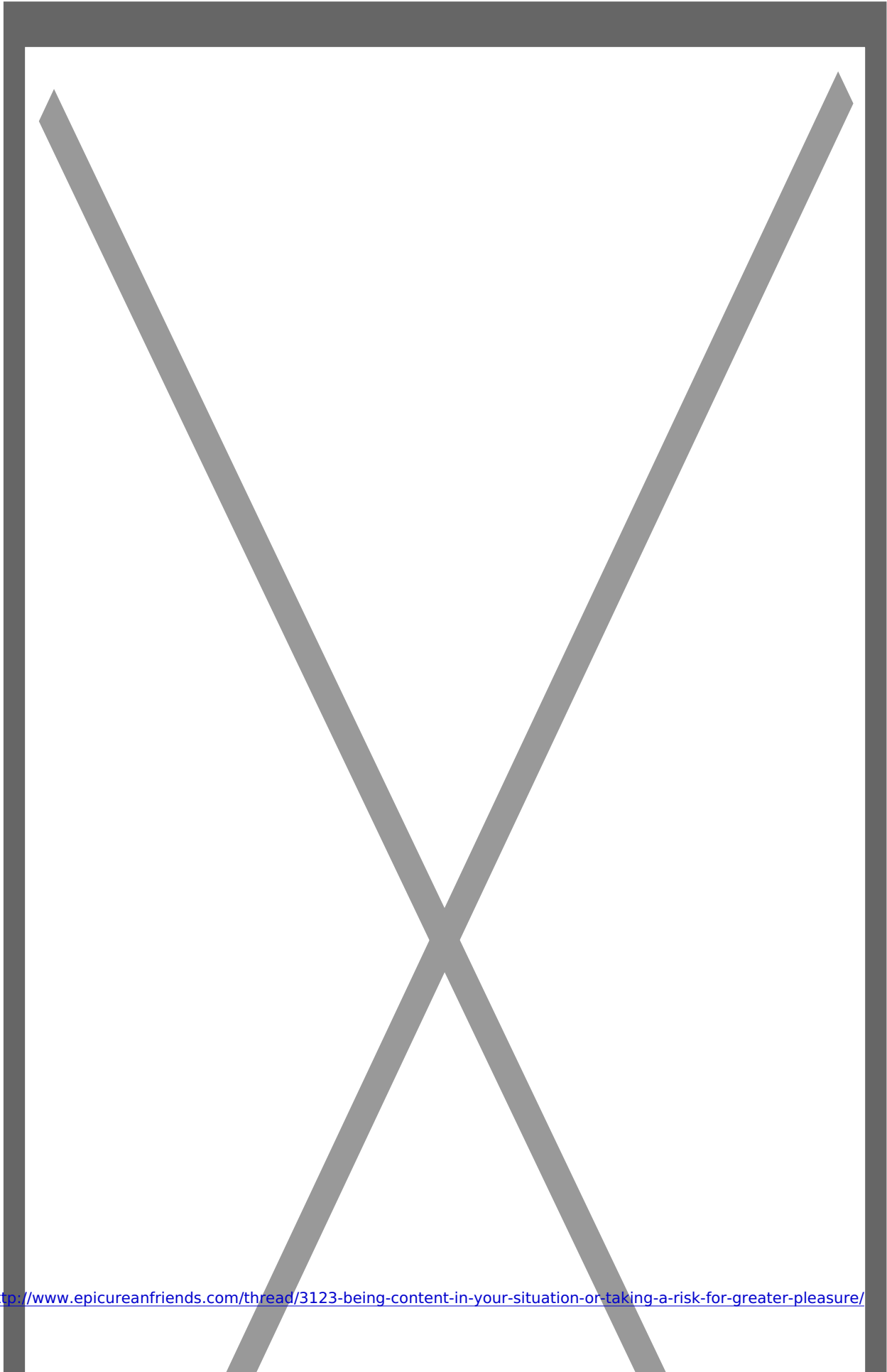
But this does have me wondering...if the failure is in the mental realm of the mind, such that it doesn't affect the body, but only the mind could be affected by the thought "I tried but I failed" then seems like the risk of failure shouldn't be feared, and because you know that you can then just move on to something else.

[Quote from Eoghan Gardiner](#)

Let's say it was entering a relationship well I am guessing we have all known the absolute joy of intimacy, sex but the heart break of the breakup is very painful.

Here is something very good for dealing with fear of heartbreak:

Image not found or type unknown



## [Overcoming the Fear of Heartbreak — Marie Thouin, PhD](#)

□ More than a few of my clients say that they are looking for a magical connection. But saying YES to a magical love life implies taking a big risk:...

[www.loveinsight-dating.com](http://www.loveinsight-dating.com)

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### Post by “Cassius” of May 21, 2024 at 10:41 AM

#### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Pondering the Hedonic Calculus or prioritizing "smart choices" would lead one to choose less risky activities.

I think as stated that's overbroad. Risk is only one aspect of the equation, and the major (and really only elements ultimately in play) are the pleasure and pain that result - the question is your prediction as to each and is not limited to chance of failure.

As Godfrey illustrated in post 3 above, sometimes the biggest improvements in life come through the greatest risk. The problem is that no one can make that risk/reward decision for you but yourself, in part because only you can factor in the pain that will come from thinking "you didn't even try" when you get to the end of your life and realize that you have no further options forward.

Certainly everyone has different tolerances for risk and there's no single right or wrong answer, but to adopt a general rule to \*always\* choose the less risky alternative would almost certainly lead to huge regret in the end.

We have at least one clear example of Epicurus noting this himself, and I would say that he would apply the same rule across the board with all aspects of the context needing to be considered all the time:

VS28. We must not approve either those who are always ready for friendship, or those who hang back, but for friendship's sake **we must run risks.**

This is a very important point because I think we see a large number of people who otherwise listen to Epicurus's suggestions think that he is always telling them to flee from ALL pain and ALL risk ALL the time - which I think is perversely wrong in the big Epicurean picture. The \*only\* way to succeed in a goal stated that way is to choose death.

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

But this does have me wondering...if the failure is in the mental realm of the mind, such that it doesn't affect the body, but only the mind could be affected by the thought "I tried but I failed" then seems like the risk of failure shouldn't be feared, and because you know that you can then just move on to something else.

But you CAN'T always move on to something else, and that's the point of why it is so important to emphasize that death leads to nothingness. You generally don't know how much more time you have to live, but one thing you know for certain is that once passed you never get that particular moment back again. And you add that to the observation that mental pain and pleasure are often more significant, because the mind is aware of the past, present, and future, while the body is aware only of the present.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of May 21, 2024 at 1:24 PM**

To expand on this: "You generally don't know how much more time you have to live, but one thing you know for certain is that once passed you never get that particular moment back again."

I don't have a suggested resolution to this, but to me this points the opposite way from nihilism, which strikes me as the worst enemy, at least for us today. I don't get the idea that the ancient Greeks or Romans were plagued by nihilism like we are today, so maybe that's an example that there really are changes in thought patterns over time, as in some recent discussions we're having. (Or maybe we can just chalk it up to that German word "Zeitgeist.")

If every moment you are alive you are focused on how short life is and how important it should be to you to make the most of your time, then you don't drift through life and inevitably run into the regret that you wish you had done more with your time.

That's pretty much why I have so little sympathy with a flat "me-oh-my-i-am-satisfied-with-what-i-have" approach.

Maybe you should be satisfied with your life, because you understand how the world works and you understand that variation, while it may be desirable, is not necessary in order to be able to say that you have experienced the "greatest" pleasure / "best life" possible.

But maybe you shouldn't be satisfied with your life if you've drifted from one false idea to another, exposing yourself to totally unnecessary pains and forgoing easily possible pleasures, and never really grasped what life is all about.

I think Epicurus' comments about satisfaction have to be taken in that context, such as:

*VS68. Nothing is sufficient for him to whom what is sufficient seems too little.*

That "*what is sufficient*" shouldn't be read to mean that "whatever you have is sufficient," but that it's important to think about what really is sufficient and target your plans for pleasure based on your circumstances. The same with:

*VS35. We must not spoil the enjoyment of the blessings we have by pining for those we have not, but rather reflect that these too are among the things desirable.*

That doesn't mean that you should be happy no matter what your current circumstances are, but that it's likely that during the ups and downs of life you have in fact achieved many things that you always wanted but never thought possible.

But even that isn't a blanket endorsement of the status quo. Simply "being satisfied for the sake of being satisfied" sounds like an awfully Platonic or even Stoic reading of Epicurean philosophy to me. Feeling satisfied is certainly a type of pleasure, but it's far from the only type of pleasure. I would reject the idea that "satisfaction" is a complete and correct statement of the goal for the same reason I would reject "tranquility" as a complete and correct statement of the goal. Epicurus and his successors spent hundreds of years debating the precise way to articulate the goal, and it seems to me there's a very good reason that they settled on "pleasure" as the best single word statement, rather than on some more narrow subset of pleasure.

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### **Post by “Eoghan Gardiner” of May 22, 2024 at 11:09 AM**

I am now of the opinion of it's better to take risks, if you fail it sucks but you can always try again at something else and if you succeed it feels great!

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### **Post by “Cassius” of May 22, 2024 at 12:22 PM**

Well at the hazard of sounding pessimistic I would say that you can't \*always\* try again, if things go badly enough, but at the very least you won't be in the position of having to say to yourself "I didn't even try" and if the activity involved is important enough to you, I would think having to say to yourself "I didn't even try" would be the worst possible outcome.

I would place that right up there with the depth of error involved in wishing one had never been born.

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### Post by “Don” of May 22, 2024 at 1:31 PM

68. Nothing is enough to one for whom enough is very little.

I've always taken this one to simply mean "Don't go through life consistently dissatisfied with your life. Enjoy what you have!" I read this along with 35. "Don't ruin the things you have by wanting what you don't have, but realize that they too are things you once did wish for."

This one is nice simple Greek, too.

οὐδὲν ἱκανὸν ἢ ὀλίγον τὸ ἱκανόν.

ἱκανὸν "sufficient, adequate, enough, satisfactory"

[https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...04.0057:entry=i\(kano/s](https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...04.0057:entry=i(kano/s)

ὀλίγον (where we get oligarchy = "rule by the few"

Of small amount: few, little

Of small size: little, small

Of small degree: slight

[https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...04.0057:entry=o\)li/gos](https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...04.0057:entry=o)li/gos)

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### Post by “Godfrey” of May 22, 2024 at 1:58 PM

Quote from Cassius

but at the very least you won't be in the position of having to say to yourself "I didn't even try" and if the activity involved is important enough to you

Somewhere I read that this is one of the common deathbed regrets. The key being "if the activity involved is important enough to you."

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### Post by "Cassius" of May 22, 2024 at 4:09 PM

Godfrey I think that's the most important point.

To me the word "satisfaction" is much too ambiguous of abstraction to be of much help. I can much more identify with the attitude of Vatican Saying 47, which I find much more concrete. I want to be able to say at all times, and under any circumstances, no matter what may happen to me, that *when it is time for me to go, spitting contempt on life and on those who vainly cling to it, I will leave life crying aloud a glorious triumph-song that I have lived well.*

VS47. Bailey: "I have anticipated thee, Fortune, and entrenched myself against all thy secret attacks. And I will not give myself up as captive to thee or to any other circumstance; but when it is time for me to go, spitting contempt on life and on those who vainly cling to it, I will leave life crying aloud a glorious triumph-song that I have lived well."

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### Post by "Don" of May 22, 2024 at 7:44 PM

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

when it is time for me to go, spitting contempt on life and on those who vainly cling to it, I will leave life crying aloud a glorious triumph-song that I have lived well.

That's a good one. I have always interpreted this as being indicative of not clinging to life at the end. There's palliative care at the end of life; and there's "keep me alive at all costs" (literally and figuratively). If I have (decades and decades in the future 😊) a terminal diagnosis from a disease, I hope I can do what's feasible; then, at some point, help me with the pain and go out on my own terms... Knowing I lived well.

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## Post by “Godfrey” of May 22, 2024 at 7:57 PM

Amen! By Zeus 🙏

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## Post by “Don” of May 23, 2024 at 6:48 AM

Always the killjoy here at the forum 😊 ... I just made a post on the VS47 thread that the word "triumph-song" is not in the original manuscript... that's a "correction" by Usener. Feel free to continue the conversation over there:

Thread

[VS47 - Source in Vat.gr.1950 and elsewhere](#)

This saying is attributed to Metrodorus.

Here is the manuscript of VS47

[epicureanfriends.com/wcf/attachment/4774/](http://epicureanfriends.com/wcf/attachment/4774/)

(Source: [Vat.gr.1950, part 2, 403verso](#))

And here is the text in [Metrodori Epicurei Fragmenta collegit scriptoris incerti Epicurei Commentarium moralem, subiecit Alfredus Koerte](#) (p.561)

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That famous word "triumph-song" does not appear in the manuscript! It is a "correction" by Usener, clearly shown in the manuscript itself and in Note (5) in...



Don

May 23, 2024 at 6:46 AM

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## Post by “Cassius” of May 23, 2024 at 8:40 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

Always the killjoy here at the forum 😊 ...

No need to consider anyone who is committed to accuracy to be a killjoy - we need to be committed to accuracy above all if we are ever going to understand this stuff!

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**Post by “Eikadistes” of May 23, 2024 at 8:48 AM**

**"And [the sage] thinks it better to be unlucky in a rational way than lucky in a senseless way; for it is better for a good decision not to turn out right in action than for a bad decision to turn out right because of chance."** (Epicurus, *Epistle to Menoikeus* 134-135)

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**Post by “Eoghan Gardiner” of May 23, 2024 at 3:16 PM**

Yeah if something is important, and you don't even try you may as well count it as a failure and the pain of regret is probably a lot worse than the pain of failure on the deathbed.

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**Post by “Don” of May 25, 2024 at 9:28 AM**

[Quote from Don](#)

Always the killjoy here at the forum 😊 ... I just made a post on the VS47 thread that the word "triumph-song" is not in the original manuscript... that's a "correction" by Usener. Feel free to continue the conversation over there:

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Don

May 23, 2024 at 6:46 AM

I'll admit I feel bad I made [Little Rocker](#) sad (see emoticons). In the end, I agree with [Cassius](#) about the need for accuracy. When we have access to the manuscripts themselves - the same ones examined by scholars of the past and present - we don't have to just accept the "brilliant emendations" they give. Trying to get to an accurate transcription and reconstruction of texts is one thing. Being clever and trying to outsmart or "correct" an ancient scribe is another, in my opinion.

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### Post by "Cassius" of May 25, 2024 at 12:19 PM

Well the reason it may have sounded good to Usener (and LittleRocker and others) is that it does fit the upbeat mood that I think we agree the Epicureans were trying to capture. The truth about death being nothing to us is not a downer but the ultimate in liberation, and one way we can cheer up LittleRocker and others is to emphasize that we understand the point by making it clear that even if the line *\*didn't\** end that way, it *\*could\** have ended that way, and maybe even if Metrodorus or whoever wrote it had thought about the allusion, they *\*would\** have ended it that way! 😊

## Post by “Don” of May 25, 2024 at 2:29 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

even if the line \*didn't\* end that way, it \*could\* have ended that way

And I'm more than fine with that! It's a nice use of classical themes and allusions. Coming up with new metaphors and sayings would be a fine exercise!

I just think it's disingenuous to pass off one's "brilliant emendation" as the actual ancient text.

Usener's "correction" appears to have really stuck in my craw.

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## Post by “Little Rocker” of May 26, 2024 at 2:56 PM

Fret not, [Don](#) , my sad emoji was in jest. I'm just over here humming my favorite triumph-song, "Eye of the Tiger."

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## Post by “Don” of May 26, 2024 at 3:53 PM

### [Quote from Little Rocker](#)

Fret not, [Don](#) , my sad emoji was in jest. I'm just over here humming my favorite triumph-song, "Eye of the Tiger."

I need to stop taking things so literally! 😏

And 👍👍 on your choice of "triumph-song"!

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## Post by “Pacatus” of May 26, 2024 at 5:18 PM

I agree with [Don](#) on the thumbs up for "Eye of the Tiger." But I am also partial to "Let It Go" from the film *Frozen*.

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**Post by "Godfrey" of May 26, 2024 at 5:24 PM**

"Won't Get Fooled Again"... 😊

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**Post by "Don" of May 26, 2024 at 6:54 PM**

"Closer to Fine" by the Indigo Girls 😊

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**Post by "Kalosyni" of May 27, 2024 at 8:00 AM**

The song: "We Are the Champions"? (but depends on the situation).