

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

## Post by "Cassius" of November 5, 2025 at 6:38 PM

This post is to start discussion of plans for Sunday November 9th. I don't recall that we announced a topic yet - there are plenty to choose from, but if someone would like to suggest something in particular go ahead and respond to this thread and let us know.

We'll update this thread later in the week to formalize the topic.

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## Post by "Cassius" of November 7, 2025 at 1:42 PM

Going along with the topic that has been central to the last several weeks of podcasts, and which will be central to Episode 306 and 307 which will be released soon, let's look closely this week at Epicurus' view of good and evil, especially the statement in the letter to Menoecus:

### Quote

[129]... Every pleasure then because of its natural kinship to us is good, yet not every pleasure is to be chosen: even as every pain also is an evil, yet not all are always of a nature to be avoided.[130] Yet by a scale of comparison and by the consideration of advantages and disadvantages we must form our judgment on all these matters. For the good on certain occasions we treat as bad, and conversely the bad as good.

The contention that good and evil are not absolute, and that sometimes the same thing can be bad and at other times good, is very important in contrasting how Epicurus thinks with the views of most other thinkers.

A related question derives from the view of the Stoics and others that ONLY virtue is good and that there are really no other true goods but only those things that we might "prefer" or not.

A lot of this involves the question of the Stoics and others wanting to take the position that the wise man can be completely happy, and holding that the wise man through virtue has no part of evil. Let's discuss too how Epicurus can hold that the wise man can always be happy even

though he experiences at times pain, which is evil.

We've been talking a lot about these issues in the podcasts so lets take the time this Sunday to get some participant feedback on these issues.

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### **Post by “Matteng” of November 8, 2025 at 5:37 AM**

Yes for example Ciceros and the Stoics define the only good Virtue and bad Vice and that the good must be something that always must be chosen, the bad always avoided. And their indifferents are choiceworthy or not. Interesting that there it is complete the opposite on the first view.

On a further digging I see there is a calculation and degree between good/bad for a higher good (Pleasant life ) in Epicureanism whereby for Cicero/ Stoics good/ bad are absolutes

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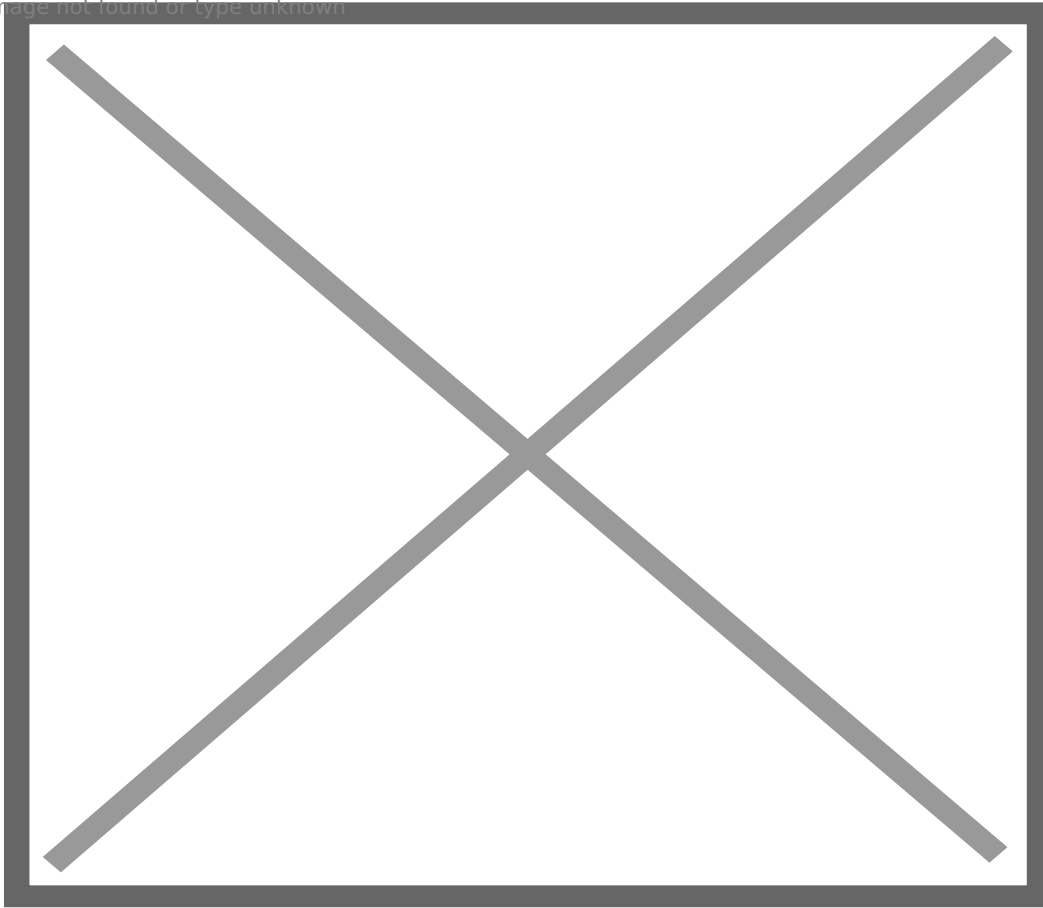
### **Post by “Kalosyni” of November 8, 2025 at 2:26 PM**

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

The contention that good and evil are not absolute, and that sometimes the same thing can be bad and at other times good, is very important in contrasting how Epicurus thinks with the views of most other thinkers.

If you opened a jar of honey and ate a teaspoon of it it would be pleasurable, but if you were forced to eat the entire jar that would be painful -- all good and evil consists in sensation.

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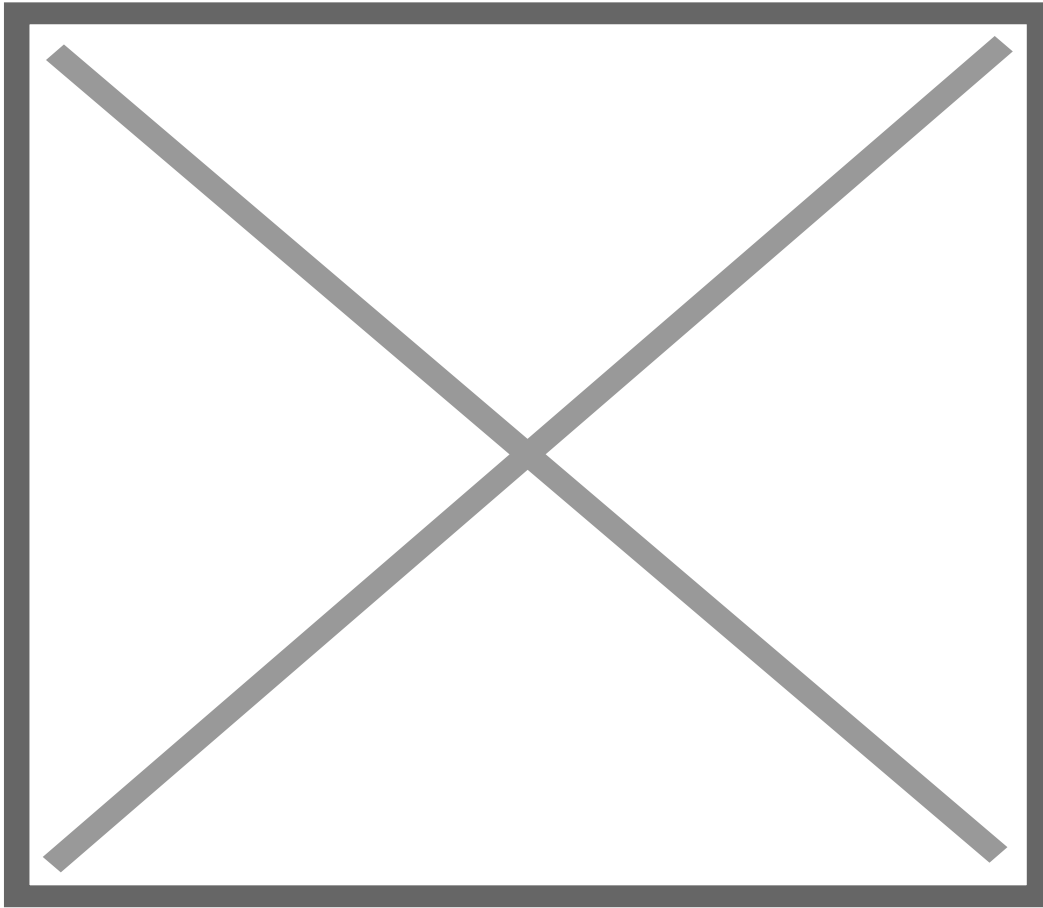
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[www.epicureanfriends.com](http://www.epicureanfriends.com)

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**Post by “Cassius” of November 8, 2025 at 3:06 PM**

Here are additional citations on Epicurus as to the nature of good and evil that we can discuss tomorrow. it's hard to think of a topic that has more far-reaching implications. If anyone has suggestions for citations to add, please post in this thread. I'm also setting this up as a FAQ answer here:

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4795-sunday-november-9-2025-zoom-discussion-12-30-pm-est-epicurus-on-good-and-evil/>



[What Did Epicurus Say About the Relationship Between Good and Evil? - Epicureanfriends.com](http://www.epicureanfriends.com)  
www.epicureanfriends.com

## **What Was Epicurus' View Of The Nature of Good And Evil?**

**In the Epicurean system there is no such thing as a separate force or absolute nature of good and evil. Good exists only through the feeling of pleasure and evil only through the feeling of pain. Citations:**

### **1. Letter to Menoecus [124]**

1. *Bailey*: "Become accustomed to the belief that [death is nothing to us](#). **For all good and evil consists in sensation**, but death is deprivation of sensation. And therefore a right understanding that [death is nothing to us](#) makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not because it adds to it an infinite span of time, but because it takes away the craving for immortality."

### **2. As Epicurus stated in his letter to Menoecus:**

1. [129] And for this cause we call pleasure the beginning and end of the blessed life. For we recognize pleasure as the first good innate in us, and from pleasure we begin every act of choice and avoidance, and to pleasure we return again, using the feeling as the standard by which we judge every good. And since pleasure is the

first good and natural to us, for this very reason we do not choose every pleasure, but sometimes we pass over many pleasures, when greater discomfort accrues to us as the result of them: and similarly we think many pains better than pleasures, since a greater pleasure comes to us when we have endured pains for a long time. Every pleasure then because of its natural kinship to us is good, yet not every pleasure is to be chosen: even as every pain also is an evil, yet not all are always of a nature to be avoided. [130] Yet by a scale of comparison and by the consideration of advantages and disadvantages we must form our judgment on all these matters. For the good on certain occasions we treat as bad, and conversely the bad as good.

3. U423 Plutarch, That Epicurus actually makes a pleasant life impossible, 7, p. 1091A:

1. Not only is the basis that they assume for the pleasurable life untrustworthy and insecure, it is quite trivial and paltry as well, inasmuch as their “thing delighted” – their good – is an escape from ills, and they say that they can conceive of no other, and indeed that our nature has no place at all in which to put its good except the place left when its evil is expelled. ... Epicurus too makes a similar statement to the effect that the good is a thing that arises out of your very escape from evil and from your memory and reflection and gratitude that this has happened to you. His words are these: “That which produces a jubilation unsurpassed is the nature of good, if you apply your mind rightly and then stand firm and do not stroll about {a jibe at the Peripatetics}, prating meaninglessly about the good.”

4. Yonge Translation of Principal Doctrine 6:

1. For the sake of feeling confidence and security with regard to men, and not with reference to the nature of government and kingly power being a good, some men have wished to be eminent and powerful, in order that others might attain this feeling by their means; thinking that so they would secure safety as far as men are concerned. So that, if the life of such men is safe, they have attained to the nature of good; but if it is not safe, then they have failed in obtaining that for the sake of which they originally desired power according to the order of nature.

5. As Torquatus states in On Ends Book 1:

1. [[29] ... "Epicurus places this standard in pleasure, which he lays down to be the supreme good, while pain is the supreme evil; and he founds his proof of this on the following considerations. [30] Every creature, as soon as it is born, seeks after pleasure and delights therein as in its supreme good, while it recoils from pain as its supreme evil, and banishes that, so far as it can, from its own presence, and this it does while still uncorrupted, and while nature herself prompts unbiased and unaffected decisions. So he says we need no reasoning or debate to shew why pleasure is matter for desire, pain for aversion. These facts he thinks are simply perceived, just as the fact that fire is hot, snow is white, and honey sweet, no one of which facts are we bound to support by elaborate arguments; it is enough merely to draw attention to the fact; and there is a difference between proof and formal argument on the one hand and a slight hint and direction of the attention on the other; the one process reveals to us mysteries and things under a veil, so to speak;

the other enables us to pronounce upon patent and evident facts. Moreover, seeing that if you deprive a man of his senses there is nothing left to him, it is inevitable that nature herself should be the arbiter of what is in accord with or opposed to nature. Now what facts does she grasp or with what facts is her decision to seek or avoid any particular thing concerned, unless the facts of pleasure and pain?

6. Torquatus in On Ends Book I Section XII.

1. The truth of the position that pleasure is the ultimate good will most readily appear from the following illustration. Let us imagine a man living in the continuous enjoyment of numerous and vivid pleasures alike of body and of mind, undisturbed either by the presence or by the prospect of pain: what possible state of existence could we describe as being more excellent or more desirable? One so situated must possess in the first place a strength of mind that is proof against all fear of death or of pain; he will know that death means complete unconsciousness, and that pain is generally light if long and short if strong, so that its intensity is compensated by brief duration and its continuance by diminishing severity. Let such a man moreover have no dread of any supernatural power; let him never suffer the pleasures of the past to fade away, but constantly renew their enjoyment in recollection, and his lot will be one which will not admit of further improvement.

7. **Arrian, Diatribes of Epictetus, I.20.19:**

1. Why, Epicurus, do you even light a lamp and labor for our sake, and write so many books? **Ibid, II.20.9:** Dear fellow, why do you bother yourself about us? Why do you keep up a vigil on our account, for which you light a lamp? Why do you get up? Why do you write so many big books? Is it to keep one or another of us from being tricked into believing that the gods care for men, or is it to keep one or another of us from supposing that the nature of good is other than pleasure? If this is indeed so, then back to your bed and go to sleep!

8. Cicero On Ends ( *De Finibus* , Book II, 6.18)

1. "He says that virtue cannot exist without pleasure, nor pleasure without virtue; but how inconsistent and contradictory are such assertions! For if it is pleasure that constitutes the supreme good, what place is left for virtue?"

9. Cicero On Ends Book II Section X

1. Now not to see that the greatest proof we have with regard to that form of pleasure apart from which he declares himself wholly unable to understand the nature of good (he pursues this pleasure into detail thus, that which we enjoy through the palate, and through the ears; then he adds the rest, things not to be named without an apologetic preface) —very well, this stern and serious philosopher does not see that the only good within his knowledge is a thing not even to be desired, because, on the authority of the same thinker, when- ever we are without pain we do not crave that form of pleasure. How irreconcilable these statements are!

10. Interpretation of Vatican Saying 42 by DeWitt

1. The specific teaching that life itself is the greatest good is to be drawn from Vatican Saying 42: "The same span of time includes both beginning and termination of the

greatest good." If this seems to be a dark saying, the obscurity is dispelled by viewing it as merely a denial of belief in either pre-existence or the afterlife. As Horace wrote, concluding Epistle i.16 with stinging abruptness, "Death is the tape-line that ends the race of life." Editors, however, misled by the summum bonum fallacy, equate "the greatest good" with pleasure and so are forced to emend. The change of a single letter does the trick but fundamental teaching is obliterated. While this quoted statement is first-hand evidence of the Epicurean attitude, the syllogistic approach is also known from an extant text, of which the significance has been overlooked. The major premise is the assumption that the greatest good must be associated with the most powerful emotions, that is, the worst of all fears and the greatest of all joys. Now the worst of all fears is that of a violent death and the greatest of all joys is escape from the same. The supporting text runs as follows: "That which occasions unsurpassable joy is the bare escape from some dreadful calamity; and this is the nature of 'good,' if one apprehend it rightly and then stand by his finding, and not go on walking round and round and harping uselessly on the meaning of 'good'." This passage marks the summary cutting of a Gordian knot, the meaning of "good," upon which Plato had harped so tediously. Epicurus finds a quick solution by appealing to the Feelings, that is to Nature, as the criterion; it is their verdict that the supreme good is life itself, because the strongest emotions are occasioned by the threat of losing it or the prospect of saving it.

#### 11. Interpretation of Frances Wright in Chapter 3 of A Few Days In Athens

1. "Yes, in a great measure, yet not all together: we are all the wooers of virtue, but we are wooers of a different character." "And may she not then favor one more than another?" "That is a question," replied the Gargettian, playfully, " that each will answer in his own favor. If you ask me, he continued, - with one of his sweetest tones and smiles, "I shall say, that I feel myself virtuous, because my soul is at rest." "If this be your criterion, you should with the stoics deny that pain is an evil." "By no means: so much the contrary, I hold it the greatest of all evils, and the whole aim of my life, and of my philosophy, is to escape from it. To deny that pain is an evil is such another quibble as the Elean's denial of motion: that must exist to man which exists to his senses; and as to existence or non existence abstracted from them, though it may afford an idle argument for an idle hour, it can never enter as a truth, from which to draw conclusions, in the practical lessons of a master. To deny that pain is an evil seems more absurd than to deny its existence, which has also been done, for its existence is only apparent from its effect upon our senses; how then shall we admit the existence, and deny the effect, which alone forces that admittance? But we will leave these matters to the dialecticians of the Portico. I feel myself virtuous because my soul is at rest. With evil passions I should be disturbed and uneasy; with uncontrolled appetites I should be disordered in body as well as mind — for this reason, and for this reason only, I avoid both." "Only!" "Only: virtue is pleasure; were it not so, I should not follow it."

#### 12. Interpretation of Frances Wright in Chapter 16 of A Few Days In Athens

1. Let Epicurus be your guide. The source of every enjoyment is within yourselves. Good and evil lie before you. The good is — all which can yield you pleasure: the evil — what must bring you pain. Here is no paradox, no dark saying, no moral hid in tables.”
13. Compare Epicurus' view to What Cicero Says Against Epicurus in On Ends Book Two
1. “For the origin of the Chief Good he goes back, I understand, to the birth of living things. As soon as an animal is born, it delights in pleasure and seeks it as a good, but shuns pain as an evil. Creatures as yet uncorrupted are according to him the best judges of Good and Evil. That is the position both as you expounded it and as it is expressed in the phraseology of your school. What a mass of fallacies! Which kind of pleasure will it be that guides a mewling infant to distinguish between the Chief Good and Evil, ‘static’ pleasure or ‘kinetic’? — since we learn our language, heaven help us! from Epicurus. If the ‘static’ kind, the natural instinct is clearly towards self-preservation, as we agree; but if the ‘kinetic,’ and this is after all what you maintain, then no pleasure will be too base to be accepted; and also our new-born animal in this case does not find its earliest motive in the highest form of pleasure, since this on your showing consists in absence of pain. For proof of this, however, Epicurus cannot have gone to children nor yet to animals, which according to him hold a mirror up to nature; he could hardly say that natural instinct guides the young to desire the pleasure of freedom from pain. This cannot excite appetite; the ‘static’ condition of feeling no pain exerts no driving-power, supplies no impulse to the will (so that Hieronymus also is wrong here); it is the positive sensation of pleasure and delight that furnishes a motive. Accordingly Epicurus’s standing argument to prove that pleasure is naturally desired is that infants and animals are attracted by the ‘kinetic’ sort of pleasure, not the ‘static’ kind which consists merely in freedom from pain. Surely then it is inconsistent to say that natural instinct starts from one sort of pleasure, but that the Chief Good is found in another. “As for the lower animals, I set no value on their verdict. Their instincts may be wrong, although we cannot say they are perverted. One stick has been bent and twisted on purpose, another has grown crooked; similarly the nature of wild animals, though not indeed corrupted by bad education, is corrupt of its own nature. Again in the infant the natural instinct is not to seek pleasure; its instinct is merely towards self-regard, self-preservation and protection from injury. Every living creature, from the moment of birth, loves itself and all its members; primarily this self-regard embraces the two main divisions of mind and body, and subsequently the parts of each of these. Both mind and body have certain excellences; of these the young animal grows vaguely conscious, and later begins to discriminate, and to seek for the primary endowments of Nature and shun their opposites. Whether the list of these primary natural objects of desire includes pleasure or not is a much debated question; but to hold that it includes nothing else but pleasure, neither the limbs, nor the senses, nor mental activity, nor bodily integrity nor health, seems to me to be the height of stupidity. And this is the

fountain-head from which one's whole theory of Goods and Evils must necessarily flow. Polemo, and also before him Aristotle, held that the primary objects were the ones I have just mentioned. Thus arose the doctrine of the Old Academy and of the Peripatetics, maintaining that the End of Goods is to live in accordance with Nature, that is, to enjoy the primary gifts of Nature's bestowal with the accompaniment of virtue. Callipho coupled with virtue pleasure alone; Diodorus freedom from pain. . . . In the case of all the philosophers mentioned, their End of Goods logically follows: with Aristippus it is pleasure pure and simple; with the Stoics, harmony with Nature, which they interpret as meaning virtuous or morally good life, and further explain this as meaning to live with an understanding of the natural course of events, selecting things that are in accordance with Nature and rejecting the opposite. Thus there are three Ends that do not include moral worth, one that of Aristippus or Epicurus, the second that of Hieronymus, and the third that of Carneades; three that comprise moral goodness together with some additional element, those of Polemo, Callipho and Diodorus; and one theory that is simple, of which Zeno was the author, and which is based entirely on propriety, that is, on moral worth. (As for Pyrrho, Aristo and Erillus, they have long ago been exploded.) All of these but Epicurus were consistent, and made their final ends agree with their first principles, — Aristippus holding the End to be Pleasure, Hieronymus freedom from pain, Carneades the enjoyment of the primary natural objects. What Epicurus, if in saying that pleasure was the primary object of attraction, he meant pleasure in the sense of Aristippus, ought to have maintained the same ultimate Good as Aristippus; or if he made pleasure in the sense of Hieronymus his Chief Good, should he at the same time have allowed himself to make the former kind of pleasure, that of Aristippus, the primary attraction? "The fact is that when he says that the verdict of the senses themselves decides pleasure to be good and pain evil, he assigns more authority to the senses than the law allows to us when we sit as judges in private suits. We cannot decide any issue not within our jurisdiction; and there is not really any point in the proviso which judges are fond of adding to their verdicts: 'if it be a matter within my jurisdiction,' for if it was not within their jurisdiction, the verdict is equally invalid with the proviso omitted. What does come under the verdict of the senses? Sweetness, sourness, smoothness, roughness, proximity, distance; whether an object is stationary or moving, square or round. A just decision can therefore only be delivered by Reason, with the aid in the first place of that knowledge of things human and divine, which may rightly claim the title of Wisdom; and secondly with the assistance of the Virtues, which Reason would have to be the mistresses of all things, but you considered as the handmaids and subordinates of the pleasures. After calling all of these into council, she will pronounce first as to Pleasure, that she has no claim, not merely to be enthroned alone in the seat of our ideal Chief Good, but even to be admitted as the associate of Moral Worth. As regards freedom from pain her decision will be the same. For Carneades will be put out of court, and no theory of the Chief Good will be approved that either includes

pleasure or absence of pain, or does not include moral worth. Two views will thus be left. After prolonged consideration of these, either her final verdict will be that there is no Good but moral worth and no Evil but moral baseness, all other things being either entirely unimportant or of so little importance that they are not desirable or to be avoided, but only to be selected or rejected; or else she will prefer the theory which she will recognize as including the full beauty of moral worth, enriched by the addition of the primary natural objects and of a life completed to its perfect span. And her judgment will be all the clearer, if she can first of all settle whether the dispute between these rival theories is one of fact, or turns on verbal differences only.

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of November 9, 2025 at 9:40 AM**

I'm going to need to sit out today's Zoom (still recovering from the flu).

I'm hoping that whatever good thoughts and ideas come up during the meeting can be posted here, if possible.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of November 9, 2025 at 2:18 PM**

Just to confirm the link that Robert mentioned today, here is a text from Gassendi and the page as a whole looks very useful as to other authors as well

[EMT - Pierre Gassendi](#)

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### **Post by “Don” of November 9, 2025 at 2:26 PM**

I see they even have a work by La Mettrie.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of November 9, 2025 at 6:46 PM**

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4795-sunday-november-9-2025-zoom-discussion-12-30-pm-est-epicurus-on-good-and-evil/>

How ironic that we were also talking about this very thing today too

[EMT - FAQs - bennett](#)

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### **Post by “DaveT” of November 9, 2025 at 8:12 PM**

[Cassius](#) Thank you for the deep dive above. I read all of the selections until Cicero, when I got tired and skimmed his take.

My take away from the selections is kind of like: Epicurus: What's good for me is good and what's bad for me is bad with proportions of each depending on prudence. And if everyone does it that way; "what a wonderful world it would be." (to borrow a phrase from a popular tune.)

While contrarily, Cicero is saying: Sure, I get that, sort of; but let's get real here. Everyone in the world can't be allowed to judge on their own, we'll have chaos. We need clear standards of right and wrong.

And then, 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.

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of November 10, 2025 at 7:55 AM**

#### [Quote from DaveT](#)

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I've been thinking about how there are two differing meanings (or connotations) to consider with regard to the ideas (or words) "good" and "evil":

1) that which is either "good" or "bad" -- as in that which is either wanted or not wanted. In Epicureanism, this is determined by knowing what brings pleasure or pain.

2) that which is of a moral nature -- that which is either morally correct or morally wrong. This is determined by reason, based on the truth that all humans wish to not be harmed. I don't think we see this directly referenced within Epicurean philosophy, but if we reason through things then we arrive at very similar "morals" as all the highest held by society.

Principal Doctrine 5 demonstrates the final result of having reasoned through to the understanding that living prudently (and morally) leads to the best life: [PD05](#): "It is not possible to live pleasantly without living prudently, honorably, and justly, [nor again to live a life of prudence, honor, and justice] without living pleasantly. And the man who does not possess the pleasant life is not living prudently, honorably, and justly, [and the man who does not possess the virtuous life] cannot possibly live pleasantly."

Also illustrated in: [PD17](#): "The just man is most free from trouble; the unjust most full of trouble."

The benefit here is in understanding morals from a very grounded, visceral, and direct manner, rather than as something coming from God (or gods) which can be altered depending on "what God wants".

Yet there still remains the problem of conveying morals to very young children who are still unable to reason through things and understand cause and effect (end results and consequences). And of course there are plenty of adults who have trouble with this as well.

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**Post by "Don" of November 10, 2025 at 1:47 PM**

[Quote from DaveT](#)

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And then, 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.

Choices are always made within a larger context which affects the consequences that have to be taken into account. "Good" decisions will sometimes have painful consequences that, in the long run, have positive consequences for the individual(s). Consider the choice to end a marriage or to have major surgery with an extended recovery time. The ending of the marriage may be the best, most prudent decision for both parties individually but that doesn't mean it's pleasurable at the time of the divorce. Having a major surgery will indeed be painful for the individual (and their family and friends) and recovery may be long and painful; but, as a choice, that's "what's good for me" based on prudence. Conversely, if it's a terminal diagnosis and the surgery and recovery will likely make the last months of one's life unbearable, NOT having surgery (if one is relatively able to go about their day up until the last few weeks or days of one's life) may be what's best for one's life.

For Epicurus, context is everything and individual circumstances are of paramount importance.

As far as communal actions, these can also be seen as individual actions that have broader consequences. As [PD31](#) says, "31. Natural justice is a symbol or expression of expediency, to prevent one man from harming or being harmed by another." I don't want to be harmed and, therefore, it's in my best interest for having a pleasurable happy existence to not harm others and to encourage that behavior in others. Individuals choosing "what's best for me" in the moment may decide what's best for them is to steal money or food. This decision could be based on simple greed or it could be based on the need to feed yourself or your children. A decision to lie is also not a virtuous/vicious choice in and of itself. If someone is coming to beat up another person and that intended victim has taken shelter in your house, you don't truthfully at all costs tell the potential assailant that the person is in your house when they come knocking on the door. Absolute adherence to some truth-telling virtue in this case does more harm than good. There is no virtue in handing a victim over to their assailant in honor of "I always tell the truth."

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**Post by “DaveT” of November 10, 2025 at 3:33 PM**

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4795-sunday-november-9-2025-zoom-discussion-12-30-pm-est-epicurus-on-good-and-evil/>

[Don](#) For me, as I learn more about Epicureanism, I identify with most of the tetrapharmikos.

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

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

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

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

With respect, your reference to PD 31 doesn't address my question. It says: "The justice which arises from nature is a pledge of mutual advantage, to restrain men from harming one another, and save them from being harmed." So, 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.

Furthermore when looking at the communal impact of an individual pursuing pleasure/good, "justice" in [PD31](#) doesn't address the small things in life that impact us and others, sometimes in a big way. The agreed upon "crimes", PD 31 applies. Kill and you go to jail. But cheat, or lie in mostly undetectable ways, say on income tax returns, and Epicureanism seems to fail the reality test of bad communal consequences of those seeking the pleasure of more after tax income (justified because the rich get away with it all the time). If enough people do the small stuff that society can't touch or punish, you have everyone out for themselves in one way or another. Could it be that a weakness in Epicurus' teaching is that it can't apply to any community larger than the Garden?

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## 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 εὐεκκαρτέρητον (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.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of November 11, 2025 at 4:34 AM**

This is relevant to the discussion of pain. This comes from the Gassendi book on Happiness/Virtue/Liberty that Tau Phi linked earlier today. Doesn't cite Epicurus but seems to be a restatement of Epicurus' argument:

but to be caught in the Theft, lusted his Bowels to be devoured by a little Fox that he had Stole and hid in his Bosom, without expressing any sign of Pain, for fear of discovering the Theft.

He will also consider, That if the Pain be light, it is easy to be born; if great, that it is so much the more Glorious and Honourable to endure it with Courage, and that by frequent Custom it will become more supportable, or that being of no long continuance, it will speedily put an end either to him or his Suffering. If it ceaseth, the Pleasure of being delivered from it, and the health of Body that succeeds, with a perfect Indolency, are so pleasing and delightful, that we seem to be well satisfied with the Pain we have undergone, from the Pleasure we enjoy of being freed from it. And if it takes away the Sufferer, it brings him to the end of all Sufferings. So that this Suffering brings at least this Advantage with it, that it makes our Life, which we must needs part with, less pleasing, and Death less terrible; wherefore many care not how soon they Dye, expecting thereby to be delivered from their Pains, so that every Day they talk after this manner,

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**Post by "DaveT" of November 11, 2025 at 8:47 AM**

[Quote from Don](#)

I'm not sure what you mean by "hard to measure."

I was thinking it is hard to restrain yourself, the temptation is always "just a little bit more"

[Quote from Don](#)

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4795-sunday-november-9-2025-zoom-discussion-12-30-pm-est-epicurus-on-good-and-evil/>

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.

Here, respectfully, perhaps we are both so deep in our opinions neither can offer a generalized proof. I only speak from my experience, and aside from major antisocial actions that overwhelmingly will be discovered immediately, or sooner or later, the fear of being caught is by and large written off as "who will know?" And those kinds of secretive actions, are ones that are pervasive, and corrosive on an interpersonal or communal level. After all, the major Abrahamic religions to my knowledge rely on an all seeing god, who never misses a thing you think or do to enforce societal norms punishable in eternity. And even then, people cheat, or lie when they judge that the consequences to them outweigh the negative effects on other individuals, family, or community.

A true Epicurean to me is a worthy idea to try to emulate, but even one such as they (a rarity in a real world) must sometimes make zero sum decisions where there are "winners" and "losers".

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## Post by "Kalosyni" of November 11, 2025 at 10:06 AM

[Quote from DaveT](#)

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

[Quote from DaveT](#)

[Quote from Don](#)

I'm not sure what you mean by "hard to measure."

I was thinking it is hard to restrain yourself, the temptation is always "just a little bit more"

Here is what I found for myself:

- 1) Have gratitude for pleasure as it comes and pay attention to the experience as it unfolds.
- 2) Don't worry about whether or not future pleasures will come...because they will! But realize that they may not be in the exact same "package" (or object).

3) If you can't "get" or experience something (a specific thing) anymore, then you need to find substitutes.

4) If you feel like you are "always wanting more" (chocolate, sex, glass of wine...etc, etc.) then:

a) you need to start paying more attention to the experience and see when the switch between immediate enjoyment and satisfaction (fulfilment and feeling like you had enough) occurs.

b) take something to excess and observe the process of pleasure switching to pain -- really observe and learn when the switch happens and then use that learning for making good choices in the future.

c) make sure you aren't "using" your pleasure as a distraction from mental pains (and if so implement a plan to deal with all that, maybe with self-help or a therapist).

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## Post by “Kalosyni” of November 11, 2025 at 10:31 AM

### [Quote from DaveT](#)

Furthermore when looking at the communal impact of an individual pursuing pleasure/good, "justice" in [PD31](#) doesn't address the small things in life that impact us and others, sometimes in a big way. The agreed upon "crimes", PD 31 applies. Kill and you go to jail. But cheat, or lie in mostly undetectable ways, say on income tax returns, and Epicureanism seems to fail the reality test of bad communal consequences of those seeking the pleasure of more after tax income (justified because the rich get away with it all the time). If enough people do the small stuff that society can't touch or punish, you have everyone out for themselves in one way or another. Could it be that a weakness in Epicurus' teaching is that it can't apply to any community larger than the Garden?

First I want to point out that right now it seems that Western civilization is experiencing a "morality problem" (especially in the US). It can be seen in social media, news media, entertainment media, as well as by those in political power. It seems that some people are beginning to lose their sense of "human decency".

Our current society is not running on an "Epicurean philosophical worldview" but on the remnants of a "Platonic and Judeo-Christian worldview" - which either looks to heaven as the best place to go, and/or the belief that wealth/nice possession are the highest goal in life.

So the question of "What is the best life?" and "What actions bring a life of well-being and joy here on earth?" are not being addressed. And the Epicurean philosophy can't apply to a wider

number of people (beyond a "garden"), since the "Platonic/Judeo-Christian" worldview (with it's now twisted and unmoral thinking) pervades so much of the thinking of people who are vocal and expressing their thoughts to everyone else.

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of November 11, 2025 at 10:47 AM**

Regarding justice and "not to harm or be harmed"... once we understand what pain is (both mental and physical) and that we don't like pain or being harmed, and we can see that no one else wants to feel pain or be harmed, .....and if someone else is harmed, then it is natural to want to quickly stop the pain by taking actions to make it stop (or seeking retribution, now through civilized court system) as a natural human reaction...then...we realize that we don't want to cause turmoil or trouble for ourselves.... and in truly understanding what pain is then we also have empathy toward others.

Regarding lying and cheating - in the end this can tend to harm only oneself the most (rather than directly causing physical pain to others) - being found out and then relegated to only those friends who also lie and cheat, compounding one's problems.

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### **Post by “Matteng” of November 11, 2025 at 2:08 PM**

My thoughts regarding Pain:

1. Difference between faculty of Pain (and Pleasure ) and Painful things/situation/ ideas.  
The faculty is there to protect us, born from evolutionary self-preservation.

2. Unnecessary Pain:

Empty ideas, worry, fears of superstitious, empty cultural ideas, fear of death, fear of (eternal and unendurable )pain( one aim of the 4. tetrapharmacon I think).

=> help of Epicurean physics

3. Avoidable Pain:

Avoidance of dangers/ painful situations....

=> help of Epicurean ethics/virtue (especially prudence, justice, friendship)

#### 4. Endurable Pain:

Non-Avoidable Pain, Painful things/action for less pain or more pleasure.

=> help of Epicurean ethics/virtue (especially courage, temperance, justice, friendship)

#### 5. Limits of Pain:

Hedonic Adaptation for Pain, Unendurable Pain...Death is for that the end. There is no eternal hell. Considering this that there is a last way out even could encourage to take greater pain.

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### Post by “Cassius” of November 11, 2025 at 4:42 PM

#### [Quote from DaveT](#)

For me, as I learn more about Epicureanism, I identify with most of the tetrapharmikos.

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

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

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

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

The problem in my view is not with the germ of thought that apparently gave rise to the phrasing of the fourth of the statements, but that the formulation makes it look like a claim to being an oracular claim to revealed universal truth when the full wording of [PD04](#) is much more realistic and practical.

As bad or worse is that isolating it in this way strips the statement of its context. I'm convinced the context is the very stark question of "how can you be sure that you'll remain happy when the evils of the body and external evils are not within your complete control. That's the challenge that they were answering, such as in the way that Cicero framed it in Part 5 of Tusculan Disputations:

#### Quote

And this very thing, too, Metrodorus has said, but in better language: “I have anticipated you, Fortune; I have caught you, and cut off every access, so that you cannot possibly reach me.” This would be excellent in the mouth of Aristo the Chian, or Zeno the Stoic, who held nothing to be an evil but what was base; but for you, Metrodorus, to anticipate the approaches of fortune, who confine all that is good to your bowels and marrow,—for you to say so, who define the chief good by a strong constitution of body, and a well assured hope of its continuance,—for you to cut off every access of fortune? Why, you may instantly be deprived of that good. Yet the simple are taken with these propositions, and a vast crowd is led away by such sentences to become their followers.

Cicero may deride this as simplistic snake-oil that takes in the unsophisticated, but [PD04](#) is very reasonable and unchallengeable. Moderate pains can be lived with, and if pains get so bad we can't live with them and don't go away, we ourselves have the remedy in that we can terminate our lives. In no way does pain have the ability to hold us in its grip forever. We are in control, not pain. Metrodorus' formulation explains the calculation, especially when it is given in FULL:

#### Quote

VS47. 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.

And that's why I see Dave's concern , which is so often shared by others, The Tetrpharmakon serves well as a memory device for educated Epicureans, but others who throw it around without knowing the full ideas that it outlines are often woefully misinterpreting it.

And to repeat for Dave and for lurkers, you NEVER hear the Tetrpharmakon formulation stated by Epicurus, or by Lucretius, or by Dlogenes of Oinoanda, or by anyone else whose text is expansive and fully-preserved and completely clear.

The hazard is exactly what we see Dave stating. Dave thinks he has to reject something that he believes to be a well established and core statement of Epicurean doctrine when it is not.

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**Post by “Cassius” of November 12, 2025 at 6:01 AM**

Here's a much better example of the way to understand this issue as stated by an articulate Roman Epicurean in 50 BC.

After over a hundred years of thinking about what Epicurus taught, you can place the key ideas in the context of how the wise man is always happy. Cicero identifies in *Tusculan Disputations* that how the wise man is in fact always happy is the most important question in philosophy.

The point about pain is not to callously say that what is terrible is "easy to endure," but that pain ultimately has no unbreakable power over us because it is almost always manageable, and when it is truly not manageable we can always defeat it by departing from life:

Quote from Torquatus in *On Ends* Book 1

XIX. At the same time this Stoic doctrine can be stated in a form which we do not object to, and indeed ourselves endorse. For Epicurus thus presents his Wise Man who is always happy: (3) his desires are kept within bounds; (2) death he disregards; (1) he has a true conception, untainted by fear, of the Divine nature; (4) he does not hesitate to depart from life, if that would better his condition. Thus equipped he enjoys perpetual pleasure, for there is no moment when the pleasures he experiences do not outbalance the pains; since he remembers the past with gratitude, grasps the present with a full realization of its pleasantness, and does not rely upon the future; he looks forward to it, but finds his true enjoyment in the present.

And I would agree with the thrust of Don's comments that it does indeed appear that the Epicureans saw these four aspects as particularly important. But the four have to be stated clearly in order to be persuasive.

Here they are again in different order stated in much more full terms from earlier in *On Ends*:

Quote

XII. Again, the truth that pleasure is the supreme good can be most easily apprehended from the following consideration. (3) Let us imagine an individual in the enjoyment of pleasures great, numerous and constant, both mental and bodily, with no pain to thwart or threaten them; I ask what circumstances can we describe as more excellent than these or more desirable? A man whose circumstances are such must needs possess, as well as other things, a robust mind subject to no fear of death or pain, because (2) death is apart from sensation, and (4) pain when lasting is usually slight, when oppressive is of short duration, so that its temporariness reconciles us to its intensity, and its slightness to its continuance. When in addition we suppose that such a man is (1) in no awe of the influence of the gods, and does not allow his past

pleasures to slip away, but takes delight in constantly recalling them, what circumstance is it possible to add to these, to make his condition better?

So there's plenty of information from which to flesh out the full meaning of the fourth item of the list without just saying "what's terrible is easy to endure." Cicero is using the same grouping of four to identify the best way of life / how the wise man is always happy.

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### **Post by “DaveT” of November 12, 2025 at 11:36 AM**

[Cassius](#) I appreciate your effort to provide citations that you hope will clarify my understanding of the doctrines. But on this topic of pain/pleasure in the Tetracharmakon, they are not persuasive. Since I've survived more than 3/4 of a century, my past experiences tell me that generalized doctrines expressed in the language of absolutes don't always hold up as universal truths.

I know personally, and have seen innumerable times that the following assertion is not true. "4) pain when lasting is usually slight," it is not usually slight. Sometimes it is, but not usually.

And further, the quote that [pain] "when oppressive is of short duration, so that its temporariness reconciles us to its intensity,..." Again, sometimes, but as a premise to further doctrinal beliefs, it can't believably be stated as a universal truth.

And, I have to say that the earlier quote that when pain is oppressive: "4) he does not hesitate to depart from life, if that would better his condition." Really? Being dead betters one's condition? Sure, it stops the pain, but you're dead!

I don't object to a person making a rational, competent decision to end their life, even absent pain or suffering. However, those quoted thoughts, as a proof that there is a good alternative for one pursuing happiness if their severe pain lasts beyond a short time and it is "oppressive", seems to me to be a superficial and dismissive attitude by those speakers. This, I think, is especially so to someone who tries to bear chronic pain, or to cope with ongoing knowledge that their unstoppable progressive disease is making them less and less able to live like they used to live, someone who tries to find some modicum of daily joy, but doesn't want to call it quits. That suffering person, seems to me to be far more common than someone who is willing to take the needle and end it all. So, Epicureans must speak to this person, too, rather than offering them the choice to commit suicide if you are struggling to find pleasure.

Does this appear to be disdainful of the entire tetrapharmakos? Perhaps to some, but not to me.

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**Post by “Matteng” of November 12, 2025 at 5:25 PM**

[DaveT](#) On one point Epicureanism recognizes Pain as the core evil, on the other it wants to give help, ideas, techniques against it. So I can understand the irritation that than it is stated that Pain is not really a problem (maybe only meant for the Epicurean Sage or an irrational Fear of Pain ? )

What is your attitude towards pain? Or rather, what would be a healthy or resilient attitude towards pain in life?

How justified do you see the fear of pain ?

I ´ve read even an article that for natural/necessary desires it is right for an Epicurean to fear Pain for such desires. Otherwise one of the natural/necessary desires is the desire for eudaimonia/ataraxia, so to have no or very less fears.

Is the potential amount of pain in life too great ? What should we conclude then from this insight ?

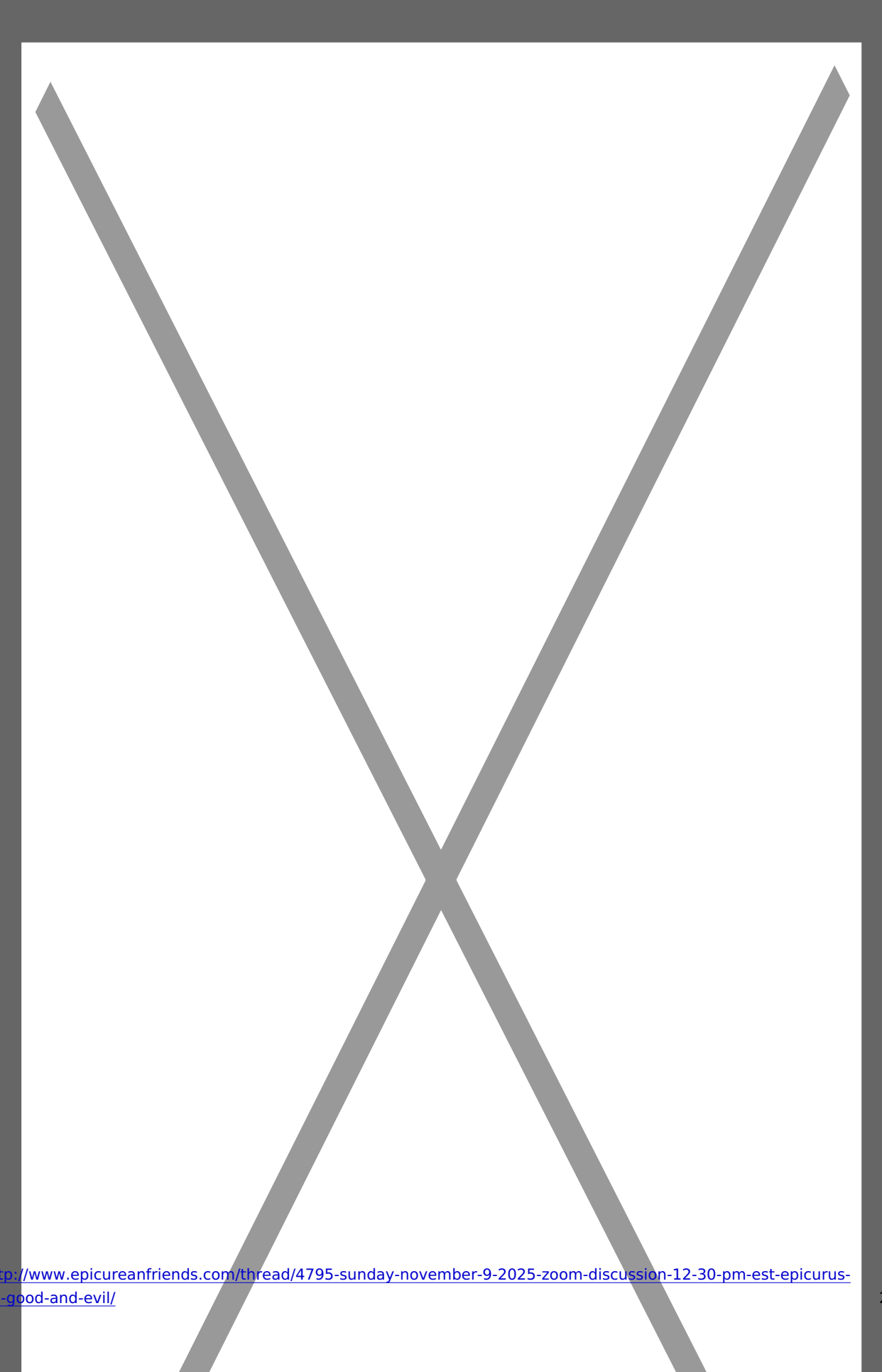
What would you advice ?

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**Post by “Kalosyni” of November 12, 2025 at 6:24 PM**

I want add to the discussion of pain, the fact that opium was available in ancient Greece as a pain reliever.

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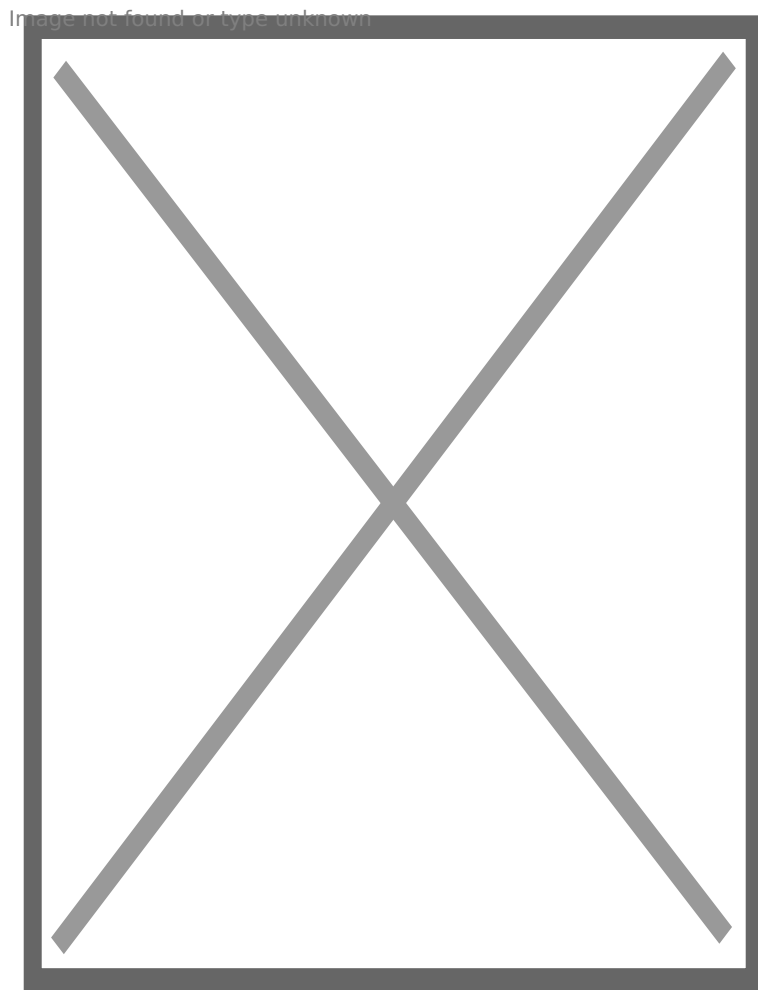
[Opium - Wikipedia](#)

en.wikipedia.org

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## Post by “Matteng” of November 13, 2025 at 12:56 AM

I want to add for limit of pain ( maybe more for slight pain or mental pain ) the hedonic treadmill for pain, with also Epicurean advice in it :



### [Hedonic Treadmill](#)

The hedonic treadmill is the idea that an individual's level of happiness, after rising or falling in response to positive or negative life events, ultimately...

[www.psychologytoday.com](http://www.psychologytoday.com)

So I think now we can consult the worst health systems in the world: Suffering ? Wait, take drugs or go dying [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4795-sunday-november-9-2025-zoom-discussion-12-30-pm-est-epicurus-on-good-and-evil/>

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## Post by “Martin” of November 13, 2025 at 3:40 AM

The article "Hedonic Treadmill" presents some good to know items but falls short of sound advice.

"Given that set points are not always fixed, a person may also be able to reset it in a positive direction through persistent behaviors such as pursuing altruistic goals."

This is a red flag for BS. Pursuing altruistic goals for an extended period of time is a recipe for burn-out, superiority complex and other disasters.

An alternative usage of the term "hedonic treadmill" refers to seeking out ever "higher" thrills, which becomes counterproductive. Apparently, some introductory courses to philosophy try to use this to reject all hedonic philosophies. The Epicurean answer to that is to use prudence to avoid getting on the hedonic treadmill in that alternative usage. "Hedonic adaptation" is the better word for what the article means with "hedonic treadmill".

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## Post by “Don” of November 13, 2025 at 5:38 AM

Talk of the hedonic treadmill reminded me of Dr. Anna Lembke's book *Dopamine Nation: Finding Balance in the Age of Indulgence*. Here's an interview with the author on NPR's Fresh Air:

<https://www.npr.org/transcripts/1030930259>

She brings up overindulgence, homeostasis, addiction. I brought up the book several years ago, so I'm sure if you search the title there's a thread on the forum.

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## Post by “Kalosyni” of November 13, 2025 at 9:25 AM

[Matteng](#) this quote from the Hedonic Treadmill article is good:

Quote

one potential way to keep happiness from fading is to mix up the elements of one's positive experiences so that they are less repetitive. Another approach is to try to

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4795-sunday-november-9-2025-zoom-discussion-12-30-pm-est-epicurus-on-good-and-evil/>

appreciate such experiences even more by making an effort to pay attention to and savor what is enjoyable about them.

I personally feel like the concept of a "hedonic treadmill" is not helpful. Instead just think about how you want to move toward happiness (and enjoyment) and away from pain, and that it is a learning process that occurs through trial and error. Then, over time as you get older you become wiser and your happiness levels increase.

And this is: [VS17](#). "It is not the young man who should be thought [most] happy, but the old man who has lived a good life. For the young man at the height of his powers is unstable, and is carried this way and that by fortune, like a headlong stream. But the old man has come to anchor in old age, as though in port, and the good things for which before he hardly hoped he has brought into safe harbor in his grateful recollections."

And from Letter to Menoeceus: "...Wherefore both when young and old a man must study philosophy, that as he grows old he may be young in blessings through the grateful recollection of what has been, and that in youth he may be old as well, since he will know no fear of what is to come. We must then meditate on the things that make our happiness, seeing that when that is with us we have all, but when it is absent we do all to win it."

The young man will learn much sooner what brings a life of happiness (through the study of philosophy).

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## **Post by "DaveT" of November 13, 2025 at 9:53 AM**

My advice to anyone enduring extended suffering mentally, or experiencing ongoing significant physical pain is to share it. By this I mean, tell someone you love or trust about your situation. For those of us who have the means in WEIRD societies (western educated industrialized rich and democratic) or who have state provided care, "get professional help" can ease the burden sometimes. But for them, and most of the rest of the world; loved ones and trusted ones may help too, in the absence of professional care.

For me, the realistic goal is to experience living with more contentment (read as pleasure by the Epicurean) than pain/suffering. To try to attain the former permanently, or to banish the latter completely is unrealistic, perhaps a further cause of suffering, yet completely Epicurean, when you think about it.

How one might do it for themselves, during self talk, is a more individualized task, and if one technique works for a while, and then doesn't, my advice is keep exploring alternatives until you improve and can enjoy life better.

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## Post by “Patrikios” of November 13, 2025 at 5:06 PM

### [Quote from Matteng](#)

My thoughts regarding Pain:

1. Difference between faculty of Pain (and Pleasure ) and Painful things/situation/ ideas.  
The faculty is there to protect us, born from evolutionary self-preservation.

### [Matteng](#)

Thanks for this outline of your thoughts on pain. I agree with your point that pain is there to protect us. Have you considered pain as Nature’s method to guide us back to our intended, normal, simple mode of operation for our mind & body. The more often and most efficiently we can operate without pain (of mind or body) the more likely we are to live more healthy, which is self preservation.