

PD21 - Commentary and Interpretation

Post by “Kalosyni” of February 2, 2026 at 1:35 PM

[PD21](#). "He who has learned the limits of life knows that that which removes the pain due to want, and makes the whole of life complete, is easy to obtain, so that there is no need of actions which involve competition."

I was curious what was meant by the word "competition" and so I did a search and found...

...this article:

[Agonistic Orientation and Cultural Dynamics in Ancient Greece](#)

Quote

This essay centers on the cultural experience that the Greeks had to face again and again in ever-new circumstances: agonistic orientation. Ancient Greek culture was highly competitive. There was hardly an area of life that wasn't shaped by competitive thinking. On the one hand, the ethos of competition united all of Greece and separated it from other cultures. On the other hand, this ethos also divided them as individuals from each other within their own culture, being under the persistent pressure to distinguish themselves. The Greek word "*agon*" covers all the dimensions of competition: it refers to the warlike conflict of life and death as well as political rivalries. It also denotes the competition between professions and ways of life as well as the competition between athletes and artists.

Knowing the role of competition within ancient Greek society (among male citizens) really sheds some light on understanding [PD21](#).

Since in modern times non-stop competition only exists with certain professions (such as stockbrokers in the stock market, etc, etc.) and competitive sports (such as football, etc.) and is only taken on by the few who engage in those activities, and so most people do not face the mental stresses and agitation that that kind of competition can bring on.

Post by “DaveT” of February 3, 2026 at 11:02 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

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[PD 21]"He who has learned the limits of life knows that that which removes the pain due to want, and makes the whole of life complete, is easy to obtain, so that there is no need of actions which involve competition."

The PD 21 speaks to me somewhat. As a small-town lawyer and then a writer and author, I understand you weren't excluding any professions when you cited stockbrokers, etc. etc. as being the only ones subject to competition. I can add that in my Bar Association, there was an intense level of competition from the highest to the lowest for clients, fame, and community admiration. And in publishing, the competition among writers is a constant source of stress while trying to find a publisher and an audience.

And although I have no data to back me up, I think the population of the USA is acculturated to capitalism's competition. And we are subject to the pressure of "keeping up with the Joneses" by measuring ourselves against the apparent material attainments of friends and neighbors, as well as depictions in advertising in the media. We can reduce stress to a degree by having the wisdom to understand necessary/unnecessary, natural/unnatural desires and their limitations to attain pleasure/happiness. But there are limits, stress causing limits on what we can actually do about it.

Unfortunately, given modern life, we can't survive unless we compete for necessary things like jobs, better wages, more customers, which allow us to have decent food, clean water, secure housing and healthcare for ourselves and our aged family members.

I don't see how we have a choice to reduce that competition given the economics of modern life. This is not to belittle the wisdom of PD 21 as applied to the ancient Greeks, but perhaps it was easier for them to make the "whole of life complete" than it is for all the people who work for a living to attain the same ends. Perhaps the family structure of Athens was also a factor, but I do not know how it compared to our modern world.

Post by "Godfrey" of February 3, 2026 at 4:13 PM

Totally agree regarding modern competition. I spent my entire career, particularly the last 25 years, in a highly competitive big city working environment. Unfortunately, during that time I had never heard of Epicurus.

However, the last 25 years were particularly enjoyable and successful. My formula was: 1) do work that I love, 2) understand how this work can benefit people and who those people are, 3) fully utilize my knowledge, skills and talents in doing the work, 4) have a pleasant disposition, 5) get out of the way and be open to the results of my work.

Although at the time my model came more from a variety of eastern philosophies, I think this formula is completely compatible with Epicurism.