

Epicurean Virtue

Post by “wbernys” of February 6, 2026 at 1:33 AM

We are often slandered by Stoics and the religious as devaluing the virtues, as though treating them as “mere means” strips them of beauty. Truly, the virtues are means. But this does not devalue them in the least. On the contrary, by understanding the Epicurean conception of virtue as inseparable from living pleasantly, we learn to love virtue more deeply than anyone, because of the beautiful life it gives us. Unlike the vanity of the religious who promotes the virtues out of fear, or the Stoics who sing an empty name of virtue unconnected to the beautiful life they give, we Epicureans sing the song of virtue triumphantly as I wish to show.

So allow me to prove the slander wrong by speaking poetically, piously, and with utmost gratitude toward the virtues. To prove that the elegant praise of virtues do not belong only to the Stoics or the religious. It belongs to us as well. It is my hope that this clarifies our position and inspires delight in the teachings of Epicurus, even among those not yet come to the philosophy.

With that said, let us turn to the virtues and how they are necessary for living pleasantly.

Wisdom: The crown of the virtues and the source of every other virtue. Prudence teaches us how to choose and avoid the fine art of living, arming us with knowledge of every other virtue and guiding us toward a life full of pleasure. It shows us that the gods present no fear, death no worries, that the good is easy to obtain, and what is terrible is easy to endure. Without prudence, pleasure cannot be secured.

Honor: The gentle grace that guides us to life's pleasures. Honor is the wisdom of conducting oneself in a way that avoids needless offense and easily earns respect. We know that we cannot please everyone, only a fool would think this, but we by respecting reasonable customs and dignity of others, we can easily secure the goodwill and affection of our neighbors, a secure means of pleasure. In doing so, we may even soften hostility from fools and people filled with hatred, turning former rivals into allies through simple consideration and respect.

Justice: The ground beneath our feet, it gives us security from other men, allowing us to operate life free of anxiety, for injustice pollutes the mind, if not by the actual penalties of the law, than always by the fear of discovery, the association with vicious people we don't trust, the sacrifice of things that truly matter, the just hatred of our fellow men, and the guilty conscious stemming from acts of injustice.

Courage: The sword against the fears of pain and death. Courage allows us to endure temporary pain for greater pleasure. It strengthens us to act rightly under threat and even, if

necessary, to die for a friend, since death itself is no evil, while a life preserved at the cost of betrayal is poisoned by distrust and inner turmoil. Courage destroys the fear of everlasting torment — for none exists. It dissolves the terror of death, which is nothing to us. It casts down the image of angry gods and opens the way to the greatest pleasures by removing fear at its root.

Temperance: The greatest armor of everlasting pleasure in life, it ensures we are safeguarded from our own follies by means of true reason, telling us to not choose pleasures which lead to pains many times worse than the pleasure they bring. Advising us against those vain and groundless desires for limitless wealth, fame, or power, and those natural desires that are hard to get or likely to cause pain.

Self-Sufficiency: Freedom itself, showing how easily we can resist the harm of relying on the unstable force of fortune, and reminding us how easy it is to procure that which is acquired by nature. Showing us how easy it is to free ourselves from the vain and groundless desires which stretch on to infinity and making even the poor man feel wealthy in every way that matters.

Making Friends: Of all that wisdom provides for living one's entire life in happiness, the greatest by far is friendship. Friendship gives affection, security in danger, shared joy, and trust in adversity. It is among the greatest goods life offers. We must speak well of our friends, present or absent. Show gratitude in word and deed. Not reduce friendship to a transaction, nor pretend we expect nothing in return for mutual goodwill and hope strengthens the bond and thus life itself. For wisdom shows us that a poisoned friendship poisons life itself. But nothing enhance life more than a faithful friendship.

Piety: Far from the slander that Epicurus was a god-hating atheist, he taught a purified reverence. A proper conception of the gods, whether as ideals formed in the mind or as blessed beings existing beyond us, does not inspire fear. It inspires admiration of blessedness. The gods, rightly understood, are models of tranquility and immortality. They do not threaten. They do not punish. They show us what blessed existence looks like and how it is to get even with a mortal life. Truly I declare, with bread and water, friendship and wisdom, we may rival even the gods in happiness.

Frank Speech: How can we hope to improve ourselves and our friends unless we're willing to criticize and be criticized in open and free speech? We need the sympathy of our friends to sometimes save us from our faults and we need to show sympathy to our friends to better improve them. We must show patience, a proper understanding of what truly matters and what does not, and a understanding of our own faults as well as those of our friends in open and respectful dialogue to truly achieve the peaks of friendship and security.

Magnanimity: Tell me, how can we hate one who makes mistakes, when we know that we ourselves make mistakes? Magnanimity teaches forgiveness where forgiveness is deserved. It prevents punishments disproportionate to the crime. It transforms enemies into friends, earns goodwill and affection, and frees us from empty anger — that corrosion of the soul which

disturbs and destroys what we most value. Resentment disturbs. Forgiveness restores peace.

Philanthropy: Unless we commit to helping others, we cannot reap the rewards of their goodwill. Thoughtful concern expands our circle of friends, enhancing both security and affection. A life of greed breeds righteous contempt. A life of generosity earns righteous respect. Enhancing our life immensely with simple acts of charity, courtesy, and love of mankind.

Faith: The radical skeptic, who rejects trust in life itself, is left paralyzed and confused. We must say, without some firm trust, life collapses into endless doubt, a fate worse than even a person who fears the Gods, since at least they have hope of deliverance. Rather we must have confidence to navigate life with clarity, confidence that we can have knowledge, that we can control our own destiny and some actions are up to us, that our senses reveal reality as it appears; that the gods do not punish, that death brings no suffering; that the good is easy to get and the evil to endure, that our friends are trustworthy, and that wisdom steadies us in misfortune. Without faith, there is paralysis. With it, there is peace.

Hope for the Future: Without hope, the present becomes bitter. Even if no deliverance from misfortune ever comes before death, the very act of hoping preserves sweetness in the present. Hope is defiance against despair. Even hope for goods after one's death can be a blessing, as seen in Epicurus' will, where he provided for the preservation of his community of friends, giving him joy on his last days. To prove the power of hope, tell me, who would you rather be at your final moment? One who still anticipates good and is delighted even in the worst misfortunes with anticipation of the future, or one who believes pleasure has forever passed them by? Hope strengthens the present. And if deliverance does come, hope is vindicated all the more.

Delight in the Past: Memory of past goods gives us our greatest guardianship against misfortunes. Another great act of defiance whenever life or men do us wrong. One should not look at the past with fear but rather take delight in the many pleasures we have had in life, every feeling of laughter, excitement, hope, joy, friendship, and affection we have felt. Epicurus himself proved this as he was dying painfully from kidney stones, he wrote that these pains, though extreme, were offset his past delight in his conversations with his friends. Delight in the past shows us not to feel dismay at the prospect of the missing future goods, but rather delight in all the goods of life that we did have, and even when death finally comes, go to the grave with a triumphant song that we have lived well.

Enjoyment of the Present: Yet none of this matters if we cannot enjoy the present. For just as life is diminished not only by hopelessness about the future or regret about the past, is it also poisoned by the failure to savor what is here. Wisdom teaches the good news of life, no one is too young, too old, too broken, or too imperfect to live a good life. Showing us that happiness is never out of season. Delight in the past. Hope for the future. But above all, enjoy the present.

Hope people enjoy this piece! For me the pleasure i got just from writing is enough for me, but if others enjoy it, all the better. Please never stop feeling delight in the simple art of living offered by Epicurean philosophy. For someone who has these virtues and the pleasures they bring is like a god walking among men."

Post by “Cassius” of February 6, 2026 at 7:30 AM

Wbernys I haven't had the opportunity to read this in full but thank you. In the meantime however i am not quite sure what you mean by the title "[Effort Post]"? Do you mean prototype, or "Work-in-Progress," or something else?

Post by “wbernys” of February 6, 2026 at 10:45 AM

Effort post just means something like long post with effort put in..

Post by “wbernys” of February 6, 2026 at 10:57 AM

It is kind of a reddit term so on second thought I'm gonna remove it.

Post by “Kalosyni” of February 7, 2026 at 9:34 AM

[Quote from wbernys](#)

analysis on virtue as inseparable goods of life

[wbernys](#) Thanks for sharing this here, and this is an interesting project that perhaps all Epicureans should take on -- a project in which we each define the virtues in our own words, and as Epicurean philosophy directs, as the means to which a pleasant life comes to be. And, I

would guess that each person will have wording that differs as they describe the virtues -- the virtues are abstract ideas that need to be tied down to concrete experiences, so also in some sense they are "alive" and function in connection with life situations.

Ultimately they can be summed up as "do no harm" both to others and to oneself. Non-harming brings about a good life free from troubles.

Post by “Cassius” of February 7, 2026 at 12:34 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

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What? Define the goal purely negatively? If that were the case Epicurus could have stopped at "freedom from pain" without ever referring to pleasure (?)

Post by “wbernys” of February 7, 2026 at 8:33 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Thanks for sharing this here, and this is an interesting project that perhaps all Epicureans should take on

I was mainly inspired by Emily Austin's advice to actually write Epicureanism in order to appreciate it. Philodemus apparently said one should write criticisms of oneself and wrote down Epicurean doctrine to fully appreciate the tenets of Epicureanism.

I do a journal entry around every Eikas and I can attest it does wonders for mental and bodily health. Recommend others do it.

Post by “Matteng” of February 8, 2026 at 2:32 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

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[Cassius](#)

Good point, more positively would be to pursue philia and pleasure but also the non-harming can mean to take active actions for example to help not someone who needs help und we could easily help could be seen as harming someone. Is a „not-decision“ sometimes also a decision ?

Post by “Cassius” of February 8, 2026 at 6:49 AM

[Quote from Matteng](#)

to pursue philia and pleasure

In the end Epicurus is defining pleasure so broadly that in the end it's not really logically consistent to say "friendship and pleasure" given that. Friendship or anything else is either pleasurable (or leading to more pleasure than pain, even if some pain is required to obtain it) or there is no reason to pursue it.

The point I think needs to be made is that you can't just say that your whole goal is to avoid pain. If so, then you can just kill yourself. Your goal is to live pleurably, which requires that you live, being alive being a good/pleasurable thing unless you are in a situation where you are guaranteed more pain than pleasure). Treasuring life in such a way is a positive activity.

I would say that yes there are ways of looking at life as "avoiding pain," especially if you want to emphasize that there are limitless ways to live pleurably, and you want to emphasize the limitless aspect of it. But at some point you have to acknowledge the way words are used in your society, and if you just say "My highest goal is to avoid pain" in 2026 English, then the majority of people are rightly going to say that the only way to guarantee success in that is to kill yourself. Of course that's not what we mean, but if you're going to communicate clearly you have to make yourself understood.

Post by “Matteng” of February 8, 2026 at 6:56 AM

[Cassius](#)

Yes a crucial point, I meant philia as a positive attitude in contrast to justice as avoiding negative things.

And yes, dead we avoid all pain ☐☐

It is more about a kind of satisfied life or agreement with one life. A life with positive value, it is like pursuing health in life instead of avoiding illness absolutely.

Post by “Kalosyni” of February 8, 2026 at 9:19 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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I think that is why it works better to say that there are multiple "goods" for an Epicurean -- friendship is a great good, but not the "highest good". And "virtue" is a good, when it leads to a pleasant life. As for "pleasures", you could choose to pursue a pleasure that results in 55 percent pleasure and 45 percent pain - but that wouldn't be the "highest good" -- the highest good is a good which is as good as it can get ([PD03](#)).

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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There is a difference in mental cognition between "avoiding pain" -vs- "choosing pleasures which do not lead to pain" because there are a lot of pleasures which do not lead to any pain.

Also, there are prudent ways to engage with objects of pleasure that do not result in pain (for example eating the right amount rather than too much).

[Quote from Cassius](#)

and if you just say "My highest goal is to avoid pain" in 2026 English, then the majority of people are rightly going to say that the only way to guarantee success in that is to kill yourself.

Probably better to say "my highest goal is to seek pleasures which have good and pleasant results rather than painful consequences". I think that confining this to the types of pleasures, rather than all necessary actions undertaken in life (such as getting into a car and driving to work which has always a small risk of being in a car accident), works much better for cognition of choices. But of course you do need to consider what is safe to do, such as avoiding driving in a blizzard. And all of this boils down to "well-being".

Post by "Bryan" of June 26, 2026 at 8:09 PM

[Quote from wbernys](#)

Forgiveness restores peace

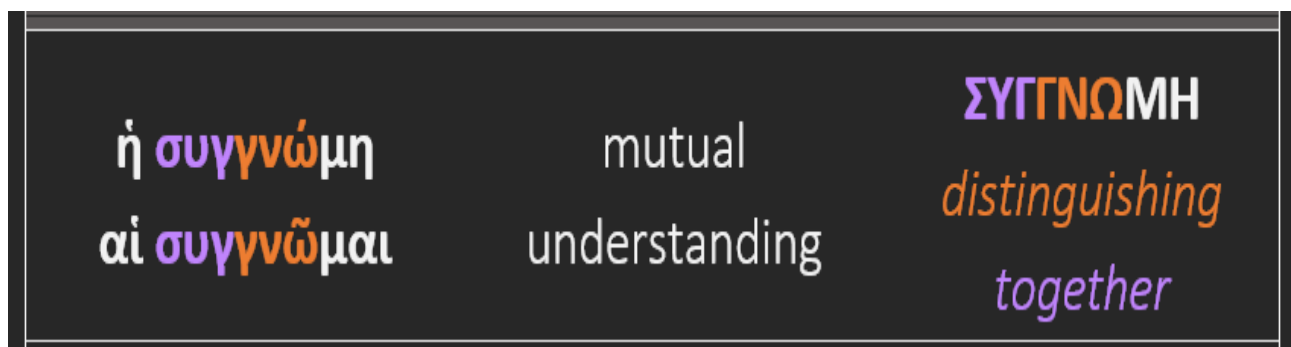
Certainly true!

In fact, if Plutarch is correct, Epicureans were even known to say, "**Let even this have forgiveness**" more literally it means "Let even this have a mutual understanding" which is a certainly a helpful mantra to have in mind for working well with others.

"ἐχέτω δὲ συγγνώμην καὶ τοῦτο" - ὡς λέγουσι!

"Let even this have pardon" - as they say!

Plutarch, Against Colotes, 1118D



Post by “Pacatus” of June 27, 2026 at 1:00 PM

Interesting: that’s very different from the main New Testament Greek word translated as “forgive” – ἀφίημι.

[ἀφίημι - Wiktionary, the free dictionary](#)

Another word, ἀπολύω, is used once in the NT (at Luke 6:37) as “forgive.” It is also used to mean “divorce.” ἀφίημι was also used by Paul in Cointhians 7:12 to mean “divorce.”

[ἀπολύω - Wiktionary, the free dictionary](#)

Post by “DaveT” of June 28, 2026 at 11:00 AM

I was re-reading this interesting thread and would like to make a couple of observations. I have no trouble accepting that avoiding pain can be a prime method, even a goal, of finding pleasure. This would be true either by an isolated act, or concurrently with a pleasurable one.

In his letter to Menoeceus Epicurus said: ““When we say, then, that pleasure is the end and aim, we do not mean the pleasures of the prodigal or the pleasures of sensuality, as we are understood to do by some through ignorance, prejudice, or wilful misrepresentation. By pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul.”

The point about anyone killing themselves to avoid pain if it was as simple as that to be Epicurean needs some attention for two reasons. First, I think killing oneself is not an option for Epicurus outside of hastening death when death is naturally imminent. Killing oneself outside of that circumstance as a means to seek pleasure, as Epicurus meant it is impossible. It is impossible because you can never experience pleasure if you are dead. Therefore to kill oneself is a violation of Epicurus' teaching of how to attain happiness. You cannot say killing yourself to avoid pain is ever consistent with Epicureanism (with the exception I stated above) either in attacking Epicurus or in ignorantly believing such an act is consistent with Epicureanism.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

The point I think needs to be made is that you can't just say that your whole goal is to avoid pain. If so, then you can just kill yourself. Your goal is to live pleurably, which requires that you live, being alive being a good/pleasurable thing unless you are in a

situation where you are guaranteed more pain than pleasure). Treasuring life in such a way is a positive activity.

Secondly in the thread here, as far as the virtues go; I think Epicurus said pursuing one virtue, Prudence is enough.

"Of all this the beginning and the greatest good is prudence. Wherefore prudence is a more precious thing even than philosophy: for from prudence are sprung all the other virtues, and it teaches us that it is not possible to live pleasantly without living prudently and honorably and justly, (nor, again, to live a life of prudence, honor, and justice) without living pleasantly. For the virtues are by nature bound up with the pleasant life, and the pleasant life is inseparable from them." Letter to Menoeceus.

As a subset of the virtue of Prudence, then, I have no real issue with saying "do no harm" since refraining from harmful behavior is prudent.