

# Have PD35 and Vatican Saying 7 been straw-manned?

Post by “wbernys” of April 18, 2026 at 3:28 AM

EDIT: Grammar got screwed up as Eikadistes pointed out, so i corrected it.

Hello all,

I've been thinking about **PD 35** and **Vatican Saying 7**, A common interpretation (especially in modern discussions) is that *even a single unjust act* results in ever-lasting fear or instability until death, since one can never be certain of escaping detection. But I'm wondering whether that overstates the claim and may be a strawman to knock down Epicurus more by imagining that Epicurus says that someone who stole a DVD as a kid 10 years ago will still live in constant fear. To be clear he's absolutely against all injustice for it's anxiety but i wonder if the points on it destroying happiness are more about a single act or a persistent trait or lifestyle.

Both texts use present participles (τὸν λάθρη τι ποιοῦντα, δύσκολον), in Vatican Saying 7 it is "A wrongdoer (someone who is persistent in wrongdoing)" and in [PD35](#) it is "One who secretly violates the pact (a persistent trait)" which might suggest not merely a one-off action but someone *engaged in injustice as an ongoing practice or disposition*.

My main question is as follows: **Did Epicurus claim that any single act of injustice (no matter how small) ruins a life through constant anxiety unless caught or turning oneself in, or is he primarily targeting those who engage in injustice as a recurring pattern or stable trait being filled with fear because they constantly violate the pact?**

I'd be especially interested in how people read the Greek participles here, perhaps people like [Don](#) and [Bryan](#) could help in clarifying whether Epicurus' point is meant to apply universally to even a single unjust act, or more specifically to injustice as a way of life or permanent trait.

Thanks!

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Post by “Eikadistes” of April 18, 2026 at 10:50 AM

Quote

**"Who that is wise practices that which the laws forbid, knowing that they will escape notice? A simple-minded accusation is easy to pass."** (Usener 18, from *Against Kolótēs*.)

Epíkouros stops short of saying, 'don't ever break the law'.

This reflection seems poignant in times of lawlessness and collapse, when **"someone establishes a law"** that **"no longer possesses the nature of the just"** (KD 37), or when many **"things appear not to fit the definition of what is considered to be just"** (KD 38).

When this is the case, I think the wise person would continue using comparative analysis to determine which options are most profitable (including potential law-breaking). In the case of betraying a friend versus breaking the law, the suffering one commits to the soul is greater with betrayal:

Quote

**"And so the wise tortured on a rack [suffer] no [more] pain than the torture of a friend, and in defense of them will die. For if one betrays a friend everything through one's life will become frustrated by doubt and strained"** (*Vatican Sayings* 56-57)

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### **Post by "Eikadistes" of April 18, 2026 at 10:55 AM**

I'm curious about the phrasing you got. I might have it wrong and need to review.

In KD35, I have "**Οὐκ ἔστι τὸν λάθρα τι κινουῦντα...**"

I based my translation of Book 10 on [this text from Perseus](#).

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### **Post by "Cassius" of April 18, 2026 at 11:33 AM**

I have no ability to add anything to your parsing of the Greek, but I strongly agree with the direction you are going in each of your evaluations.

1 - *Certainly* we are going to sometimes break the law - that's inherent in the full analysis of how justice is contextual and changes over time. When something becomes unjust, you aren't going to wait for the next procedural permission-granting to consider the situation unjust and act on that consideration. Sure you have to take into consideration who has power and how they may punish you, but we're talking philosophy and justice, and there's no cosmic enforcement mechanism that would convert "the law" into something any more than it is - a social structure among living people.

2 - *Certainly* Epicurus would not consider "all sins to be equal" such that stealing a DVD when you are six years old leads to a life of torment.

Any readings which would go in the opposite direction from your thoughts would be highly suspect.

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### Post by "wbernys" of April 18, 2026 at 12:13 PM

#### [Quote from Eikadistes](#)

I'm curious about the phrasing you got. I might have it wrong and need to review.

Hmm. Odd. You're right. I asked ai for grammar help and it may have f'd up the greek. Can't edit my original post to change it though for some reason.

For what I've seen the point still stands, relied on Cyril Bailey who translates it as "evil-doer" and "one who acts in secret contravention" with present tense. And Tim J. Young in classic caves translation does the same.

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### Post by "Bryan" of May 25, 2026 at 3:12 AM

#### [Quote from Eikadistes](#)

τὸν λάθρα τι κινουῦντα.

#### [Quote from wbernys](#)

τὸν λάθρη τι ποιοῦντα

"τὸν λάθρα τι κινοῦντα = the one secretly moving [*i.e., doing*] something"

vs

"τὸν λάθρη τι ποιοῦντα = the one doing something in secret"

Editors use both, they really have the same meaning.