

# **Eudaimonia and Makariotēs in the Letter to Menoeceus**

**Post by “Kalosyni” of May 30, 2026 at 5:24 PM**

This thread is for cross-referencing and further discussion on the blog article:

# Eudaimonia and Makariotēs in the Letter to Menoecus



Blog Article

## [Eudaimonia and Makariotēs in the Letter to Menoecus](#)

# Eudaimonia and Makariotēs in the Letter to Menoecus

Blog article by Kalosyni - The following is based on material developed for the Epicurean Ethics study group

## 1.1 Eudaimonia (εὐδαιμονία): Happiness and Well-being

Among the surviving writings of Epicurus, the *Letter to Menoecus* provides a summary of his ethical philosophy. At the heart of the letter stands the Greek word *eudaimonia* (εὐδαιμονία), commonly translated as "happiness," "well-being," or "human flourishing." The Greek term *eudaimonia*...



Kalosyni

May 30, 2026 at 4:11 PM

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## Post by “Cassius” of May 30, 2026 at 5:28 PM

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

For Epicurus, happiness is not a temporary feeling of pleasure or excitement but a stable condition of living well. In Epicurean thought, it refers to a life that is complete, satisfying, and free from suffering. It is not merely an emotion but an enduring state of flourishing.

In regard to "free from suffering" that does not mean *totally* free, right, because we have the example of Epicurus bring happy on his last days while still under great pain?

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## Post by “Kalosyni” of May 30, 2026 at 5:40 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

In regard to "free from suffering" that does not mean totally free, right, because we have the example of Epicurus bring happy on his last days while still under great pain?

I just now added in the word "mental"...so now it reads: *free from mental suffering*.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of May 30, 2026 at 5:51 PM**

Same question - must one be *totally* free of mental suffering in order to be happy?

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### **Post by "Kalosyni" of May 30, 2026 at 6:30 PM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Same question - must one be totally free of mental suffering in order to be happy?

Thanks for asking...

No, but free from unnecessary mental suffering.

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### **Post by "Don" of May 30, 2026 at 6:53 PM**

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Same question - must one be totally free of mental suffering in order to be happy?

Thanks for asking...

No, but free from unnecessary mental suffering.

Agreed. Once the false beliefs of the gods, death, and similar ones, we can have a firm foundation free from unnecessary mental pain, fear, and anxiety.

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## Post by “Don” of May 30, 2026 at 7:01 PM

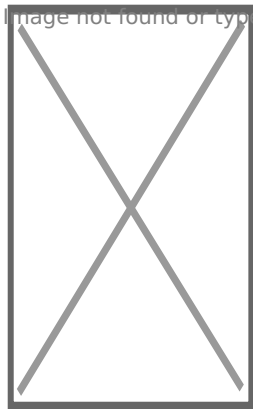
FWIW (from my Menoikeus commentary)

μακάριον

This word is often translated as "blessed, fortunate, wealthy, 'well-off.'" There appears to be no certain etymology of the root [makar] or the longer form [makarios/on]. It appears to possibly have something to do with being wealthy, either literally or figuratively. *Taking Ancient Mythology Economically* by Morris Silver has a very interesting section on the origins of the word. This is yet another example of the inadequacy of using one word to translate from one language to another.

See also

Image not found or type unknown



[Taking Ancient Mythology Economically](#)

books.google.com

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## Post by “Cassius” of May 31, 2026 at 3:03 AM

I just noticed something about this article that should have jumped out at me from the beginning. My failure to notice it reinforces to me that there's a test that above all others ought to be applied in evaluating any discussion of Epicurean ethics.

The test is: "How often and how clearly and how strongly does the discussion mention *pleasure*?"

So let me apply that test here, just as I hope people will apply that to my own articles on these subjects.

In this case, the first mention of pleasure occurs in the second paragraph, but only to exclude "temporary pleasure" from the meaning of Epicurean happiness.

The next mention of pleasure does not occur until the table near the end of the article, where the fourth of six items under happiness is stated to be "A stable life with many more pleasures than pains."

The only other and final mention is in the next-to-last paragraph, where "enjoys prudent pleasures" is the third of three items listed as allowing one to obtain happiness.

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Apparently even in the ancient world Diogenes of Oinoanda felt it necessary to "shout loudly" about this issue:

*But since, as I say, the issue is not «what is the means of happiness?» but «what is happiness and what is the ultimate goal of our nature?», I say both now and always, shouting out loudly to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that pleasure is the end of the best mode of life....*

And nothing could be more clear than the way Torquatus expressed it:

*[54] But if the encomium passed even on the virtues themselves, over which the eloquence of all other philosophers especially runs riot, can find no vent unless it be referred to pleasure, and pleasure is the only thing which invites us to the pursuit of itself, and attracts us by reason of its own nature, then there can be no doubt that of all things good it is the supreme and ultimate good, and that a life of happiness means nothing else but a life attended by pleasure.*

In other contexts here on the forum we are discussing the problem of the rhetorical choice to portray Epicurus as a philosopher of withdrawal, resignation, and primarily relief from pain, rather than as the philosopher whose ethics focuses on a life of pleasure and who said that:

*[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.*

Note that pleasure is the standard by which we judge every good. That means that pleasure is the standard by which we judge the existence and desirability of both happiness and blessedness - not the other way around.

The letter to Menoecus itself provides more than a few opportunities to stress the primary place of pleasure in Epicurean philosophy. When that doesn't happen, it's an important reminder to all of us that there are powerful pressures at work -- even among those of us who admire Epicurus -- that cause us to downplay the role of pleasure in discussing ethics.

At least here at EpicureanFriends, those pressures need to be called out and "shouted" down, just as Epicurus himself in writing to Menoecus pointed out that he himself was being misrepresented and misunderstood.

Certainly happiness and blessedness are important and useful terms, and it is helpful to talk about them. But we should never let pleasure lose its central focus. It's the means without which we would never even recognize happiness and blessedness as desirable in the first place.

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### Post by "Kalosyni" of May 31, 2026 at 6:41 AM

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

The test is: "How often and how clearly and how strongly does the discussion mention pleasure?"

[Cassius](#) I wonder if you somehow conceive of happiness being an unpleasant state??

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### Post by "Cassius" of May 31, 2026 at 6:58 AM

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

Cassius I wonder if you somehow conceive of happiness being an unpleasant state??

I don't think I understand the question. The only reason why happiness or blessedness or anything else is desirable in the first place is **BECAUSE** is is a state or condition of pleasure.

That's what the "war of words" with rest of the world is all about.

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### Post by "Kalosyni" of May 31, 2026 at 7:57 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

That's what the "war of words" with rest of the world is all about.

There are past ancient "wars of words", and there are current modern "wars of words".

I really think that in modern times pleasure is much more tied to "happiness" and "well-being", where as in ancient times "well-being" was thought to be tied solely to being virtuous.

One specific "war of words" which still continues from ancient times into current times, is with the word "pleasure"...as when you say the word "on the street" it seems to automatically point to excess and debauchery without regard for the consequences. This is one reason why I don't like including the word without a complete explanation of what is meant by it (according to Epicureans).

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### **Post by "Don" of May 31, 2026 at 8:43 AM**

I will be among the first to advocate for the word "pleasure" to be foremost in a description of Epicurus' philosophy, but I have come around to seeing this "war of words," among those sincerely trying to incorporate Epicurean philosophy into their lives, to be more divisive (on both sides) than it needs to be. Sure, the "bread and water" crowd need to be addressed, but...

From my perspective after reading and commenting and responding to Jack Gedney on Substack, I don't believe his view and mine (I am speaking ONLY for me here!) are really that far apart. To use an analogy I used over there, we're two blind men describing the elephant by focusing on the trunk and tusks respectively. Even Epicurus felt the need to explain what he meant by pleasure: *"whenever we say repeatedly that "pleasure is the τέλος," we do not say..."* Within "pleasure" there is tranquility, blessedness, painlessness, joy, delight, happiness. They're all related, because "the feelings are two." To give the "camp" that emphasizes the absence or removal of pain their due, Epicurus *does* teach us to work to remove the pain of fear of gods, death; remove the pain from empty desires. Why? To live a pleasant, happy, blessed life, but that also means a life free from unnecessary pain, fear, and anxiety. That "freedom from pain" doesn't necessarily equate immediately hyperbolically to asceticism or "living in a cave." The absence of pain IS pleasure, and the absence of pleasure IS pain. We can't have one of those without the other. Do I personally prefer focusing on the pleasure? Yes. Is there an insurmountable problem with focusing on the philosophy as giving one a life free from pain? No, I don't think so. But BOTH those positions require explanation. From my perspective, it's not enough to use "pleasure" as a shibboleth to identify the "real" Epicureans. All that said, I do not agree with those who say "Epicureans lived on bread, water, and the occasional cheese." I'll

push against that all day long. But I'm tiring of the fortified camps on both sides of this "war of words." Do misconceptions still exist out there? Absolutely. However, in the end, for those sincerely trying to incorporate Epicurean philosophy into their lives, I believe there is much more that unites us than divides us. I would much rather see a dialogue than a war.

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## Post by "Pacatus" of May 31, 2026 at 11:49 AM

The question (or at least **a** question), I think, is the purpose of engaging, philosophically, with "the rest of the world" - or anyone for that matter. Perhaps some hints (and recognition of limits) -

As Epicurus has been said to have put it: "Vain is the word of that philosopher by which no malady of mankind is healed. *For just as there is no profit in medicine unless it expels the diseases of the body, so there is none in philosophy either, unless it expels the suffering of the soul.*" [My italics. I think there is some question as to that attribution, though DeWitt accepts it?] That seems to me to be a pretty clear expression of purpose and intention, beyond just defending a particular philosophical corpus ("beyond," not "to the exclusion of") ...

That does not mean compromise, as per [VS29](#): "For I would certainly prefer, as I study Nature, to announce frankly what is beneficial to all people, even if none agrees with me, rather than to compromise with common opinions ..."

And [VS79](#): "The man who is serene causes no disturbance to himself or to another." I know that **I** need to strive for a more "contagious" serenity in philosophical (and other) discourse - something that I have failed at too many times in the past, as my old argumentative tendencies rear their heads 😞 (from some self-defensive fear?).

And from MFS's translation of Diogenes of Oinoanda:

"Moreover, we have set up this inscription **not for our own sake, but for your sake**, citizens, as a means of salvation for you, as we announced at the opening of the whole discourse. And we do not consider that it (i.e. the inscription) will be useful to certain people and not useful to certain people, but that it will be useful to all. ... [A]nd we contrived this in order that, even while [sitting] at home, [we might be able **to exhibit the] goods of philosophy**, not to all people here [indeed], but **to those of them who are civil-spoken**; and not least we did [this] for those who are called foreigners, although they are not really so." [My bolds and italics]

And MFS in the preface: "Diogenes, with his philanthropic and cosmopolitan attitudes and motives and his evident tranquillity in the face of illness, old age, and death, is himself a fine advertisement for the efficacy of the "medicines" he prescribes, and we should do well to pay

attention to his message at this time when the pursuit of wealth and power is rampant in many quarters, while philanthropy and cosmopolitanism often seem in short supply." [My italics]

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## Post by "Kalosyni" of May 31, 2026 at 12:11 PM

### [Quote from Don](#)

Within "pleasure" there is tranquility, blessedness, painlessness, joy, delight, happiness. They're all related, because "the feelings are two." To give the "camp" that emphasizes the absence or removal of pain their due, Epicurus does teach us to work to remove the pain of fear of gods, death; remove the pain from empty desires.

[Don](#) Your post got me thinking...perhaps we need to consider that there are "four feelings"...

1. Feelings of mental pleasure
2. Feelings of mental pain
3. Feelings of bodily pleasure
4. Feelings of bodily pain

So, if you remove mental pains, it doesn't necessarily add in bodily pleasure. Just like if you add in bodily pleasure, it doesn't necessary remove mental pains.

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## Post by "Pacatus" of May 31, 2026 at 12:19 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

The only reason why happiness or blessedness or anything else is desirable in the first place is BECAUSE is is a state or condition of pleasure.

I associate happiness *exactly* with pleasurable/pleasantness (kinetic or katastematic experience). And I suspect most people really do, though they might not use those words. In philosophical discussion, I think it's not difficult to point that out to them - unless they have some stubborn objection (is that not what even most Christians think they will experience in heaven?)

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## Post by “Don” of May 31, 2026 at 12:30 PM

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Don Your post got me thinking...perhaps we need to consider that there are "four feelings"...

1. Feelings of mental pleasure
2. Feelings of mental pain
3. Feelings of bodily pleasure
4. Feelings of bodily pain

I see where you're going. I would say more like:

1. Feelings
  1. Pleasure
    1. Mental
    2. Bodily
  2. Pain
    1. Mental
    2. Bodily

The words Epicurus used can sometimes cover all pain, both physical and mental. But there is still only pain and pleasure as ways to experience the world, with innumerable ways within those two.

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## Post by “Godfrey” of May 31, 2026 at 3:25 PM

### Quote from Kalosyni

So, if you remove mental pains, it doesn't *necessarily* add in bodily pleasure. Just like if you add in bodily pleasure, it doesn't necessary remove mental pains.

At some point separating the mind from the body makes no sense to me. The mind and body are intricately interwoven and continuously interact. If you have a lousy night's sleep (physical?

mental?) both your mind and body can feel out of sorts. "Hangry" is another example: hungry (body) and angry (mind) together.

Separating "pain" from "suffering" is a common way to prevent your thoughts from increasing your pain, whether the pain is mental or physical. So I think the word *necessarily* is important in the above quote. There's a whole spectrum of interaction between what we consider to be mental or physical, a fact that to my layman's understanding is being emphasized by current neuroscience.

As a practical matter it's useful to be able to understand the location, duration and intensity of your feelings in order to better pursue pleasure. But at some level separating mental and physical is the same as separating pleasure from absence of pain. But maybe I'm just a curmudgeon 😞

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### **Post by “Don” of May 31, 2026 at 4:12 PM**

I see where you're going, but to my mind there are strictly "mental" pains and pleasures, like:

- Dreading a public speaking engagement
- Anticipating a vacation
- Obsessing over an interaction you think went poorly
- Remembering a conversation with a friend

And similar mental thoughts that at least start in the mind. The dread can make you nauseous physically. The memory can feel "warm." But I would categorize these primarily as mental pleasure and pain.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of June 1, 2026 at 1:05 AM**

What I've attempted to say is that it's a matter of location. You can experience pain in your stomach and throat as well as painful thoughts, all at the same time. Or you could experience any one of them separately. You can add pleasure/ remove pain from any and all of them by using specific remedies.

This is a way of saying that pleasure is pleasure, without putting one above the other, in order to counter the "absence of pain" argument or the "ascetic" argument. You evaluate

pleasures/pains by intensity, location and duration.

Taking the previous examples: 1) the dread can show up in the mind, but at the same time in the chest or the gut. 2) anticipation is primarily located in the mind, but at the same time can cause a feeling of giddiness or increased energy throughout the body. 3) obsessing occurs in the mind, but also possibly in the gut or chest. 4) Remembering a conversation with a friend can either be pleasant or painful, depending on the subject and context, and either way may elicit feelings in the body.

An illustration is that the ancients argued whether the brain was in the gut or the chest, apparently because bodily feelings are so associated with thoughts.

The last few days my body has felt pain free (a rare occurrence!) and this is giving me mental pleasure. The feelings move in both directions. A good workout elicits all sorts of feelings in a variety of locations, and you could say that those in the mind and those in the body are constantly changing in intensity, location and duration.

A good cup of coffee not only tastes good, but that good taste brings mental pleasure in response to the taste. It also might bring physical pleasure in the brain once the caffeine kicks in. Which in turn could bring the mental pleasure of increased alertness.... &c

So, practically speaking we can use the mental model of mental and physical feelings, but I think that if you dig deeper, the model of intensity, location and duration is more accurate. And possibly could bridge the gap between proponents of "absence of pain" vs those following "pleasure".

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### **Post by "Godfrey" of June 1, 2026 at 7:10 PM**

I'll go further out on a limb and posit that *EP is the study of nature* (Epicurus advised the study of nature though I don't know that he went so far as to say his philosophy *is* the study of nature), then you arrive at pleasure as the goal through intense examination of pleasure and pain and how they occur in the body and mind. This is perhaps how you come to an understanding of intensity, location and duration (ILD for short).

Labeling mental and physical pleasures may come either before or after in this process, but a detailed understanding comes from understanding ILD.

Having a format (such as Lucretius) that explicitly introduces the philosophy as the study of nature, and from there gets to pleasure as the goal might be a useful modern pedagogy.

## Post by “Don” of June 3, 2026 at 12:10 PM

### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

Epicurus advised the study of nature though I don't know that he went so far as to say his philosophy *is* the study of nature

I see where you're going. I don't think we'll find a definitive "my philosophy is the study of nature" but [PD11/12](#) comes close (*emphasis added*)

[PD11/12](#). *If we had never been molested by alarms at celestial and atmospheric phenomena, nor by the misgiving that death somehow affects us, nor by neglect of the proper limits of pains and desires, we should have had no need to study natural science (φυσιολογίας physiologias). It would be impossible to banish fear on matters of the highest importance, if a man did not know the nature of the whole universe, but lived in dread of what the legends tell us. Hence without the study of nature (φυσιολογίας) there was no enjoyment of unmixed pleasures.*

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## Post by “Pacatus” of June 3, 2026 at 12:40 PM

[Don](#) : But isn't the standard tripartite division physics, ethics and canon? What am I missing?

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## Post by “Don” of June 3, 2026 at 2:59 PM

### [Quote from Pacatus](#)

[Don](#) : But isn't the standard tripartite division physics, ethics and canon? What am I missing?

Touché. Good point. And *physics* is the study of nature. However, physics was a fundamental component of philosophy for everyone. From Diogenes Laertius' Lives 1:18:

*Philosophy has three parts, physics, ethics, and dialectic or logic. Physics is the part concerned with the universe and all that it contains; ethics that concerned with life and all that has to do with us; while the processes of reasoning employed by both form the province of dialectic.*

*Physics flourished down to the time of Archelaus; ethics, as we have said, started with Socrates; while dialectic goes as far back as Zeno of Elea. In ethics there have been ten schools: the Academic, the Cyrenaic, the Elian, the Megarian, the Cynic, the Eretrian, the Dialectic, the Peripatetic, the Stoic, and the Epicurean.*

I firmly agree that Epicurus sees the study of nature as fundamental, but other schools would probably have said something similar. That said, Epicurus also wrote to Herodotus that:

"Hence, since such a course is of service to all who take up *natural science* (φυσιολογία), I, who devote to the subject my continuous energy and reap the calm enjoyment of a life like this, have prepared for you just such an epitome and manual of the doctrines as a whole

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### **Post by "Pacatus" of June 3, 2026 at 5:49 PM**

Yes, unlike, say Plato or Aristotle, Epicurus' ethics are derived from a proper understanding of nature. I might put it thus:

Φύσις (φυσιολογία) ⇒ συμπερασματολογία [?] (logical inference\*) ⇒ ἠθικός (ethics).

Nature as a whole (and our place in it) is the guiding ground, rather than human reason abstracted therefrom. And that natural sequence may be part of what the canon is about?

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\* By "logical inference" here, I mean that Epicurus - as opposed to other schools - seems to have employed a kind of precursor to modern inductive reasoning (e.g., regarding atoms and the void), whereas the Stoics - e.g. Chrysippus - seem to have thought that their deductive syllogisms could yield empirical truth.

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### **Post by "Don" of June 3, 2026 at 7:51 PM**

#### [Quote from Pacatus](#)

unlike, say Plato or Aristotle, Epicurus' ethics are derived from a proper understanding of nature

Nicely worded! Yes.

(LOL I'm sure Plato and Aristotle would beg to differ, but I don't think that have a leg to stand on with their arguments)