

# Priorities: How To Rank "Pursuing Pleasure" vs. "Avoiding Pain"

Post by "Cassius" of February 5, 2019 at 7:10 AM

And because I don't want to leave my own view to question, I hereby offer this music video. Although I don't care personally for "country" music, the only issue I have with the lyrics from an Epicurean perspective is that "the good book" would be the letters of Epicurus and the poem of Lucretius!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JjRXGqRofE4> (Lyrics below)

[Cassius Amicus](#) Also, note that the question is phrased "as a general guide to life." Of course every situation is different, and we sometime choose pain in order to pursue pleasure, etc., but I do believe it is valid to ask about a "general attitude" because in many questions the outcome is very difficult to predict and we must guesstimate according to our priorities.

**Poster R:** You now give your answer, which was not one of the options you provided, i.e., sometimes choosing pleasure is wiser and sometimes avoiding pain is wiser. The option that comes closest to agreeing with that state of affairs is #3.

[Elli Pensa R,](#) sorry, but we avoid pain due to the goal of pleasure. Pleasure is the wise guidance, and for pleasure we are doing everything. Since, when

[#sometimes](#) (note : sometimes it is not equal with the usual/the common and the everyday happening) we are in pain, we have the power to recollect the past pleasures and the expectation of future pleasures.

And here is how is going the issue PD 4. "Pain does not last continuously in the flesh, but the acutest pain is there for a very short time, and even that which just exceeds the pleasure in the flesh does not continue for many days at once. But chronic illnesses permit a predominance of pleasure over pain in the flesh". And the ES 19. "Forgetting the good that has been, he has become old this very day".

[Cassius Amicus](#)

Yes of course I agree with Elli's response here. I see no conflict or separation at all between "pursuing pleasure wisely" and "pursuing pleasure." I value wisdom because, and only because,

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/715-priorities-how-to-rank-pursuing-pleasure-vs-avoiding-pain/?postID=2069#post2069>

it is useful in achieving pleasure. Were wisdom not useful in achieving pleasurable living, or if someone were to submit to me a definition of wisdom not useful for producing pleasure, I would "spit on them" as Epicurus would spit "on the beautiful, unless it bring pleasure."

All this follows directly from the basic premise that there are no motivating factors in life whatsoever - no feelings - other than pleasure and pain. As I am a human and not a "god," I gladly embrace pains where necessary so as to experience pleasures.

From this perspective the issue is not even up to debate. To deprive oneself of pleasure in life for the purpose of avoiding all pain is as perverted a goal as I can imagine, short only of immediately embracing death - a death cult itself.

And to complete the circle, that is exactly how I see the forced equivalence of "absence of pain" as "the highest pleasure" - as not accidental, but a wilful perversion of Epicurean theory for the purpose of making it revolting - and therefore impossible to adopt - for any normal human being. I as regularly argue I believe Epicurus expected his philosophy be taken as a whole and not piecemeal, and once the premise was established that there are only two feelings, pleasure and pain, the measure of experience (or presence) of one of them becomes by definition the measure of the absence of the other. This measurement equivalence is important for understanding the flaws in Platonic argument against pleasure, but it certainly was never intended to be understood as a complete definition of the type of pleasures being experienced by the normal person in normal life.

To paraphrase Torquatus, Epicurus refused to admit any necessity for argument or discussion to prove that pleasure is desirable and pain to be avoided. These facts, he thought, are perceived by the senses, as that fire is hot, snow white, honey sweet, none of which things need be proved by elaborate argument: it is enough merely to draw attention to them.

It would therefore be absurd to suggest that the man who considered it totally unnecessary to even discuss the desirability of pleasure considered the term "absence of pain" to be a full and complete definition of "pleasure." "Without pain" and "without disturbance" tell us nothing more about the nature of any pleasure that we are experiencing than "without ketchup" tells us about what food we are eating.

Song Lyrics:

He said I was in my early forties, with a lot of life before me

And one moment came that stopped me on a dime

I spent most of the next days, looking at the x-rays

Talking bout' the options and talking bout' sweet times.

I asked him when it sank in, that this might really be the real end

How's it hit 'cha when you get that kind of news?

Man what did ya do?

He said

I went skydiving

I went rocky mountain climbing

I went two point seven seconds on a bull named Fu Man Chu

And I loved deeper

And I spoke sweeter

And I gave forgiveness I'd been denyin'

And he said some day I hope you get the chance

To live like you were dyin'

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He said I was finally the husband, that most the time I wasn't

And I became a friend, a friend would like to have

And all of a sudden goin' fishin, wasn't such an imposition

And I went three times that year I lost my dad

Well I finally read the good book, and I took a good long hard look

At what I'd do if I could do it all again

And then

I went skydiving

I went rocky mountain climbing

I went two point seven seconds on a bull named Fu Man Shu

And I loved deeper

And I spoke sweeter

And I gave forgiveness I'd been denyin'

And he said some day I hope you get the chance

To live like you were dyin'

Like tomorrow was the end

And ya got eternity to think about what to do with it

What should you do with it

What can I do with it

What would I do with it

Skydiving

I went rocky mountain climbing

I went two point seven seconds on a bull named Fu Man Chu

And man I loved deeper

And I spoke sweeter

And I watched an eagle as it was flyin'

And he said some day I hope you get the chance

To live like you were dyin'

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