

# How Would Epicurus Analyze The Slogan "Live Free Or Die" As An Ethical Guide?

Post by "Cassius" of December 5, 2024 at 10:42 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

didn't articulate any definitive response

Well I think this and most all other questions get resolved something like this:

1 - Because there are no supernatural forces or absolute forms to tell us otherwise, we've chosen to use the word "pleasure" as the ultimate term to describe all that is desirable in life, including all forms of desirable experience, mental or physical or any other adverb or adjective anyone would like to apply as a qualifier. The single word "Pleasure" includes them all.

2 - We should desire to continue to live so long as we can reasonably expect that the pleasurable experiences in our life will outweigh the experiences that are non-pleasurable (which means painful). This "calculation" is a totally subjective judgment in our own minds. We can make general statements about the way most people tend to think (most people tend to like vanilla ice cream) but no one has supernatural or absolute "moral" authority to make decisions for any other adult.

3 - You can argue about children and other edge cases but we're talking about adult responsible people in this analysis. That's why it is also important to acknowledge that from the Epicurean perspective all actions are not deterministic, and that it is proper for us to praise some things and blame others. You also have to consider the rules of society here, and what is illegal and legal, but no one should confuse the standard of "what society says is ok" with a standard of "right vs. wrong."

4 - Hard questions exist, such as cases where (1) we might choose not to intervene to save their lives, but if we did so we wouldn't forgive ourselves and thereafter suffer overriding mental pain, or (2) we face incurable highly painful disease or even pain from old age, or (3) any similar extreme situation where the outcomes are beyond our control, and the only option we have to stay alive would entail mental or physical torture that we don't think we could endure.

4 - In my view it seems pretty clear that the only way to make decision in cases such as listed in (3) is for we ourselves to make our best estimate of all of the consequences that each choice entails. Then we ourselves have to decide whether any future pleasures (of any kind) we might experience would be worth the expected pains (of any kind) that would come from our choice of action. There are no supernatural gods, no future reward or punishment, and no absolute rules

which tell us what to decide - we have to make that decision ourselves.

I think that's the general rule Epicurus is setting out, and that's why alarm bells start going off in my mind whenever I hear anyone emphasize "tranquility" or "simple pleasures" --- or emphasize the reverse, "excitement" or "luxuries" -- that would override the general rule.

The general rule has to be clear or else there's no way to avoid confusion when we actually have to make these kinds of decisions.