

## PD 25 meaning? by Woolf (2004)

Post by “wbernys” of May 10, 2026 at 6:20 PM

Hi all. Principal Doctrine 25 is a notoriously hard doctrine to understand. This is really only the Principal Doctrine i have trouble understanding and as a good Epicurean i want to understand it.

Cooper (1999) thinks it is evidence that Epicurus is not a psychologist hedonist, however there is Woolf's (2004) idea that this is actually an affirmation of psychological Hedonism, which i find convincing and wanted to share.

He translates it as follows: "If you shall not on every occasion ascribe [or: refer, ἐπανοίσεις] each of your actions to the goal (τέλος;) of nature, but tum prematurely (προκαταστρέψεις)29 when making pursuit or avoidance to some other [goal] (εἰς ἄλλο τι), your actions will not correspond with your words". (Pg.17)

He explains this by saying. "What Principal Doctrine XXV teaches is that, **never mind what you say your goals are**, and that your words indicate a turning away from nature's goal to some other: **your actions will belie your words. You will still be acting in such a way as to maximise your freedom from pain and distress nonetheless.** Reference to any other motive than this on a given occasion is premature. Of the agent who turns aside, Epicurus says literally "your deeds will not follow your words" (οὐκ ἔσσονται σοι τοῖς λόγοις αἱ πράξεις ἀκόλουθοι.). Your words, that is, may have switched allegiance; but your deeds will not accompany them. You will remain, in your actions, a seeker after nature's goal" (Pg. 19)

Basically it says that "no matter how much the Stoics like to talk about virtue in of itself", there actions are still ultimately motivated by a fear of pain and desire to remove mental disturbance, even if they don't admit it. Kind of like how the Skeptic says that nothing can be known and those who deny free will say all choices are predetermined but does not actually live like this, their actions do not follow their words. Curious if others agree with this.