

PD 25 meaning? by Woolf (2004)

Post by "Cassius" of May 11, 2026 at 1:22 PM

Please do Don as I don't want Wberny's to think I am singling him out! 😊

This is one of my most long-running issues with how Epicurean philosophy is presented. Saying that "the goal is absence of pain" can be explained in a perfectly logical way. However taken in isolation the slogan is apt to be misinterpreted by people who do not understand that there are only two feelings, that if you are not experiencing the one then you are experiencing the other, and that saying you want "absence of pain" means you want pleasure in the full sense of the word, including the active pleasures of joy and delight, rather than just a feeling of "nothingness."

But til my dying day I will remain convinced that a very large number of people in today's world are not interpreting the full meaning in that way. They don't read Torquatus arguing with Cicero about it, and they don't read David Sedley's "Inferential basis of Epicurean Ethics" explaining how Epicurus can apply the same logic he applies to atoms and void to pleasure and pain, and as a result they are apt to say "Epicurus is saying the same thing as the Buddhists! Epicurus is saying get rid of all ups and downs of life just like the Stoics! We're all just one big happy family trying to rise above the siren calls of the body to achieve a blessed state of absolute spirit contemplating absolute wisdom! (Or some variation of the above.)"

So I am all in favor of saying "the sun is the size it appears to be" and "pleasure is the absence of pain" and "[death is nothing to us](#)." But I want to be sure that my audience has a full explanation of why I say that, and if I'm pretty sure they don't understand it, then explanation is necessary or else you can cause more harm than good. I don't want anyone thinking I am flat-earth idiot who thinks that the sun is the size of a basketball, I don't want anyone thinking I am advocating the life of a hermit in a cave on bread and water, and I don't want anyone to think I am advocating suicide because I don't care about life.