

Ongoing Discussion of Jack Gedney's "Untroubled" Substack Blog

Post by "Patrikios" of May 19, 2026 at 10:38 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I try not to judge Tim O'Keefe or really even Emily Austin as primarily advocates for Epicurean philosophy. As far as I know they are professional educators and they aren't hired or for all I know allowed to be the kind of advocates for the philosophy that I attribute to the members of the school such as Lucretius or Diogenes of Oinoanda in the ancient world.

[Cassius](#)

There is a Comment to Geddy's posting about O'Keefe, by **D.S. Griffin**, which follows much of the statements by you and [Don](#) .

Quote

O'Keefe's work is detailed and documented and he is a serious scholar. His papers on friendship, natural desires, and wealth are all worth the time to read. But the framing in his paper on Achieving Tranquility is problematic.

O'Keefe writes that Epicurean hedonism is primarily about the reduction of pain.

That single sentence does real damage. Epicurus was explicit. Pleasure is the beginning and end of the blessed life. Not pain management. Not suffering reduction. Pleasure. Putting pain at the center rather than pleasure doesn't just shift the emphasis - it quietly imports a Buddhist or Stoic prism onto a philosophy that was built in direct opposition to both.

This isn't a minor semantic quibble. A reader who absorbs that Epicureanism is primarily about reducing pain walks away with a completely different philosophy than the one Epicurus actually taught. That framing makes Epicureanism sound like damage control for a life that is fundamentally difficult. The actual philosophy is a full throated argument that pleasure is the natural guide of every living thing from birth and that a life organized around that fact is genuinely available to anyone willing to think clearly about what they actually need.

Epicureanism keeps getting filtered through frameworks that dilute it. Buddhist suffering. Stoic virtue in disguise. Humanist civic obligation. Academic hedging that sands down the sharpest edges. O'Keefe's framing here is a milder version of the same problem. Epicurean philosophy doesn't need rehabilitation or translation into more respectable terms. It needs to be stated as Epicurus stated it.

[Pleasure is the guide of life.](#)

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Here is the response from the author of the post, **Jack Gedney**:, which provides the direct quotes from Epicurus, supporting O'Keefe's premise.

Quote

I think O'Keefe is being entirely true to Epicurus here. The redefinition of pleasure (compared to the popular conception) as the absence of pain is front and center in the core ethical texts.

Principal Doctrine 3 states that "***The greatest magnitude of pleasure possible is the removal of all suffering.***" The Letter to Menoeceus 128 says "***Everything we do is for this purpose: the avoidance of pain in our body and fear in our mind*** ." A few lines later comes the sentence you quote, but the full version says this: "***For it is when we feel pain from the absence of pleasure that we require pleasure; when all our pain has been relieved, we need no further pleasure. This is why we say that pleasure is the beginning and end of a blessed life.***"

As you note, O'Keefe is a serious scholar who makes sure to document his claims well, and there is plenty of evidence for this emphasis in the original texts. The ancient Epicureans clearly talked extensively about pain management, increasing security, and reducing painful emotions, while relegating positive pleasures to minor "variation" rather than actual amplification of happiness.

How is the response from Geddy supporting O'Keefe not a valid viewpoint on Epicurus' writings?