

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

Post by "Titus" of May 20, 2026 at 8:22 AM

[Quote from wbernys](#)

Does Epicurus mean natural as innate or natural as in nature approves of it? I think Tim O'Keefe misreads natural desires as meaning innate, whereas it actually means "actually helps with pleasure", this is why natural desires can turn into vain or unnatural desires if they become sources of stress or likely to cause harm. It's natural and should be pursued when bringing more pleasure than pain but unnatural when not and should be shunned. There is also the fact that I think Epicurus just outright disagrees that sex or lavish food is necessary for happiness and can't be eliminated and he seems to say the opposite below.

My interpretation has always been that of the natural desires being key factors to focus on. I somewhat would agree that they are "innate" in the sense that they are indiscutible and inherently connected with our being. Not caring for one's health and security/social connections is disastrous. I am confronted with these points every single day, may it be at work, outside or within my social sphere.

Instead, people focus on anything else and do not realize on what basis their house is built on. My life isn't perfect either, but I realize that focusing on natural desires and meditating (finally transferring into action) these points is a great source of realizing what really matters. From there on I refer to Diogenes from Oinoanda:

"when the emotions which disturb the soul are removed, those which produce pleasure enter into it to take their place"

Diogenes of Oinoanda, fragment 34

[Quote from Cassius](#)

The purpose of this forum is to study and promote [Classical Epicurean Philosophy](#) as Epicurus taught it. It is extremely important for us to grapple with Epicurus' framing of the term "absence of pain" and explain how Epicurus is about PLEASURE - which can indeed be defined for certain important uses as "absence of pain" or "reduction of pain." But to place PAIN in the center of the philosophy rather than PLEASURE is not what the ancient Epicureans did, and it's not consistent with the mission of this forum to allow for the regular advocacy of that position here.

Maybe this discussion about "absence of pain" is an "English speaker thing". I remember Epicurus receiving a more nuanced interpretation in e.g. German literature. The "absence of pain" discussion is known there as well, but Epicurus is still the philosopher of pleasure (sometimes rather translated to "joy" which is perhaps a good term to include both the status of a healthy being and experiencing appreciated feelings). Obviously, there is just weak connection in the German language between "Epicurean" and food, perhaps this is also a root why English interpreters might dislike the term pleasure.

Generally speaking, in German literature Epicurus is understood as a wise man who taught how to live a joyful life, focussing on the "little" but important aspects while skipping disturbance.

I agree with you that the "absence of pain" might have something to do with other philosophies. Today, Stoicism, Buddhism, even the monotheistic religions are marketed as something that can reduce stress and leads to less pain in life.

There is also the point of "reducing pain" being more doctrinally neutral than "promoting pleasure". Declaring pleasure as an end in itself is like appreciating Epicurus and his philosophy way too much, elevating him to a saint.

It sounds very stark, but perhaps people sometimes deliberately misread Epicurean philosophy or study it just as being worth a superficial reading. A wide range of authors e.g. Karl Popper, Friedrich Nietzsche, Albert Camus relate to some Epicurean content just to conclude that their own thought is of bigger importance. Okay, this is how egos and new traditions of thought are formed. 😄