

# Discussion of Blog Article - "Why It Is Incorrect to Say Epicurean Philosophy Is Primarily About 'Absence of Pain'"

Post by “Cassius” of May 20, 2026 at 2:56 PM

Again, Todd, thank you very much for the suggestion. The new section below has been added.

## Argument 6: The Ancient World Already Had a Name for “Absence of Pain” as the Goal — and It Was Not “Epicurean”

This argument cuts to the heart of the historical record in a way that cannot be dismissed as a matter of interpretation.

The ancient philosophical world was perfectly aware that someone had proposed “absence of pain” — freedom from all annoyance — as the ultimate goal of life. They did not attribute this position to Epicurus. They attributed it to **Hieronymus of Rhodes**, a Peripatetic philosopher who lived approximately 290–230 BC, after Epicurus, and who had Epicurus’s works available to him when he formulated his own position.

The ancient sources are explicit. Clement of Alexandria, in his [Stromateis](#) (Book II, Chapter 21, sections 127–128), records the ancient division of philosophical schools by their stated goals, explicitly placing Epicurus in the category of those who proposed pleasure as the end, and Hieronymus of Rhodes in the separate category of those who proposed absence of pain as the end. Cicero reports the same division independently in multiple works. In *Academic Questions*, he states it directly:

Quote

*“Hieronymus placed it [the chief good] in being free from all annoyance.”*

And in *On Ends*, Cicero stages a direct debate in which Hieronymus is explicitly named as the philosopher who held that “freedom from pain” and “pleasure” are two different things — and that “freedom from pain” is the true chief good — while Torquatus, the Epicurean spokesman, argues that pleasure is the goal and that freedom from pain is simply another name for the same condition, not a separate or superior alternative.

Several points follow from this with force:

- **Epicurus and Hieronymus are listed as distinct positions by the ancient sources.** No ancient commentator collapses them. The difference between “pleasure is the goal” and “absence of pain is the goal” was understood in antiquity as the difference between two different philosophers holding two genuinely different views — not as two formulations of the same philosophy.
- **Hieronymus came after Epicurus and chose deliberately to differ.** He had access to Epicurus’s texts. He was not confused about what Epicurus taught. He disagreed — and the ancient world recorded the disagreement as a matter of philosophical fact.
- **Epicurus would have been fully aware of the “absence of pain” option and chose not to adopt it.** The position was available to him. He defined pleasure — not mere freedom from pain — as the goal, the beginning, and the end of the blessed life. This was not an oversight; it was a deliberate choice between two positions that the ancient world clearly distinguished.
- **The person who today attributes “absence of pain” to Epicurus is not reporting Epicurean philosophy.** They are reporting Hieronymian philosophy and attaching Epicurus’s name to it in error. The ancient world would have recognized this immediately — not because the texts are ambiguous, but because the distinction between the two positions was the kind of thing that philosophers in antiquity took pains to establish and record precisely.

The practical implication is direct: if you maintain that “absence of pain” rather than pleasure is the true goal of life, you are not an Epicurean. You are a Hieronymian. The irony is precise: Hieronymus of Rhodes deliberately rejected Epicurus’s position — pleasure as the goal — and substituted his own: absence of pain. That substitution is what the ancient world recorded and attributed to Hieronymus. Today, Hieronymus is forgotten and Epicurus’s name endures — but the “absence of pain” position that Hieronymus invented as a departure from Epicurus has been wrongly reattached to Epicurus himself. Epicurus has been tagged with his own successor’s rejection of his own teaching. The confusion should be corrected wherever it appears.

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