

# An Exchange On The Issue of How Much Pain To Accept

Post by "Cassius" of January 10, 2018 at 7:11 PM



A suggestion for the list of reasons to study Epicurus:



That happiness is not obtained by accumulating wealth, power and fame, beyond what we need for self preservation and helping our friends. Limiting our desires is key to the philosophy. This goes against everything our consumeristic societies tell us to do.[1](#)

**Cassius AmicusGroup Admin** Thanks Aurelius. For those who have not seen us debate this before, I would say that the formulation **\*\*beyond what we need for self preservation and helping our friends\*\*** needs work to make it more accurate, but in general I agree with you that Epicurus has important things to say on this issue. Everyone can fine-tune their own list but as number 12 for this purpose I have added:

(12) Epicurus will teach you that happiness is not generally obtained by pursuing goals of wealth, power, fame, or material possessions, and that it is necessary to understand our limitations and adjust our desires accordingly.[1](#)

**Aurelius Espinoza** I purposely mentioned self preservation and friendship. Friendship is absolutely key for our philosophy, and Epicurus has often been accused of being an egoist when the opposite is true. I added "self preservation" because an Epicurean must learn to be content with the bare minimum in case he has no access to luxury. That is not to say that luxury must be rejected in all circumstances, just that he must be psychologically prepared for crisis situations.[1](#)

**Cassius AmicusGroup Admin** "an Epicurean must learn to be content with the bare minimum in case he has no access to luxury" Just curious, are you a "survivalist"?  

**Aurelius Espinoza** Not even close   [1](#)

**Aurelius Espinoza** I mean that if I'm short on money, I'll be content with going out less to restaurants and movies. If I can't afford a big house, I'll be content with a small studio, etc.[1](#)

**Aurelius Espinoza** If I happen to come across a lot of money, than I'd spend it on a trip to Japan and invite a friend or something like that. But if getting that money means I have to do a stressful job that i hate and associate with difficult people, I can do without the money

**Cassius AmicusGroup Admin** I absolutely agree with that kind of calculation, and the way you expressed it. So we have no essential difference, I think. But there are at least two errors a lot of people make to warn about in making a general list: (1) some ascetic mentalities who do disagree, and who will never accept [VS63](#) that you can err by being too frugal just like you can err by being too luxurious, and (2) some absolutist mentalities who think there is a "one size fits all" level of living that everyone should seek to achieve in every circumstance.

**Cassius Amicus** Ok the second example though is more nuanced. When you say: "If I happen to come across a lot of money, than I'd spend it on a trip to Japan and invite a friend or something like that. But if getting that money means I have to do a stressful job that i hate and associate with difficult people, I can do without the money." Part 1 we fully agree. But part 2 is very difficult to assess. I you have to do that job the rest of your life, I fully agree. But what if you only have to do that job for a week in order to earn the money for the trip to Japan? How long would the trip have to last for it to be worthwhile? I bet a lot of people would properly choose to do the job for a week in exchange for the trip to Japan.

I started to do a separate post on exactly this question so thanks for advancing the ball!

**Cassius AmicusGroup Admin** There are some people who argue that ANY additional pain in ANY circumstance is not to be chosen, because our goal is "absence of pain." That formulation has to be unwound in many different ways before it can be properly assessed, but the way most people who would say that mean it, they would be flat wrong (from the Epicurean viewpoint). As the letter to Menoecus says, we sometimes choose pain when greater pleasure is gained that way, so no one should ever think that that could be the Epicurean position. But I think a significant number of people are confused by the "absence of pain" discussion to think that "never accept any pain" is what Epicurus meant.