

# Attitudes: Stoic Gloom vs. Epicurean Sunshine

Post by “Cassius” of January 21, 2020 at 6:54 AM

Some people look at the pain of life, think that escaping pain is all that matters, develop a "gloomy" disposition, and even regularly question whether they would have been better off if they had never been born. It is probably fair to say that this is typical of a personality that strongly embraces Stoicism, while the Epicurean personality affirms that the joy in life is well worth the pain.

You can find this division discussed in [Thomas Jefferson's Head and Heart letter](#) (in which Jefferson sides with the heart):

"Heart. And what more sublime delight than to mingle tears with one whom the hand of heaven hath smitten! To watch over the bed of sickness, & to beguile its tedious & its painful moments! To share our bread with one to whom misfortune has left none! This world abounds indeed with misery: to lighten its burthen we must divide it with one another. But let us now try the virtues of your mathematical balance, & as you have put into one scale the burthen of friendship, let me put its comforts into the other. When languishing then under disease, how grateful is the solace of our friends! How are we penetrated with their assiduities & attentions! How much are we supported by their encouragements & kind offices! When heaven has taken from us some object of our love, how sweet is it to have a bosom whereon to recline our heads, & into which we may pour the torrent of our tears! Grief, with such a comfort, is almost a luxury! In a life where we are perpetually exposed to want & accident, yours is a wonderful proposition, to insulate ourselves, to retire from all aid, & to wrap ourselves in the mantle of self-sufficiency! For assuredly nobody will care for him who care for nobody. **But friendship is precious, not only in the shade but in the sunshine of life; & thanks to a benevolent arrangement of things, the greater part of life is sunshine.**"

And you can also find in Chapter Ten of [A Few Days in Athens](#), where Frances Wright suggests that Epicurus would say:

"Should we, then, to avoid the evil, forego the good? Shall we shut love from our hearts, that we may not feel the pain of his departure? No; happiness forbids it. Experience forbids it. Let him who hath laid on the pyre the dearest of his soul, who hath washed the urn with the bitterest tears of grief — let him say if his heart hath ever formed the wish that it had never shrined within it him whom he now deplures. Let him say if the pleasures of the sweet communion of his former days doth not still live in his remembrance. If he love not to recall the image of the departed, the tones of his voice, the words of his discourse, the deeds of his kindness, the amiable virtues of his life. If, while he weeps the loss of his friend, he smiles not to think that he once possessed him. He who knows not friendship, knows not the purest

pleasure of earth. Yet if fate deprive us of it, though we grieve, we do not sink; Philosophy is still at hand, and she upholds us with fortitude. And think, my sons, perhaps in the very evil we dread, there is a good; perhaps the very uncertainty of the tenure gives it value in our eyes; perhaps all our pleasures take their zest from the known possibility of their interruption. What were the glories of the sun, if we knew not the gloom of darkness? What the refreshing breezes of morning and evening, if we felt not the fervors of noon?

Should we value the lovely-flower, if it bloomed eternally; or the luscious fruit, if it hung always on the bough? Are not the smiles of the heavens more beautiful in contrast with their frowns, and the delights of the seasons more grateful from their vicissitudes? Let us then be slow to blame nature, for perhaps in her apparent errors there is hidden a wisdom. Let us not quarrel with fate, for perhaps in our evils lie the seeds of our good. Were our body never subject to sickness, we might be insensible to the joy of health. Were our life eternal, our tranquillity might sink into inaction. Were our friendship not threatened with interruption, it might want much of its tenderness. This, then, my sons, is our duty, for this is our interest and our happiness; to seek our pleasures from the hands of the virtues, and for the pain which may befall us, to submit to it with patience, or bear up against it with fortitude. To walk, in short, through life innocently and tranquilly; and to look on death as its gentle termination, which it becomes us to meet with ready minds, neither regretting the past, nor anxious for the future.”

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## Post by “Mike Anyayahan” of January 21, 2020 at 11:33 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Some people look at the pain of life, think that escaping pain is all that matters, develop a "gloomy" disposition, and even regularly question whether they would have been better off if they had never been born. It is probably fair to say that this typical of a personality that strongly embraces Stoicism, while the Epicurean personality affirms that the joy in life is well worth the pain.

When I used to be active in one FB Stoicism group, I noticed that even stoics there are divided in this issue. Some are gloomy. Others are joyful amidst pain especially for those who incorporate stoicism into cognitive behavioral therapy.

I just can't understand until now how pain and joy can exist at the same moment. I practiced it before, and it didn't work for me. When I was jobless for quite awhile, I suffered from depression. None of those stoic applications helped me. What cured me was the pleasure I got when landing a new job. This is what makes me believe that practical Epicureanism makes more sense than practical stoicism. 😊

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## Post by “Charles” of January 21, 2020 at 11:49 PM

[Mike Anyayahan](#)

The indifference of Stoicism has a hard time keeping up with the Swerve of Epicurean Philosophy 😊

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## Post by “Mike Anyayahan” of January 22, 2020 at 1:26 AM

[Quote from Charles](#)

The indifference of Stoicism has a hard time keeping up with the Swerve of Epicurean Philosophy

That's also what I told them, but they replied to me that they do not claim to be indifferent. They said that it is the surrounding that is indifferent, and they only have control of their mind whether to affirm an indifferent object as painful or annoying. They gave me an example that when a pen falls on the ground, I shouldn't get annoyed because it is indifferent and does not have any intention to annoy me. Or I can say that it is destined to annoy me so I better not be. This is why I asked them how we could control our mind and feelings toward something if the external world is highly deterministic and uncontrollable. It would be like fooling myself that I am in control of everything.

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## Post by “Cassius” of January 22, 2020 at 6:14 AM

i am perfectly prepared to grant that words can be used in special ways and that we shouldn't rush to judgment. Epicurus clearly used special meanings for words like "gods" which have to be taken into account.

But the accumulated thrust of stoicism is also very clear - words like "Indifference" - "apathy" - "stoic" all have taken on generic meanings which cannot all be so far from the truth. The stoics were pretty clear about what they clearly were getting at, and what they were getting at was pretty repulsive, even in the form that it is used today covered over as "Therapy."

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**Post by “Mike Anyayahan” of January 22, 2020 at 9:25 AM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

The stoics were pretty clear about what they clearly were getting at, and what they were getting at was pretty repulsive, even in the form that it is used today covered over as "Therapy."

The problem with their notion of therapy is that they want people to become numb with the reality. It's a total suppression of sensation.

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**Post by “Cassius” of January 22, 2020 at 9:39 AM**

Amen! Anesthesia is not "therapy" at all. It is dumbing and numbing yourself down to destruction.

And all for what? For "VIRTUE"!