

# Opportunities for Activism And Collaboration Here At EpicureanFriends.com

**Post by "Cassius" of April 2, 2020 at 9:59 AM**

I have been thinking again about how to prioritize time among projects.

Charles made a comment in the most recent Lucretius Today podcast that 98% of the people who come into his Discord or Reddit groups, or the Facebook group, are essentially "NeoEpicurean" in their thinking. They have little interest in the physics or the epistemology, and they think that they have captured Epicurus fully in a couple of remarks about "absence of pain" or "tranquility." We have much better percentages here at EpicureanFriends.com, but that's because we started by actively recruiting people who we knew had read DeWitt or had otherwise shown by long-time posting that they were really motivated to dig into the details of the philosophy.

Elayne made a comment in the same podcast that I thought was so worth emphasizing that I highlighted it in a short three minute video:

<https://youtu.be/bZOFQU13q-A>

Given that so many people who are curious about Epicurus are so far off base to start with, probably the best thing we can do for them is to highlight ways that they can consider that there might be more to Epicurus than they realize. I posted about that previously in: [How To Convert A Neo-Epicurean Into A Classical Epicurean](#)

But beyond reading list suggestions, I think by far the best thing to do is to continue working on the Lucretius podcast, which is going to end up producing a long series of educational shows that will step people back through the basics. I may make some more short "highlight" clips like the one above, but primarily what I think needs doing is to both set up new episodes and then make more notes and extend the discussion on each one.

With the results we will have a full step-by-step progression through the philosophy, from which we can make quizzes and use as "lectures" or background material for more organized presentations such as the as-yet-unlaunched EpicurusCollege.com website with a more extensive on-line learning system.

So for the moment I think we're on the right track by going through Lucretius in detail and that seems to me to be the thing to focus on for a while.

But the big holdup in making progress on these and other initiatives is "**content**," so if you have any extra free time here are things I would ask people to consider doing:

1. Post comments and questions on the existing episodes of the [LucretiusToday podcast](#). Those are organized by topic, so each episode can have here on the forum an active discussion of the topics in each show.
2. Post comments and questions about each of the [Twelve Fundamentals of Nature](#), the [Principal Doctrines](#) and the [Vatican Sayings](#). Eugenios lately has been doing some of this, and I know other people have too. Rather than post in the "General Discussion" forum, if you post under the individual Doctrine or Saying then we develop a database on the particular items. I took the time to set up a separate subforum, rather than a single thread, for each of these doctrines and sayings so that we can carry on detailed discussions over time.
3. Post comments and questions about anything that interest you in terms of [Art and Literature](#) from the past and present. There's a lot of fascinating material to be dug out of the history books like Joshua and Charles and others have been doing, and the place to post those is [here](#).
4. We don't have an immediate schedule but we need to open up on-line live discussion to more people. The place to post about that is [here: EpicureanFriends Open Discussion](#)

If you have ideas about things to be added to this list please post here. Thanks!

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## **Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of June 27, 2020 at 1:33 AM**

This may be a bit off-topic, but I must say the title is a bit misleading with the “activism” in it. Perhaps I’m mistaken but for me it connotes political and or social change-seeking activities.

Other than that, I can only complement by sharing that it’s noteworthy for me that you didn’t include the Dewitt's thread as one of the places to engage more in order to have more of the dabbling Epicureans dive deeper.

Also, the Lucretius podcast is a lot of fun, but it is indeed (and I think you may have implied this too in one of your posts) a bit harder to digest for people new to the Epicurean philosophy since, even though you guys do a great job at trying to make it relatable to this newer audience (believe me, it’s part of what’s gotten me hooked), it’s not addressing directly the common confusions that exist, and that I assume you bundle in “neo-Epicureanism”.

Oh, and also, I like the overall strategy you’re proposing here, great work; I’m looking forward to know more about this Epicurean College.

## Post by “Cassius” of June 27, 2020 at 5:52 AM

Good thoughts. What word would you suggest as more appropriate than "activism"?

I think most of the issues here revolve around the limited time that those of us who are here have, but there is also an underlying issue of what "activism" should mean. We can write torrents of words here, and definitely gain some pleasure from that, but unless we have "real-life" friends of the type Epicurus was referring to, and not just "virtual" friends, then the pleasure we gain will not be as full as it could be, nor will the issues of "safety" be addressed.

I think we have something of a chicken and egg situation in that there is no possibility of having real Epicurean friends unless there are real Epicureans, and there can be no real Epicureans unless work is done as we try here to articulate what that means. (Yes I will be frank and say that I do not consider those who focus on the Academic version of Epicurus to be real Epicureans.)

It is definitely taking longer to make progress than I had hoped, but I do think the participants here already have helped build a resource the likes of which have not been available for a very long time. And we have taken steps to identify a core of people who are not content to define their goal in life as a pseudonym for nothingness.

I think most of us here already can articulate that vision in core terms that are sufficient for our day to day use, even while we enjoy pursuing further details.

The trick now is to find a way to get the message and "vision" out further. The Academic world was apparently not the primary receptive audience in the ancient world, nor is it going to be today. It seems to me that Epicurus was always and will always be the best fit for practical common sense people who are averse to Mumbo-Jumbo and unrealistic expectations, so the issue is how to find and connect with those, who aren't necessarily going to be found on Facebook or Reddit or Twitter, or hanging out in philosophy interest groups (the last of which is possibly the most toxic of all, as it appeals to eclecticism and skepticism).

Hopefully with the current upheavals going on in society we can identify new alternatives, and hopefully the work we have done so far will be of some help.

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## Post by “Don” of June 27, 2020 at 9:35 AM

I know it's a loaded term with tons of baggage, but the word that maybe best describes what you're proposing is **evangelism**.

1. We have discovered Epicurus's philosophy.
2. We have found it to be valuable.
3. We want to spread that valuable message of "good news" to others - [the original meaning of evangelize: "bring good news."](#)

I fully realize the word has been almost trademarked by the Christians, but even DeWitt used it to describe Epicureanism.

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## Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of June 27, 2020 at 10:04 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Good thoughts. What word would you suggest as more appropriate than "activism"?

### [Quote from Don](#)

but even DeWitt used it to describe Epicureanism.

That's what I was going to propose; looking if Dewitt proposed something.

### [Quote from Don](#)

the word that maybe best describes what you're proposing is evangelism.

This came to mind as well. But I do think that, while evangelism has been used more often in secular contexts (it's even used in the to talk about the promotion of consumer products), it does have a religious load within it that may deter some people who would otherwise get interested and benefit from these "teachings towards living a good life".

Having said that, we do not need to go around using it in every propagandistic (talk about loaded terms) effort. It could be used as a word that "within the circle" is clearly defined as not religious, and used only in its secular connotation of bringing the good news; a connotation that, apparently is recognized (from the Wiktionary):

## **Etymology**[\[edit\]](#)

From [Old French](#) *évangéliser*, from [Latin](#) *evangelizare*, from [Ancient Greek](#) *εὐαγγελίζω* (euangelízō)

## Verb[[edit](#)]

**evangelize** (*third-person singular simple present* [evangelizes](#), *present participle* [evangelizing](#), *simple past and past participle* [evangelized](#))

1. To tell people about (a particular branch of) [Christianity](#), especially in order to [convert](#) them; to [preach](#) the [gospel](#) to. [quotations](#) ▼
2. **To preach any ideology to those who have not yet been converted to it.** [quotations](#) ▼
3. **To be enthusiastic about something, and to attempt to share that enthusiasm with others; to promote.**

None of the ones I put in bold talk about having the goal of converting anyone, but rather more about where the effort is focused and that it implies some joy on the part of the promoter, which I guess are rather descriptive of what we're talking about in this thread.

So perhaps, if it were clearly stated, somewhere around the site, that the meaning of the word as used here absolutely does not imply the religious connotation, it could be used to clearly convey what we're talking about; and if we (as DeWitt does in his book about having a need to constantly remind of the falsehoods attributed to Epicurus) take the time to make the necessary clarification in the posts or communications more directed towards newer audiences, we would be diminishing the risk of confusion.

Apparently the word was coopted by religion later, but at the beginning it didn't have that religious connotation. I kept reading and I found this about its etymology:

## Latin[[edit](#)]

### Etymology[[edit](#)]

Late Latin borrowing from rare [Ancient Greek](#) *εὐαγγελίζω* (euangelízō), active voice variant of deponent *εὐαγγελίζομαι* (euangelízomai, “I bring good news; I preach the Gospel”), from *εὐ-* (eu-, “good”) + *ἄγγελος* (ángelos, “messenger, envoy”), of uncertain origin.

## Ancient Greek[[edit](#)]

### Etymology[[edit](#)]

Cognate with [Mycenaean Greek](#) *𐀀𐀃𐀆𐀗𐀂* (a-ke-ro), but origin uncertain. Probably a loanword, and probably related to *ἄγγαρος* (ángaros, “Persian mounted courier”) (whence [Latin](#)

[angarius](#)), which is probably from an East Asian language...

## Noun[[edit](#)]

ἄγγελος • (ángelos) m (genitive [ἄγγέλου](#)); *second declension* ([Epic](#), [Attic](#), [Ionic](#), [Doric](#), [Koine](#))

1. a [messenger](#)
2. one that [announces](#)
3. (*later*) [angel](#), [heavenly spirit](#)

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## Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of June 27, 2020 at 10:28 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

It is definitely taking longer to make progress than I had hoped, but I do think the participants here already have helped build a resource the likes of which have not been available for a very long time. And we have taken steps to identify a core of people who are not content to define their goal in life as a pseudonym for nothingness.

I think most of us here already can articulate that vision in core terms that are sufficient for our day to day use, even while we enjoy pursuing further details.

As I see it, this is the "base camp" for the "strain" of Epicurean Philosophy you're promoting. I use "strain", because, [apparently to me] like it or not, this is an alternate path from the popular consensus, and from the academy; this comes from my yet-very-poor knowledge about this "strain". But if I were wrong (and I've already found the thread about Epicurean documents - from Charles - that makes me think that perhaps I am), this could be the "base camp of [Classical Epicurean Philosophy](#)", and an effort would be worth it to promote it as such, and also to keep the quality and level of posting around here "high" (as it seems to me you're doing already).

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

so the issue is how to find and connect with those, who aren't necessarily going to be found on Facebook or Reddit or Twitter, or hanging out in philosophy interest groups (the last of which is possibly the most toxic of all, as it appeals to eclecticism and skepticism).

From the basis of what I said lines above, I would suggest exploring the possibility to create a "wiki-style" section of the platform, where users with the right privileges would write and edit

the resources put there, and that could be accesible from the outside as the go-to place of everything Classical Epicureanism. This wiki would allow to keep the forum focused on conversations, and have a separate side for definitions and reference to resources. Easier said than done, I would guess. But I've seen it applied to many different groups of interest throughout the internet, so perhaps it is feasible. One of the advantages of it is that you could keep this forum closed from the search engines to allow for the privacy need for quality discussion and conversations, and have the wiki with all the accepted definitions open to anyone with access to a search engine; and when somebody looks for something they've heard about, they would come up with the wiki, instead of another source of the academic consensus that could get them confused.

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### **Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of June 27, 2020 at 10:30 AM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Good thoughts. What word would you suggest as more appropriate than "activism"?

Looking back at what we wrote lines above... I don't think we did a good job at addressing your question. I think a better word would, in this case, would be "collaboration". "Opportunities for collaboration". All of the said things about evangelism still stand, but the opportunities are not for "evangelization", but rather for collaboration towards that "evangelical" effort.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of June 27, 2020 at 10:35 AM**

Evangelism is the word that popped into my mind, too, but it really makes me cringe given the state of contemporary religion!

Educating? Teaching? Community building? Making friends? Anything but evangelism 😬

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### **Post by “Don” of June 27, 2020 at 10:59 AM**

Or we take the word back from the Christians! 😊 In looking at the [Liddell & Scott at Perseus](#), the word evangelize and its variants was used by Lucian, Pausanias, Aristophanes, and other ancient authors before being co-opted by the Christians. Although I know exactly where [Godfrey](#) is coming from - emoji and all 😊

It's not like Christians have cornered the market on "good news."

But I get what [Mathitis Kipouros](#) and [Godfrey](#) are saying about the goal here on the forum: opportunities for collaboration, education, etc. (for evangelizing [classical Epicurean philosophy](#)).

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### **Post by "Cassius" of June 27, 2020 at 12:35 PM**

1 - My how times have changed. There was a time when I was convinced that Don would never cite anything that DeWitt said about the christian analogy approvingly! 😊

2 - Yes "Evangelism" and synonyms for it are the obvious word choices, although the "collaboration" aspect is also clearly what we are offering.

3 - Yes I started a wiki earlier but have not had time to expand it; I use it mainly for the Lucretius texts: <http://www.epicrueanfriends.com/wiki>

4 - Yes I do want to comment that after a lot of thought and debate in the past I think "Classical Epicurean" is probably the best tag line. I would never want to give in and admit that what we are talking about is not purely Epicurean, because I see the other versions as adulterations, not this version.

5 - Wait - so WHAT is the root of evangelize? It is greek and not latin? And the greek does not have a religious connotation?

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### **Post by "Cassius" of June 27, 2020 at 12:43 PM**

Also:

In the past we always ran into the reefs when we tried to come up with a statement of principles or other list of priorities that we could use as a point of agreement on what we are promoting. I think over the last year (almost two now) we've done a lot of work on that with the

"Not NeoEpicurean" list and assorted articles elaborating on its points.

So I think while there will certainly be lots of adjustment, we're further along now than we've ever been in the past. We don't have a huge number of people yet, but we've been more clear from the beginning that this isn't just another eclectic / neo-Stoic site.

I'm personally another year closer to full retirement and more time to devote to this, plus with the "turmoil" going on in the world there is more opening for new thinking, even though there might also be developing more issues of censorship that could eventually be a problem.

One thing I really think is helpful is for us to have skype conversations, and camotero (and others who are reading this and might be interested) I hope you can consider joining us on one of those.

I think that's the area where we need more creative thought. How do we build closer bonds and get and keep motivated around a common goal, while at the same time making sure that our efforts to build numbers don't turn into a 'big tent' strategy that waters down the objective?

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### **Post by “Cassius” of June 27, 2020 at 12:46 PM**

Note: "Collaboration" is such an obvious and innocent word that I re-titled the thread to include it. "Evangelization" or synonyms probably need emphasis too, but probably more discussion first. Maybe it seems to me that "evangelization" is a term that is most frequently combined with something that clearly sets out the principles being evangelized, and I am not sure the thread title is ready for that.

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### **Post by “Don” of June 27, 2020 at 1:36 PM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

1 - My how times have changed. There was a time when I was convinced that Don would never cite anything that DeWitt said about the christian analogy approvingly!



LOL!  Well, if the DeWitticism fits...

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

3 - Yes I started a wiki earlier but have not had time to expand it; I use it mainly for the Lucretius texts: <https://www.epicureanfriends.com/wiki>

Didn't realize that was out there. Have to dig around a little.

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

5 - Wait - so WHAT is the root of evangelize? It is greek and not latin? And the greek does not have a religious connotation?

You bet! It's Greek: ευ- "eu-" good as in euthanasia (good death), eulogy (good words), etc. + ἄγγελος "angelos" messenger as in "angel" (again, co-opted by the Christians). It literally just meant the bearer of good news (like victory in a battle) or to bring good news as a verb. The ευ/eu- got the "ev" pronunciation instead of "you" pronunciation in the c. 1st-4th c. CE when the Christians would have been appropriating and coining terms.

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## **Post by "Cassius" of June 27, 2020 at 7:50 PM**

OK yes it was the "angelos" that made me think of a religious connotation. That is all good to know.

Also in this thread on collaboration / evangelization, it's of course a major issue that every step forward we have to be constantly on the lookout for a particular land mine: modern/partisan politics. It's natural that in wanting to take action with our friends that we're going to find discussions bleeding over into "politics" in which those of us from different backgrounds/locations/etc have different interests. We all want to think that our way of seeing the world is the "right" one, and that everyone who is an Epicurean will agree with us, but it seems to me that that just isn't so, and it is very disappointing to people when they realize that. We all tend to identify with respective groupings that have never been much influenced by Epicurean philosophy, and even if that we differ, I think we have to confront that a shared collaboration based solely on "ideas" has serious Platonic problems in theory. We aren't disembodied sets of ideas, we are real people with real backgrounds and real personal interests.

So as we talk about collaboration and evangelization I have come to the view that it's absolutely essential to find a way with that source of conflict. And ironically I don't think the answer lies in "live unknown" because I think that's one of the worst misinterpretations of the

doctrines. Again that's what we've tried to prepare people for with the rules that we post here at Epicureanfriends.com, and I think that has to carry over into most any collaboration.

If we didn't already have enough evidence of the stress this can cause in the community, the events of the world in the last couple of months should be sufficient for us never to doubt that again! It's no doubt going to be very tricky to navigate these waters when feelings run so hot, as they should.

But in the end I do think there is enough commonality in the core viewpoints to sustain a "fraternity" of people collaborating on the core ideas. (It always seems right to try to list them when a discussion like this comes up; surely the list is something like (1) no supernatural realm or order, (2) no reward or punishment or life of any kind after death, (3) identification of the goal and guide of life with feeling, primarily pleasure, rather than virtue or piety; (4) the view that it is correct to be confident that we can attain knowledge that is based on "reasoning" tied tightly to the senses, the anticipations, and feelings, rather than to dialectical logic; (5) a common sense view of the universe being totally natural and effectively infinite in size, eternal in time, and in which humans on earth are neither the only life in the universe nor the highest. I was about to stop there but perhaps it must be included that humans possess a degree of agency that assures us that neither fate nor theories of hard determinism make it useless for us to exert ourselves to improve our lives.

Anyway the basic point of this post that I think it's always essential to identify the unifying factors and also inoculate ourselves against the forces that will attempt to divide us.

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### **Post by "Mathitis Kipouros" of July 4, 2020 at 6:19 PM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

<http://www.epicrueanfriends.com/wiki>

Hi Cassius! Is this an active project? I followed the link but encountered an error.

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### **Post by "Mathitis Kipouros" of July 4, 2020 at 6:23 PM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1508-opportunities-for-activism-and-collaboration-here-at-epicureanfriends-com/>

I think over the last year (almost two now) we've done a lot of work on that with the "Not NeoEpicurean" list and assorted articles elaborating on its points.

In terms of marketing, or promotion, I heard a guru a while back say that it's always a great idea to promote by referencing to the popular thing (brand, product, whatever). People have an easier way getting to you when you connect the path to your thing to a place they already know about.

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### **Post by "Mathitis Kipouros" of July 4, 2020 at 6:25 PM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

One thing I really think is helpful is for us to have skype conversations, and camotero (and others who are reading this and might be interested) I hope you can consider joining us on one of those.

Yes, please count me in; I'd love to join one of those.

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### **Post by "Mathitis Kipouros" of July 4, 2020 at 6:31 PM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I think that's the area where we need more creative thought. How do we build closer bonds and get and keep motivated around a common goal, while at the same time making sure that our efforts to build numbers don't turn into a 'big tent' strategy that waters down the objective?

I'd say the wiki, if it's collaborative, could be a great resource to start gaining terrain against the popular confusions. If it's active, I'd bet it would start to pop up more often in the first page of the search engine results. Also, it could help to tackle the most common confusions with pages that tackle them specifically/directly.

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## Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of July 4, 2020 at 6:39 PM

### [Quote from Don](#)

You bet! It's Greek: ευ- "eu-" good as in euthanasia (good death), eulogy (good words), etc. + άγγελος "angelos" messenger as in "angel" (again, co-opted by the Christians). It literally just meant the bearer of good news (like victory in a battle) or to bring good news as a verb. The ευ/eu- got the "ev" pronunciation instead of "you" pronunciation in the c. 1st-4th c. CE when the Christians would have been appropriating and coining terms.

Oh my... I just spiraled down the wiktionary rabbit hole again. If you search for the etymology of messenger you don't get to "angelos", but to the latin "missaticum" which comes from the verb "mitto" (to send) and "atticum" (the later as I understood it is just a suffix to indicate pertinence to the verb. Perhaps we could create our own word "eumittization"? 😄😄😄

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## Post by “Don” of July 4, 2020 at 6:51 PM

### [Quote from camotero](#)

Hi Cassius! Is this an active project? I followed the link but encountered an error.

The links just misspelled. Try <https://www.epicureanfriends.com/wiki/>

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## Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of July 4, 2020 at 6:56 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

We all want to think that our way of seeing the world is the "right" one, and that everyone who is an Epicurean will agree with us, but it seems to me that that just isn't so, and it is very disappointing to people when they realize that.

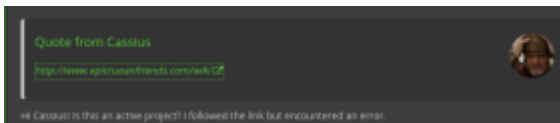
I have been liking Epicureanism so far because it's been serving me as a way to more easily identify what's right and what's wrong, without overcomplicating things. I still have the hope that this is possible. But it's also shown so far to be a bit problematic.

When you talk to someone and try to make them see your point of view from the perspective of what makes sense (generally, no particularly you) *in terms of pain or pleasure*, they start to answer with mental constructions of what should be, what it's always been, what's orthodox and how that's more safe, etc... and they show an almost visceral reaction when you point that out, but that doesn't make the truth false, it just makes then inaccessible at the moment.

This also brings to mind something I've been grappling with lately... since pleasure and pain are things you can only experience yourself, it makes it very clear that things can start to become less absolute (*and thus less comfortable - hence the resistance*) and more relative... perhaps a person does something that is not the best for a third party, but it brings him genuine pleasure, or it eliminates genuine pain, so he wasn't acting with harm in mind... so how can you say he is bad if he is even ignorant of the pain he's causing to said third party... If he does it after it has been brought to his attention the pain his suffering to someone else, then he would be bad, but not before? 🤔

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## Post by "Cassius" of July 4, 2020 at 9:05 PM



1- One would think I could spell Epicurean by now -- apparently not!

2 - Camotero I may be missing some of the subtlety of your question and maybe Don or Godfrey or others will answer better, but my first response is that you have to be clear what it means to label someone "bad" (or "good"). I think you're on the right track to see how relative and contextual everything is, and terms like "good" and "bad" as ordinarily viewed are often thought of as absolute, so they are outside the contextual / relative framework, and therefore I think Epicurus would say (and did say) that such absolute standards do not exist. That's pretty much the explicit message of the final ten PDs on "justice." Of course from our individual perspectives it certainly means something to us to consider someone a "Good person" or a "bad person," but if we're being rigorous we have to remember that our judgment comes from assessing that person as "good for us" or "bad for us" (or maybe for particular third persons we're concerned about) rather than "good" or "bad" in general. And then another implication of your question is that we need to realize that since there is no god enforcing any kind of divine or absolute law, judging someone to be "good" or "bad" is going to raise the question "So what?" With an important part of the answer being that since there is no god or absolute

standard of right and wrong, it's up to living human beings to be the "enforcers" and to bring about whatever consequences for "bad conduct" are actually going to happen.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of July 4, 2020 at 9:08 PM**

One more thing, as to the wiki --

Like so many other things here I took the bull by the horns and got things started on the wiki, with the idea and hope of collaboration in the future, but not much available help at the time. Anytime anyone would like to engage further and collaborate on any aspect of the wiki or most anything else please let me know and I would be happy to extend those privileges (to people like those in the thread so far, or who come later, who've shown their good faith and interest.)

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### **Post by "Mathitis Kipouros" of July 4, 2020 at 11:17 PM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

(1) no supernatural realm or order, (2) no reward or punishment or life of any kind after death, (3) identification of the goal and guide of life with feeling, primarily pleasure, rather than virtue or piety; (4) the view that it is correct to be confident that we can attain knowledge that is based on "reasoning" tied tightly to the senses, the anticipations, and feelings, rather than to dialectical logic; (5) a common sense view of the universe being totally natural and effectively infinite in size, eternal in time, and in which humans on earth are neither the only life in the universe nor the highest.

Perhaps what you've summed up here includes what I'm about to say... but it's been kind of revelatory for me now that I'm reading DeWitt. Once I read about the acceptance that Socratic, and then Platonic, thought got out of their rhetorical ability, it's started to become more evident the extent to which "Plato's 'forms'" (or whatever you want to call these unnecessarily-complex, undefinable-definitions) have permeated everything in our world. I see plenty of conflict caused by our unconscious acceptance of the existence of things that aren't there, and that we've grown up with, and that we take for as real as the air we breathe. So one thing I would add, although, like I said, perhaps is already there, is a conscious and disciplined effort to "catch" these concepts that we normally accept automatically, because of their ubiquitous nature, and the lack of awareness of almost everybody about them.

Trying to be more concrete, an example of this could be the "shoulds" that we think of as unavoidable: ultra competitiveness; enduring sickening stress because of a work ethic; professional success and prestige; I don't know if I'm making sense...

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### **Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of July 4, 2020 at 11:24 PM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I was about to stop there but perhaps it must be included that humans possess a degree of agency that assures us that neither fate nor theories of hard determinism make it useless for us to exert ourselves to improve our lives.

For me the answer to the free will/determinism debate perhaps won't have a concrete answer, but I compare it to something I read in my Epicurean explorations about whether or not we should care about some gods that, if they exist, don't actually show godlike qualities, at least not in a way beneficial for us to care... similiarly, if free willl doesn't exist, the illussion is so real, that it actually doesn't matter.

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### **Post by “Don” of July 4, 2020 at 11:28 PM**

#### [Quote from camotero](#)

This also brings to mind something I've been grappling with lately... since pleasure and pain are things you can only experience yourself, it makes it very clear that things can start to become less absolute (*and thus less comfortable - hence the resistance*) and more relative... ... so how can you say he is bad if he is even ignorant of the pain he's causing to said third party... If he does it after it has been brought to his attention the pain his suffering to someone else, then he would be bad, but not before? 🤔

Excellent questions and points to consider, [Mathitis Kipouros](#) .

This, too, is something I grapple with. This is how I'm beginning to reach a conclusion for myself. I hope this helps to see i too am struggling.

We grow up in and live in a culture that wants to have absolutes. Religions want to have god-given absolute laws of right and wrong. Some people want to insist on universal rights like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The US Declaration of Independence states that there are "inalienable" rights of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." At times, I would like to believe that, too.

Epicurus disagrees.

To Epicurus, justice is what is decided on among human communities to procure safety from others and to not allow people to harm other people. When those contracts and agreements are violated, the violators must be punished (by ways agreed on within the community) to keep everyone else safe from harm.

It seems to me there probably are some negative actions that are or should be considered unjust through time (since humans appear to have an innate sense of justice and fairness according to some research on toddlers and young children I've seen). Agreeing on all those may be difficult, but I think a consensus could be arrived at. But it will be subjective and mutually agreed on. There is no universal law giver or source of The Good in the universe. If we want a just world, we have to work to build it ourselves. And we have to live by "neither harm nor be harmed" in our own lives.

People are neither good nor bad. Their actions are neither intrinsically good or bad. Have they harmed someone and gone against the social contract? If so, they deserve punishment. Have they done something "bad" but no one's come to harm. Then it doesn't matter. I can say I think their actions are ill-advised and won't lead to lasting pleasure for them. But, I don't think, I can call them "bad."

In your example, if someone harms or slights someone else knowingly, chances are that other person can potentially make the life of that person that harmed them difficult in the future. That is not a direction to go for lasting pleasure. If one is "good" and just to others, chances are you will be treated well and justly by others. That's a reason to be "good." Not because God says so or it's a universal law.

As I said, my Epicurean understanding continues to evolve.

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## **Post by “Cassius” of July 5, 2020 at 7:34 AM**

[Quote from Don](#)

. The US Declaration of Independence states that there are "inalienable" rights of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Yes I agree, that formulation is certainly a problem. I don't think enough is known about the development of Jefferson's thought to know how much he was into Epicurus at the time he was involved in the Declaration, but I haven't tried to figure it out. The only way I could consider that reconcilable with Epicurus would be if he were referring to "inalienable" in the sense of the Epicurean/Lucretius doctrine of properties and qualities of bodies, as in the part of Book 1 of Lucretius where several examples are given of things like water being wet, or so forth, and it being impossible to remove the quality without destroying the nature of the thing.

I would definitely think that the common view that he means a set of rights installed and protected by a god or supernatural force is not something that can be squared with Epicurus.

#### [Quote from camotero](#)

So one thing I would add, although, like I said, perhaps is already there, is a conscious and disciplined effort to "catch" these concepts that we normally accept automatically, because of their ubiquitous nature, and the lack of awareness of almost everybody about them.

i very much agree that such an attitude of active thinking and active effort to root out false ideas seems definitely to have been a significant part of the ancient Epicurean attitude. I think that is what people think about in relating Epicurus to the skeptics, in that it is good to have a skeptical attitude toward claims which do not seem to be supported by evidence, but then people get carried away and need to remember that Epicurus does not allege that all knowledge is impossible, just that our conclusions need to be carefully checked and supported.

#### [Quote from Don](#)

People are neither good nor bad. Their actions are neither intrinsically good or bad. Have they harmed someone and gone against the social contract? If so, they deserve punishment. Have they done something "bad" but no one's come to harm. Then it doesn't matter. I can say I think their actions are ill-advised and won't lead to lasting pleasure for them. But, I don't think, I can call them "bad."

I agree with this, but I also know that some people think it is a "word game" to seem to be throwing out the words "good" and "bad" entirely, so I suppose the real point is that those words can be very useful IF they are properly understood to have a subjective basis rather than

some kind of mystical supernatural objective nature.

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## Post by “Kalosyni” of August 23, 2021 at 11:58 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

We can write torrents of words here, and definitely gain some pleasure from that, but unless we have "real-life" friends of the type Epicurus was referring to, and nor just "virtual" friends, then the pleasure we gain will not be as full as it could be,...

and Cassius' additional quote:

"...It seems to me that Epicurus was always and will always be the best fit for practical common sense people who are averse to Mumbo-Jumbo and unrealistic expectations, so the issue is how to find and connect with those, who aren't necessarily going to be found on Facebook or Reddit or Twitter, or hanging out in philosophy interest groups ..."

I hope it's okay for me to add in some thoughts even though this thread was from last year...regarding teaching this philosophy to others. My own beliefs might place me halfway between "Epicurean Friends.com" and "Society of Epicurus.com", and yet also maybe a bit of Cyrenaics.

I should confess that I've done very little study of philosophy in general, let alone Epicurean philosophy. I just see how going toward pleasure in thoughts and actions is a helpful guide in living life, for me. Just a short time time after first beginning to read about the philosophy of Epicurus, it resonated for me, so much so, that I thought it might be fun to start a "Meetup group" in the city in which I live.

As I've been diving deeper into reading posts on this site (as well as reading other sources) the more I study, the more unclear I get about what Epicurus actually taught.

And some reasons that might complicate sharing Epicurus' philosophy:

- 1) The name "Epicurean" - as it exists to the every day common understanding is: one who is devoted to the enjoyment of fine food and wine. It will be difficult to overcome that definition of "Epicurean".
- 2) The academic interpretation vs. DeWitt interpretation (both of which I have yet to fully grasp) seems to lend itself to endless debate, and is further complicated if you are wanting to

use the phrase "Classical Epicureanism".

3) "Pleasure is the highest good" - this phrase is ethically incomplete, and it is too vague and open to multiple interpretations.

There might be other reasons in addition. So these might be complicating your situation with expanding your outreach.

For myself, it has occurred to me that if I want to start a meetup, the name might have to have words other than "Epicurean" or "Epicurus".

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 24, 2021 at 7:23 AM**

Thanks for your comments Philia. Each of those concerns have answers to them which (as you say) you apparently have not studied the philosophy long enough to understand.

At the level you are discussing what you are talking about is not Epicurean philosophy at all, so it probably does not make sense to call it that for the sake of avoiding misunderstanding all around.

Unfortunately there is really no way to avoid the "work" (pleasant though it may be) of studying the philosophy so as to understand the truths and dispell the errors.

It's a great goal for you to assemble a group of friends and to pursue pleasure in a general sense, but until you grapple with the philosophy issues and decide to take Epicurus' side as your own, you're not talking Epicurean philosophy and you'll probably do yourself and your friends more harm than good by disappointing yourself and then by inaccurately portraying half-formed thoughts as Epicurean.

One of Epicurus' distinctive attitudes as displayed in the Vatican Saying at the top of our home page and in other sayings is that it is important to proclaim TRUE philosophy, and that is not to be compromised even if those around you do not understand the truth. Hopefully you and they WILL come to understand the true philosophy over time, but keep that in mind as you proceed and if you decide to promote your own eclectic blend, you will very likely be better off being honest to everyone about that so that you all will be on the same page and avoid the bitter disputes that come when people feel they have been misled.

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### **Post by “Don” of August 24, 2021 at 7:29 AM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1508-opportunities-for-activism-and-collaboration-here-at-epicureanfriends-com/>

It's more than okay for you to add your thoughts 😊 In fact, I think your fresh perspective is quite valuable. Thanks!

#### [Quote from Philia](#)

1) The name "Epicurean" - as it exists to the every day common understanding is: one who is devoted to the enjoyment of fine food and wine. It will be difficult to overcome that definition of "Epicurean".

Oddly enough, the original Epicureans including in the time of Epicurus himself dealt with this exact problem, too. People back then couldn't get over the idea of pleasure as the guide for life and attributed all kinds of fancy food stereotypes and debauchery to the Epicureans. However, just like the modern Stoics have, I think we can eventually work through the stereotypes associated with the name "Epicurean" and claim it back. The words small e "epicurean" and capital E "Epicurean" can hopefully coexist like stoic and Stoic. That being said, I fully agree with you that it won't be easy.

#### [Quote from Philia](#)

2) The academic interpretation vs. DeWitt interpretation (both of which I have yet to fully grasp) seems to lend itself to endless debate, and is further complicated if you are wanting to use the phrase "Classical Epicureanism".

i think we're all trying to fully grasp it, so you're not alone 😊 The point I often come back to is that Epicurus wanted his philosophy to be understandable to everyone: men, women, young, old, etc. That's one reason it spread throughout the ancient world and why the early Christians saw it as such a threat. That's one of the reasons we have those ancient stereotypes and slanders. Personally, I try to return to the fundamentals as contained in the [Principal Doctrines](#) and Letters. Your points are well taken!

#### [Quote from Philia](#)

3) "Pleasure is the highest good" - this phrase is ethically incomplete, and it is too vague and open to multiple interpretations.

We're having that exact conversation on what that phrase means on another thread. I would say it's a starting point. Encapsulated in that phrase, for me, is the idea that we should pursue the most pleasurable life and make decisions that point us in that direction. Sometimes we'll undergo pain for future pleasure (ex, the pain of exercise for a healthier life). Also, for me, that phrase means why do we do virtuous actions? They make us feel good (pleasure). Why do we

look forward to seeing friends? They bring is pleasure. Pain and pleasure are guides to what to avoid and what to pursue.

Thank you again for your post!! I think you've added valuable food for thought!

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### **Post by “Don” of August 24, 2021 at 7:55 AM**

[Kalosyni](#) , I wanted to add that, if you haven't run into it yet, I find the Tetrpharmakos (literally, "four ingredient medicine") a good starting place to think about what Epicurus's philosophy entails. Some on this forum may beg to differ, but I find it one of the most condensed, succinct summaries and it has ancient origins (quoted or written by Philodemus himself). Here's a personal translation:

*Nothing to fear from gods.*

*Not to be anxious about death*

*The Good (pleasure) is easy to find;*

*And the Terrible (pain) can be endured.*

That's the nutshell version in my opinion. Commentary and discussion of each of those lines could fill a book, but that's a starting point. Especially line 3. I believe moments of pleasure are available every day including recollection of past pleasures. Moment by moment, we decide to find pleasure or not. Carpe diem means Pluck the ripe fruit of pleasure that's right in front of you now.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 24, 2021 at 8:05 AM**

#### [Quote from Don](#)

Some on this forum may beg to differ,

LOL he's probably referring mainly to me! 😊

#### [Quote from Philia](#)

I should confess that I've done very little study of philosophy in general, let alone Epicurean philosophy.

I think the deeper you read into the philosophy the more you'll feel that this formulation (maybe or maybe not by Philodemus) is dramatically inadequate as a full statement of the philosophy, just as you find a statement like "pleasure is the greatest good" to be inadequate.

On the other hand, both the tetrapharmakon and the "greatest good" formulation are very useful as starting points for discussion and focusing on the issues involved, so they do have their uses even in my own perspective. They are partial statements useful in some contexts, and only by discussing the limitations and the contexts do you grow in understanding of when they are useful and when they are not and what else may be needed.

It's probably not lost on you that the rules of the forum are that we are here to promote Epicurean philosophy and not eclectic blends. At some point if you do decide to promote something that's your own blend then it becomes inappropriate to promote it here, and you'll want your own website and your own forum. However the purpose of this forum is for discussion and study of the issues of Epicurean philosophy, and all of us were at one point or another just grappling with these same issues. So it is totally appropriate for you to raise issues and discuss possibilities and generally proceed with as deep a good-faith discussion as you like, so I hope you will.

Raise each of the points you want to discuss in detail, and I think you'll find me and a number of other people are happy to respond and help you think through the issues, and in doing so that helps us all.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 24, 2021 at 9:16 AM**

Philia has raised some very good points that we regularly have run into in the past and we'll run into as long as we're associated with Epicurean philosophy. I hope several of us will comment on these points as talking through them is good for everyone, not just for Philia, and I hope we'll get much more elaboration from Philia in response.

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### **Post by "Kalosyni" of August 25, 2021 at 12:16 AM**

It's good reading everyone's comments, ideas, and helpful suggestions.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1508-opportunities-for-activism-and-collaboration-here-at-epicureanfriends-com/>

Feeling grateful for the learning resources this forum provides 😊