



An Opening Conversation With A Committed Modern Stoic - Prelude to "Eight Stoic Challenges to Epicurean Philosophy" - Part 1

Post by "Cassius" of March 11, 2017 at 4:25 PM

[Elli Pensa](#)

[March 6 at 9:34am](#)

I would like to welcome here Mr. [Donald Robertson](#) saying to him: Here you will do well to tarry. Here, we are Epicureans, our highest good is PLEASURE and we achieve it through the criteria of truth set forth in the Epicurean Canon. Please tell us clearly and specifically what is your highest good, and how you seek to achieve that goal for your students and in your own life. Thanks   not found or type unknown

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[Donald Robertson](#) not found or type unknown

[Donald Robertson](#) Thanks, Elli. I believe the highest good is virtue but I'm very interested in how the Epicureans define that concept.

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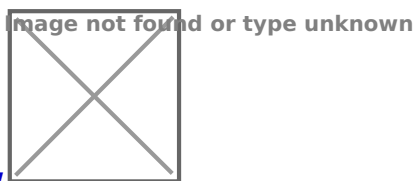
[Cassius Amicus](#) not found or type unknown

[Cassius Amicus](#) We have this from Diogenes of Oinoanda which makes clear that for

Epicureans pleasure is the end of the best mode of life, and virtue is the means to that end, but not that end itself. Do you disagree Donald Robertson?

I shall discuss folly shortly, the virtues and pleasure now.

If, gentlemen, the point at issue between these people and us involved inquiry into «what is the means of happiness?» and they wanted to say «the virtues» (which would actually be true), it would be unnecessary to take any other step than to agree with them about this, without more ado. But since, as I say, the issue is not «what is the means of happiness?» but «what is happiness and what is the ultimate goal of our nature?», I say both now and always, shouting out loudly to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that pleasure is the end of the best mode of life, while the virtues, which are inopportunately messed about by these people (being transferred from the place of the means to that of the end), are in no way an end, but the means to the end.



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Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) Yes, I disagree with that. It's an interesting theory, though.

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) I have read some of your material and I thought you would. It is my understanding that you have a much more clear vision of the differences between Epicurean and Stoic philosophies than many of the people who come here who describe themselves as Stoics.

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Donald Robertson

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[Donald Robertson](#) Thanks. I'm genuinely interested to learn more about Epicureanism. It seems to me that the surviving literature we have can be difficult to interpret and sometimes leads to conflicting views about what Epicurus taught. So I'd be eager to learn more about what conclusions people have arrived at who have spent more time and effort studying this philosophy in detail.

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[Cassius Amicus](#)

[Cassius Amicus](#) There is no doubt about that, **[Donald Robertson](#)**. There are many different influences that led to the coming together of this group, but one of the main ones for many of us was the book "Epicurus and His Philosophy" by Norman DeWitt. There are other au...[See More](#)

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[Donald Robertson](#)

[Donald Robertson](#) **[Cassius Amicus](#)** That's an interesting article. To be honest, though, I do think that it's relatively easy to produce textual evidence that conflicts with several of his comments about Stoicism. For example, they're portrayed as "sour and scowling" and yet joy (chara) and cheerfulness (euphrosunos) are two of the main "healthy passions" (eupaheiai) that should supervene on virtue in Stoicism, and these and other joyful emotions are very frequently mentioned positively in their surviving texts. Chrysippus, the third head of the Stoa, reputedly died laughing at one of his own jokes about an ass. We actually have surviving jokes and satirical poetry from Stoic authors, which shows that they embraced humour. So I don't think this happens to be a very historically accurate way of portraying the contrast between the two schools. (It's more like a caricature that was promoted by critics of the Stoics, similar to the caricature that Epicureans were merely crudely self-indulgent hedonists.) Likewise, his comments about class snobbery, etc., in relation to Epicurus, don't seem consistent with what we know about other contemporary schools of Greek philosophy, such as Stoicism. Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, was, at least by some accounts, left penniless by his shipwreck, and was not actually an Athenian citizen. Cleanthes, the second head of the Stoa, was famously poor, and watered gardens during the night to earn a living. So it's not really accurate of this author to imply that Epicurus was looked down on more than other philosophers because he was born on an island, and had humble origins. As I understand it Epicurus was nevertheless an Athenian citizen, unlike other well-known philosophers, who experienced prejudice for that reason. There are quite a few other things I'd have to question about what he says here. (E.g., contrary to what he implies, other Hellenistic schools, particularly Stoicism, frequently compared philosophy to medicine.) I'd say that as an overview of the position of Epicurus within the broader cultural and philosophical context of the time, it's definitely

rather distorted, although it's nevertheless a good article and has some interesting ideas.

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) All those are fact issues that people will have to read the material and decide for themselves. For every one article like this from DeWitt, there are tens if not hundreds of those that take the opposite position, and truth is not determined by counting the number of witnesses or commentators.

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Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

[Elli Pensa](#) Image not found or type unknown

[Elli Pensa](#) Your're welcome [Donald](#). On the concept of Virtue I will try to say it as simple as I can. We open the doors from the rooms of pleasures with a mean that you the stoics [and we the epicureans] called it as Virtue (s). But sometimes when the experiences, the circumstances OR some persons strive us against our NATURAL goal that is pleasure, we can smash the doors with a hammer (called as Epicurean Canon) and enter inside the rooms of Pleasures. This action of smushing doors is of what we call it "swerve" or "clinamen" or "free will".

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Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) I have a question for you. Cicero says that later generations of Epicureans modified the original doctrine that friends are valued solely as a means to pleasure to: "another more humane one, invented by these more modern philosophers, and never, as far as I know, advanced by the master himself, that at first, indeed, a friend is sought out with a view to one's own advantage, but that when intimacy has sprung up, then the man is loved for himself, all hope or idea of pleasure being put out of the question." Do you agree with Cicero's interpretation that this was a later (Roman?) modification of Epicurean ethics? Or do you believe that treating friends as an end in themselves, at some level, was always part of Epicurus' teaching? (I've seen modern Epicureans argue strongly over this, from conflicting perspectives.)

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) As for me in response to that question, I do not doubt that as the

years went by Epicurus' doctrines were watered down by compromisers, as Diogenes Laertius says as well in other regards. Whether the compromisers were Roman or Greek, I do not know. But I cannot imagine Epicurus compromising at all on the heart of his philosophy, which is that the faculty of [pleasure is the guide of life](#) given by Nature, and the motivator for all things to choose. So I cannot imagine that Epicurus himself would admit that there is any end in itself which comes before pleasurable living. Friends are perhaps the most important instrument toward the end of pleasurable living, but we are talking philosophy here in order to understand the big picture. And in terms of the big picture, the motivation to pleasure comes first, then the instrumentalities by which pleasure is achieved follow as means to the end. There is nothing disreputable about that, which is the implication of the criticism many have for it - it is Nature's way.

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Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) Thanks. The "modern" modification, Cicero refers to would also seem to me, at least prima facie, to conflict with Epicurus' Principle Doctrines concerning justice. So do you consider this quote attributed to Epicurus by Epictetus to be authentic? "Be not deceived, men, nor led astray, nor mistaken; there is no natural fellowship with one another among rational beings; believe me. Those who say the contrary are deceiving you and leading you astray with false reasons."

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) I do not think that Epicurus would have stated the issue in those terms at all. That sounds like Epictetus' commentary and slant to me, because in fact I think Epicurus would consider his observation that friendship is the most important means to happ...[See More](#)

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Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) [Cassius Amicus](#) I take it he means there's no innate bond or duty of fellowship, though, which is surely what you're saying Epicurus' believed, isn't it? Please correct me if I'm wrong. (It may not be a direct quotation, of course, although Epictetus certainly seems to present it as one.)

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Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus Certainly from the point of view of any supernatural requirement, or any "ideal" requirement in the form of a Platonic ideal, or an Aristotelian essence, or "duty" requirement (which presumably would arise from one of those same sources I just listed) I think Epicurus would have rejected that. However the way you are asking the question does not exclude what Epicurus is saying, as Epicurus held that Nature has so constructed human affairs so that friendship is the greatest tool by which we acquire a blessed and complete life.

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Elli Pensa

Elli Pensa If I had the chance I would like to ask Cicero :

WHAT has to do the basis that is the common benefit of the friends as well as **WHAT** has to do the measuring among pleasure and pain to place humans or friends as means for pleasure ? Since if the means fo...[See More](#)

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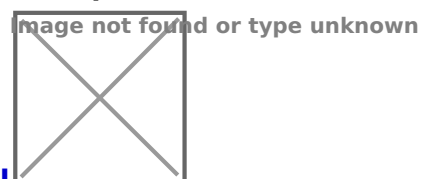
Elli Pensa

Elli Pensa 1. <<Epicurus was he who built up the theory of knowledge in his *Canonic* or *Stichioticon*, as named on the basis of multivalued logic and as it was based on the observation and experience of Nature. Epicurus dismissed as purely mental construct Aristotle...[See More](#)

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Hiram Crespo or type unknown

Hiram Crespo On innate bond or natural fellowship between people, I do not know of an Epicurus source that specifically addresses it that way but Hermarchus his sucesor did, and he believed there was such an innate fellowship



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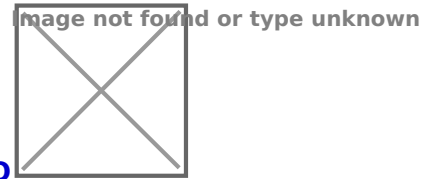
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Hiram Crespo

Hiram Crespo Also modern anthropology seems to confirm it



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Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus **Hiram Crespo** I quickly scanned the first article, but I think the basic debate would not be ****whether**** a "natural fellowship" exists, but what is the basis for it and the terms of it, with Epicureans arguing that it is something that Nature programs as a part of our motivation toward pleasure, but with non-Epicureans arguing that there is some independent duty or order of the universe independent of the pleasure directive.

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Hiram Crespo

Hiram Crespo Right, broadly (as I see it) it's the old nature versus culture; with the Epicureans believing we are good natured in our natural and healthy state, and the non-Epicureans sometimes believing that we are NOT good natured and need external, cultural coercion to force good-nature

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Donald Robertson

Donald Robertson **Hiram Crespo** Well, where we started was with Cicero's contention that Epicurus saw friendship as of purely instrumental value whereas later Epicureans modified his theory and said that friendship begins out of instrumental value but grows into a relationship where the other is valued for their own sake. I don't think that really has much to do with nature versus culture debate, though.

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Elli Pensa

Elli Pensa **Donald Robertson** wrote : <<whereas later Epicureans modified his

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(Epicurus) theory and said that friendship begins out of instrumental value but grows into a relationship where the other is valued for their own sake>> =====> Citations please, of the sources by those you said as later epicureans.

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Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) [Elli Pensa](#) Books I and II of De Finibus. I posted the actual quotation from Cicero above.

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) Yes there are several hints of the later Epicureans falling away, such as when Torquatus hints at giving in to the logicians and says: "Some members of our school however would refine upon this doctrine. These say that it is not enough for the judgment of good and evil to rest with the senses. The facts that pleasure is in and for itself desirable and pain in and for itself to be avoided can also be grasped by the intellect and the reason. Accordingly, they declare that the perception that the one is to be sought after and the other avoided is a natural and innate idea of the mind. Others again, with whom I agree, observing that a great many philosophers advance a vast array of reasons to prove why pleasure should not be counted as a good nor pain as an evil, consider that we had better not be too confident of our case. In their view, it requires elaborate and reasoned argument, and abstruse theoretical discussion of the nature of pleasure and pain."

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Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) "The control of experience was to him a categorical Imperative." I'd say the biggest problem modern Epicureanism has to face in relation to modern psychology is that there's a very large body of contemporary scientific evidence from the mental health field that shows "experiential avoidance" or the desire to directly control feelings of pleasure and pain, to be a predictor of mental health problems in the future. In one study, strength of agreement with the statement "anxiety is bad", e.g., was found by itself to correlate with increased risk of clinical anxiety and depression at long-term follow-up. I'd be interested to know how modern Epicureans might try to deal with these potential criticisms from the field of psychology:

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[Experiential avoidance - Wikipedia](#)

) has been broadly defined as attempts to avoid thoughts, feelings, memories, physical sensations, and other internal experiences—even when doing so creates harm in the long-run.

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[Shana HT](#)  found or type unknown

[Shana HT](#) **THIS!**

Stoicism helped me out of clinical depression and anxiety in ways I don't see Epicureanism doing.

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Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) Well, I'd just ask: are there actually any modern attempts to use Epicureanism as a psychological therapy? Isn't that partly what Epicurus would have wanted for his philosophy? Again, DeWitt says: "Epicurus scorned all philosophy that failed to regard psychiatry as its function." So is anyone actually doing that in a scientific manner? If so, surely they're bound to have to deal with the research literature and the obvious challenges certain findings there present for Epicureanism.

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Shana HT

[Shana HT](#) I'd love to know, there are some aspect of Epicurean philosophy that seems wonderful, and I'm trying to understand it too.

I don't like to pick sides, I want the best of all of them.

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Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) I reviewed the literature when I wrote The Philosophy of CBT and couldn't find any real references to modern evidence-based psychological therapies

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using Epicureanism as an inspiration. Albert Ellis did mention Epicurus in passing a few times, but tha...[See More](#)

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Jason Baker or type unknown

[Jason Baker](#) Pardon my interjection, not being terribly familiar with EA beyond reading the wiki article, but you haven't shown that Epicurean philosophy is one primarily of avoidance. The telos isn't the avoidance of all pain, a negative state, it's pleasure, a positive state. I've never felt that Epicurean philosophy promoted an avoidant approach to life, it's all about directing effort towards pleasure.

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Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) [Jason Baker](#) Attempts to control positive feelings such as sensations of pleasure are also known to be problematic. But in any case, is not ataraxia (the absence of pain or suffering) a major component of Epicurus' definition of the pleasant life?

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Jason Baker

[Jason Baker](#) I think ataraxia is better understood as an adjective describing pleasure, as in "undisturbed pleasures" as in the full cup analogy of pleasure, not as an end in itself.

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Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) [Jason Baker](#) What about this? "The magnitude of pleasures is limited by the removal of all pain. Wherever there is pleasure, so long as it is present, there is no pain either of body or of mind or both."

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Jason Baker

[Jason Baker](#) Again, the full cup model. The goal is to fill the cup, life, to the brim with unmixed pleasures. When it is full, there is no room for anything else.

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Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) "By pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul."



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Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) If that's what he means it's not psychologically true, is it? Increasing pleasurable sensations doesn't necessarily eliminate unpleasant ones.

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Shana HT

[Shana HT](#) [Donald](#), well, if your high, it does  

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Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) [Shana HT](#) Not if you become paranoid. I used to be a drugs counsellor. People who are high very often also get anxiety attacks. Depends what drugs you're talking about, though.

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[Alexander Rios](#) 

[Alexander Rios](#) When Epicurus was near death and in pain, he practiced the recollection of past pleasant events and conversations he had with friends. Epicurus says that having dull medium pains, still allows for many pleasures. I'm reminded of being in the hospital for appendicitis, and being pleased by my friends visiting, and smiles, and a pleasing TV show.

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Jason Baker

[Jason Baker](#) [Donald](#), Plato told us that pleasure has no limit and thus couldn't be the telos. Epicurus showed that pleasure does have a limit, that limit being the elimination of "pain in the body, and trouble in the soul." Ataraxia, tranquility, absence of pain, etc. are the limits of pleasure.

Once the cup is full, there's no room in the cup for anything else. Any more pleasures poured in and the cup runneth over. If the cup is wormy, or full of rancid dregs, then no amount of wine is going to make you enjoy it. Fix the cup, clean it out, fill it up then drink and be merry, preferably in the company of friends.

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Alexander Rios

Alexander Rios Sounds to me like "direct control of feelings" means "faking our feelings", it seems to mean "pretending to be happy", or as some people say "fake it until you make it". Self deception. Honesty is one of the three virtues that goes hand in hand with pleasant living.

When we say control of experience it means choosing prudently, with an eye towards the long term consequences. We sometimes choose pains. We sometimes avoid pleasures. The long term consequences leading to a life of happiness or else some learning. Image not found or type unknown

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Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus Within this subthread there are several things I have to reply to:

1) Shana: "Stoicism helped me out of clinical depression and anxiety in ways I don't see Epicureanism doing." <<If you were clinically depressed then you definitely needed to see a doctor, not a philosopher.

2) Donald Robertson is going straight to the attempt to find techniques ("attempts to use Epicureanism as a psychological therapy?") without defining the goal of life. That's exactly the criticism stated in the Wikipedia article I cited earlier. I submit that it ****makes a difference**** whether one builds one's approach to live on supernatural gods, on fear or hopes for death, or on what one chooses to identify as the goal of life. That's a series of steps that cannot be skipped.

3) The cites about ataraxia are the same ones everyone will see when one approaches Epicurus from the modern English perspective, and one has to be ready for them. If you define the goal of life as "absence of pain" without any further reference to other statements by Epicurus, or without any other context, then Don's position is exactly where you arrive, as virtually all other modern commentators except for Dewitt, Gosling & Taylor, [Nikolsky](#), and a maybe a few others. This is an issue on which any blurred line is a direct slide to stoicism.

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Ron Warrick Image not found or type unknown

[Ron Warrick](#) We have from Epicurus that anxiety is due largely if not entirely from fear of the gods or fear of death, and that the study of nature is therapeutic in this regard. So any approach to overcoming anxiety that is found to be counterproductive would perforce be rejected.

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Alexander Rios

[Alexander Rios](#) Yes, imaginary events. Interaction with non-happy gods, and fear that sensation (and/or memory) continues after death. Also fear of pain, and fear of becoming a slave to unlimited desires.

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Ron Warrick

[Ron Warrick](#) If you can overcome fear of death, there is little to be anxious about that is not under your control. But there will always be some residual anxiety whenever life requires choices to be made.

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Alexander Rios

[Alexander Rios](#) Image may contain text

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Alexander Rios

[Alexander Rios](#) All our emotions are naturally selected faculties. "Nature has given them to us" to help us navigate life on Earth. As well as senses, instincts and feelings (pleasant/painful).

People who wish to deny their emotions are deceiving themselves and not listening to their nature given faculties. They will end up harming themselves.

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Hiram Crespo

[Hiram Crespo](#) The intention is to live a life filled with pleasures, because it is the only one we have, and for this much attention was placed to choices and avoidances and to hedonic calculus. Epicurus was not trying to produce a clinical psychotherapy system. He w...[See More](#)

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Ron Warrick

[Ron Warrick](#) [Alexander Rios](#) "Modern" stoics will say they are not about denying the emotions at all, merely tempering the destructive ones to a safe level.

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Alexander Rios

[Alexander Rios](#) Ron Warrick , yes. Agreed.

I am responding to the accusation that Epicurus is about "direct control of feelings", which science has shown fails.

Epicurus teaches to value/listen to our natural faculties, He does not teach us to try to "control"/dampen/override or trade/swap/reassign them.

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Ron Warrick

[Ron Warrick](#) [Alexander Rios](#) It gets very semantic, but surely you don't mean that we don't eat to alleviate our feelings of hunger. Or perhaps this is considered indirect control? And isn't the technique of asking "What will happen if I do/do not act upon my desire?" meant to have direct effect on our feelings?

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Alexander Rios

[Alexander Rios](#) Ron Warrick

Yes, we eat to remove the pain of hunger. We do not deny our suffering. Hunger is unpleasant. Not sure that I would say I was sad, angry, or fearful.

We have a whole range of emotions (happy, sad, angry, fearful) and all kind of shades of those. All of those emotions can be categorized into pleasant and unpleasant feelings. By feeling I mean one of: pleasant or unpleasant.

Regarding your " meant to have a direct effect on our feelings". Hmm. You raise a good point. I have always thought that we do that to predict the consequences of our choices by the process of imagination. A simulation.

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But as you point out, the simulation is also affective. It has emotional effects, which are either pleasant or unpleasant. And those often drive our eventual choices, so we let them help us choose. We follow them.

We don't let the simulation run, detect sadness then practice telling ourselves that our sadness "ought to be" admiration or terror or bliss, and brainwash ourselves to pretend those instead of sadness, because of my hunger.

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Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) It seems to me that the discussion has kind of strayed a bit from the psychological point at stake. There are a number of different psychological problems associated with strongly judging unpleasant feelings to be bad, and with attempts to try to elim...[See More](#)

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Ron Warrick

[Ron Warrick](#) [Donald Robertson](#) OK. Not sure what this has to do with virtue being a greater goal than pleasure.

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Jason Baker

[Jason Baker](#) [Donald](#), what does your "psychological point" judging "that a feeling is bad" have to do with Epicurean philosophy? We don't have to analyze our feelings to the point of neurosis, we experience them directly!

Can you point to where the Epicurean canon describes standing in judgement of our own feelings, analyzing them rationally? It feels like you're confusing desire and feelings. They aren't the same thing. Please correct me if I've misinterpreted.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 10:10pm](#)

Alexander Rios

[Alexander Rios](#) Donald,

Regarding "judging unpleasant emotions to be bad"

What do we mean by "bad" here?

"Incorrect? Faulted? Errored?"

Why would we assume that our human nature has failed? We don't.

The emotion is correct. The feeling is correctly unpleasant. Our soul (nervous system) is not confused, troubled, or corrupted.

The situation is unpleasant and our judgement is correct. We don't need to pretend that the situation is ok.


[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [March 6 at 10:52pm](#) · [Edited](#)

Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) [Ron Warrick](#) Well if we make pleasure the supreme good in life there's reason to believe, from modern scientific research in psychology, that can be counter-productive. Whereas if we focus on the value of healthy functioning (virtue) as our priority we get around that problem and potentially experience an improvement in feelings anyway as a consequence.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 10:53pm](#)

Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) [Jason Baker](#) No, I'm not sure I understand what you're saying but it doesn't sound at all like what I've been talking about so there must be some crossed wires somewhere.  type unknown

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) 'I if we make pleasure the supreme good in life there's reason to believe, from modern scientific research in psychology, that can be counter-productive.' Counterproductive by what standard? Why would we want to be healthy if not for the pleasure that being healthy brings?

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [March 6 at 10:55pm](#)

Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) [Alexander Rios](#) It doesn't really matter, it's the negative value judgement itself that seems psychologically important and the implications that has for attention, elaborative thinking, avoidance, etc.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [March 6 at 10:55pm](#)

Alexander Rios

[Alexander Rios](#) "For the reasons I have stated, we must always pay close attention to our perceptions from the senses, to our feelings of pain and pleasure, and to our mental apprehensions from the anticipations [[instincts]], both those we receive ourselves, and thos...[See More](#)

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Ron Warrick

[Ron Warrick](#) [Donald Robertson](#) This seems to just be begging the question again. What value does this virtue of healthy functioning have other than pleasure or restoring our capacity for pleasure?

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [March 6 at 10:56pm](#)

Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) [Cassius Amicus](#) Counter-productive in the sense that it contradicts itself, by producing the opposite of what it's aiming at.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 10:56pm](#)

Alexander Rios

[Alexander Rios](#) Good night guys/gals. TTYL.

Most of all, we must keep our investigations strictly in accord with the evidence of the senses. We must ensure that we keep our conclusions consistent with those things we have already clearly grasped through our sensatio...[See More](#)

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) If a particular person's choices in how to produce pleasure in fact bring pain rather than pleasure, then of course by Epicurean standards those choices should be revised, but why would anyone ever change that course to refocus on actually achieving pleasure unless his goal is to achieve pleasure?

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [March 6 at 11:00pm](#)

Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) [Ron Warrick](#) No, I don't think it's question-begging. Perhaps the fundamental schism between Stoics and Epicureans has always been that Epicureans assume that virtue must be a means to some end, whereas the argument the Stoics

make is that we should vi...[See More](#)
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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) That is indeed the ultimate question. Why should virtue be considered an end in itself?

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [March 6 at 11:01pm](#)

Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) [Cassius Amicus](#) But what would not have changed is the fact that they value pleasure as the highest good, of course, which is the point at stake.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 11:01pm](#)

Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) We seem to be agreed that the question of whether virtue is its own reward is the ultimate issue. And so why do you personally maintain that it is?

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [March 6 at 11:02pm](#)

Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) [Cassius Amicus](#) Well one short answer would be that we have a variety of different moral intuitions or preconceptions that conflict, on reflection, with the position that virtue is only of instrumental value. For example, to pick one, it might be argued that we (or at least many of us) don't tend to admire or find praiseworthy others who make pleasure their highest goal in life. So treating it as our own supreme good would, in that case, arguably be a double standard. (Of course, some people will reject that premise, and so the argument would become more involved or another angle would have to be adopted on the question.)

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) And thus Cicero argued that it was disreputable to advocate pleasure in the forum or the camp. But that is hardly a philosophical proof is it?

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [March 6 at 11:07pm](#)

Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) [Cassius Amicus](#) I think it does constitute a philosophical argument, though, if the person to whom you're speaking concedes that they have moral intuitions that, on reflection, conflict with what's being said. That's a form of reductio ad absurdum, in fact. The problem is that some readers will deny that they

have those preconceptions or intuitions but then the argument can arguably be revised to elicit examples of other situations where they do conflict.

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) And what do you believe Donald Robertson is the source of these moral intuitions?

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [March 6 at 11:31pm](#)

Ron Warrick

[Ron Warrick](#) Early day tomorrow. I look forward to hearing more supporting arguments for why virtue is an end in itself.

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [March 6 at 11:39pm](#)

Alexander Rios

[Alexander Rios](#) Donald Robertson

Moral intuitions? As proximate or ultimate explanations?

Proximate. I think.

You have to press people hard to get an ultimate explanation.

Christians post-rationalize their actions with appeals to virtue. So will Muslims and other religious folk.

But they also believe that virtue is the criteria that their gods will use to judge whether they are worthy of eternal, maximal happy living they hope for in Heaven, Paradise. This eternal happy living is what they seek.

And the non-religious believe that virtue is the criteria that their peers will use to include/exclude them from the happy living that comes from friendship. And non-religious loners believe it should be the criteria.

Humans are Homo Sapiens. We are Apes. We are social mammals. We are mammals.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/151-an-opening-conversation-with-a-committed-modern-stoic-prelude-to-eight-stoic-cha/>

We are animals. We are alive.

Most of what we do is because of what we are. What motivates Apes? Social mammals? Animals? Life forms? The answers apply to us too.

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Hiram Crespo

[Hiram Crespo](#) I am not sure that virtue and healthy functioning are the same thing. If what is meant is efficiency, expediency, or opportunity, then why do they not use those words? Virtue is vague and not clearly discernable when we study nature, much less when people claim virtue in culture. There is a huge push toward establishing a theocracy in the US and many who are trying to get us to degenerate into a theocracy claim to be virtuous to mask their thirst for power. In Islam, a virtuous man must beat his wife if she disobeys as per Quran 4:34. Polystratus argued that not knowing that pleasure is the end our natures seek is the source of all evil. This is why we should align our choices and avoidances with the pleasure and aversion faculty, and never set an end result that is arbitrary like obedience, or a deity. I am not sure that I have come across a definition of virtue that is clear and can not be thwarted easily by cultural corruption.

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Ron Warrick

[Ron Warrick](#) I think Zeno-ist Stoics did argue that any shortfall in virtue represented unhealthy functioning, though they were primarily talking about mental functioning. And I think they would argue that nothing in their philosophy is arbitrary, but is based on reason, which is the driving force of the universe. Don't ask me how this assures happiness, given the lack of evidence that nature cares about our individual happiness.

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Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) Interesting. So do you agree with this interpretation of Epicureanism from the article above? "In spite of this teaching it was not the doctrine of Epicurus that pleasure was the greatest good. To his thinking the greatest good was life itself. This was a logical deduction from the denial of immortality. Without the afterlife this present life becomes the concentration of all values. Pleasure, or happiness, has its place as the end, goal or fulfillment of living."

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) Dewitt is addressing there in short form what he addresses at greater length in his book. His basic point is that pleasure and pain have meaning only to the living, and so that life itself is a precondition of ethics having any meaning at all. Dewitt also has a lengthy discussion of what the "greatest good" means in his "summum bonum fallacy" argument. So there are lots of subtleties but yes I agree with those observations. The dead have no ethics, no god, no afterlife, no nothing. This is related to what Jefferson said, "the earth belongs in usufruct to the living - that the dead have neither powers nor rights over it." Meaning that all discussion of ethics presupposes that we are talking about living beings.

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Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) For example, the quote you posted above from the inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda saying "pleasure is the end of the best mode of life", appears to contradict DeWitt's interpretation of Epicureanism in that passage, does it not? If there's a "best mode of life" then life itself cannot literally be the supreme good, because life in some modes is better than life in other modes, so the supreme good would presumably have to be defined more specifically either as the specific mode of life of which Diogenes is speaking (presumably the pleasant life), or as one of its components (presumably pleasure). But it can't be, contrary to what DeWitt says here, merely that life in itself is literally the supreme good for Epicurus. Or do you interpret these two passages as somehow being compatible with one another? I'd be interested to know.

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) This is essentially a good restatement of the Platonic argument. There must be a highest and best and if you can take a word which allows for something supposedly higher and better than that can't be "the" goal of life. It becomes necessary to talk ...[See More](#)

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Ron Warrick

[Ron Warrick](#) [Donald Robertson](#) We'd have to square "life is the highest good" with "He will on occasion die for a friend". I don't think that can be done.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [March 6 at 1:41pm](#)

Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) "...contrary to what DeWitt says here, merely that life in itself is literally the supreme good for Epicurus." << We might want to check the exact text as contained in the full book, but the point is reconciled by observing that none of the ethics discussion has any meaning, so that life is the PRECONDITION and therefore the greatest ASSET which one has, but that pleasure is indeed the GOAL for how life is to be used, and if one can no longer live pleasurably then it makes sense to leave the stage when the play ceases to please us. We're talking about different things when we're talking about "greatest goods" and "guides to life"

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Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) [Ron Warrick](#) Well, yes, that would also seem to be a problem here.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 9:58pm](#)

Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) [Cassius Amicus](#) Well greatest good seems like a fairly simple concept to me, but I could be wrong. Surely life being itself the supreme good and life being a precondition of the supreme good are two very different claims. To put it another way, for Epicurus, would a life full of pain and suffering be as good/desirable as a life of pleasure and contentment? Presumably not. So it's difficult to see how life, in itself, could be the supreme good, in that case.

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Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) ""The control of experience was to him a categorical Imperative" - That is a DeWitt expression, if I recall, with the point of Epicurus not to foreshadow Kant tbut simply to point out that the control of experience is how we obtain pleasure and avoid pain. I will look at the cites you mentioned. Of course there are many people who are mentally unhealthy, but that does not negate the existence of mental health.

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Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) Sure but any psychological strategy that emphasizes the goal of controlling subjective feelings of pleasure or displeasure is now known to be potentially counter-productive, especially for people with existing diagnoses. That's not a fringe-theory, it's a central component of virtually all modern evidence-based psychotherapy.

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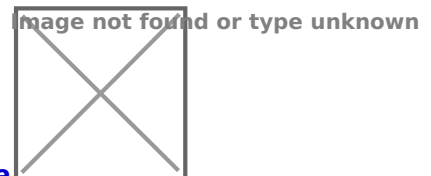
Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) Don I am not able to address your observations about psychotherapy without studying them. I am sure there are many people whose psyches have some dysfunction that disposes them to problems, and I am sure that treatment of those conditions can involve not only medication but also therapies to which you allude. But I would never judge the correctness or incorrectness of a philosophy, which seeks to cover the big picture of physics, epistemology, and ethics, primarily by looking at sick people.

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) Without getting too far into major weeds, which would require lots of details to address, I find this excerpt from Wikipedia to sound very reasonable:



Philosophical concerns with CBT methods[edit]...[See More](#)

[Cognitive behavioral therapy - Wikipedia](#)

EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG

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Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) **[Cassius Amicus](#)** Sure but as Epicureans, if you don't mind me saying, isn't it part of your philosophy to keep abreast of scientific evidence in the field of psychology or psychopathology that would have significant implications for Epicurean ethics or m...[See More](#)

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Donald Robertson

Donald Robertson Cassius Amicus I think especially as a lay person approaching scientific research, it's important to look at the big picture. There are criticisms of CBT research but (like with climate change skepticism) that shouldn't be allowed to obscure the fact that there's a clear overall consensus among most researchers in the field that CBT is proven effective for a range of common anxiety and depressive disorders (by many hundreds of high-quality independent research studies). That's what matters here. As an aside, the research on experiential avoidance isn't usually criticised by the humanistic/psychodynamic camp who are critical of CBT. They actually tend to agree with the findings in that area.

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Donald Robertson

Donald Robertson Here's a typical study:

<https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3...xkoR8j-ZI5cikH4>

Experiential avoidance as a generalized psychological vulnerability: Comparisons with coping and emotion regulation strategies

Extending previous work, we conducted two studies concerning the toxic influences of experiential avoidance (EA) as a core mechanism in the development and maintenance of psychological distress, and disruption of pleasant, engaging, and spontaneous activity. Of particular interest was whether EA acc...

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Elli Pensa

Elli Pensa I' m sorry that this video at the youtube is not in the english language to understand many issues on psychology and psychotherapy. This video is from an event held in Athens and based on the book by Philodemus "on frankness of speech" translated by our epicurean friend Christos Yapijakis professor in the Department of Neurology, Medical School, University of Athens, and founding member of the Friends of Epicurean Philosophy "Garden of Athens"

In this event were also some famous professors and physicians in the University of Athens, USA etc. All from the field of psychotherapy, physicians of Neurology, Endocrinology and Philosophy. All of them argued and were agreed that the FATHER of Psychotherapy was the Athenian philosopher Epicurus !

<https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%...xVAK5Myyx36SzwU>

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) Ok it appears the response I need to make to this thread is the same as stated otherwise. IT MAKES A DIFFERENCE whether one believes that the universe was created and directed by a god, whether one believes that after death is punishment or reward, whether one believes that living pleasurably is the goal of life or "being a good person" is the goal; whether one believes that one has any control at all over one's destiny, and similar questions about the nature of existence. I am not hearing any of those issues addressed in this discussion of clinical techniques and it is really bewildering to me how one can jump into a discussion of recommending therapeutic techniques without first identifying the nature and the natural goal of the people to whom we are giving advise.

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Ron Warrick

[Ron Warrick](#) **[Donald Robertson](#)** Aren't the psychotherapies you favor aimed at "the control of experience"? What are they aimed at, then, virtue?

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [March 6 at 1:43pm](#)

Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) And following up on Ron's question, have you yet defined for us what "virtue" means in your opinion **[Donald Robertson](#)**?

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [March 6 at 1:47pm](#)

Elli Pensa

[Elli Pensa](#) Shana HT I beg your pardon ?? Did you say that your depression is healed by stoicism ?? But this ideology IS under the regime that the goal of life is : <Virtue>> that is usually based on abstract opinions of other persons BECAUSE is not measured by a standard and a natural feeling AS our faculty that is PLEASURE !!! And this goal of Virtue is in accordance with 1) the necessity i.e. Fate-Destiny, 2) the pressure of your emotions i.e. the Apathy, and 3) any of your action that it should be i.e. your Duty !!!!???

What the heck has to do the above things and issues with the field of the science of Psychology, Psychiatric, Neurology, Endocrinology, Psychotherapy, Philosophy etc etc ? All the above issues are against YOUR autonomy, YOUR freedom of thinking, YOUR freedom of speech, YOUR freedom of acting and YOUR freedom to change laws that are not beneficial any more.!!!! These things are against the happiness and the feelings of pleasure of any person indeed. All these issues are confirmend now by

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/151-an-opening-conversation-with-a-committed-modern-stoic-prelude-to-eight-stoic-cha/>

the evidences that are leading to a leader or a savior or the worse they lead in a pantheistic deity of a god.

I wonder now is this science, is this philosophy WHAT THE HECK IS THIS ???!

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Ron Warrick

[Ron Warrick](#) [Elli Pensa](#) Needs more CAPITALS and exclamation marks!!!!
1f642.png 😊

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Hiram Crespo

[Hiram Crespo](#) Also, rather than assume or insinuate that most Epicureans in antiquity were coming from a place of anxiety or mental illness when they attempted to control experience, is it not fair to assume that the most mature and philosophically developed of them came from a place of confidence, and that they were training others in developing that confidence? We have addressed here in this group the idea of "confident expectation" in the writings, for instance, as one of the benefits of friendship. And when that confidence is in evidence, anxieties (many of which are COMPLETELY natural and based on lacking access to the natural and necessary goods, and therefore nothing to be ashamed of) naturally vanish.

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Elli Pensa

[Elli Pensa](#) Mr. [Ron Warrick](#) Why not ? The authentic ancient greek language was written with Capital letters, as it is in the attached photo. Hope you know from where is this text and what is written on it !!
No automatic alt text available.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 6:35pm](#)

Ron Warrick

[Ron Warrick](#) Different styles are appropriate to different times and mileus.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 6:49pm](#)

Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) [Elli Pensa](#) Epicurus hasn't had much influence on psychotherapy, though. He's virtually never mentioned. So I doubt most therapists would agree with the claim that he's ultimately the father of the whole field. And anyway, what about Pythagoras and Socrates who also employed the medical analogy for philosophy but

predated Epicurus?

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 10:05pm](#)

Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) [Ron Warrick](#) Mainly at improved functioning. Also, improvement in subjective feelings is a consequence but it's not the aim focused on by the individual themselves, which is what makes the difference. If I want a client to be less anxious that doesn't cause the same problem. If they are afraid of anxiety, or think it's shameful, or just bad, then they may pay more attention to it than normal, which can perpetuate it and make it more easily triggered. Also, they may try to distract themselves from it, or suppress it, which can also perpetuate it, and may have the side-effect of interfering with normal behaviour, e.g., with socially anxious clients, trying "not to feel anxious" can increase cognitive load and make them struggle to find their words when speaking to other people. (Just one of many examples.)

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 10:09pm](#)

Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) [Cassius Amicus](#) I believe that there are, at least superficially, many different virtues but they all consist in moral wisdom applied to different aspects of life, or recognizing what is good and bad. Virtue is therefore also the healthy functioning of the mind, or more specifically reasoning well about life, which once again would equate with practical wisdom. One of the main indicators of reasoning well is consistency, or not contradicting ourselves in thought or action. So wisdom is also a kind of internal harmony or integrity. That includes not applying a "double-standard" by praising/admiring qualities in others that conflict with those we seek to achieve ourselves. Virtue is therefore both healthy and praiseworthy (or "honourable"), in that sense.

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) And what is "good" and "bad"? By what standard. Why should one care about being healthy?

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [March 6 at 10:36pm](#)

Ron Warrick

[Ron Warrick](#) Donald Robertson Why does someone want or need improved functioning unless their condition is causing them to suffer?

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [March 6 at 10:49pm](#) · [Edited](#)

Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) [Ron Warrick](#) Well that's basically the "Why is virtue its own reward" question in another form. Again, there are several lines other schools of philosophy may take on this. One would be that we have certain preconceptions that commit us to thinking of...[See More](#)

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Ron Warrick

[Ron Warrick](#) [Donald Robertson](#) So, it seems to be a philosophy geared heavily toward being admirable, i.e., the opinion of others. I'm not sure that is a guarantee of a flourishing life. At least many philosophers deny that it is.

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Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) [Ron Warrick](#) No. You've misunderstood. It's almost the opposite of that. Other people's opinions are classed as indifferent in Stoic Ethics. I'm referring to whether the individual him or herself views a quality as being genuinely admirable, on reflection. That's very different from what you're describing: whether they think *other people* would find something admirable.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 11:28pm](#)

Ron Warrick

[Ron Warrick](#) [Donald Robertson](#) OK. Still instrumental in my view. I know I would suffer if I did not create standards for myself and work to uphold them. And it is pleasurable (usually!) to create and uphold them. So, as long as I get to choose all the virtues on the basis of what will please me I could live "as if" virtue were the goal of living.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [March 6 at 11:36pm](#)

Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

[Mish Taylor](#) Message hidden or type unknown

[Mish Taylor](#) Personally, I find no fault in having, adopting or acquiring a positive mental attitude, this to me is one of the main things that comes across in the philosophy of Epicurus. Most forms of 'talking therapy', self help & etc are simply old ideas dressed up in modern language.

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · [4](#) · [March 6 at 1:45pm](#)

Donald Robertson

Donald Robertson I'd say that's half-true. Modern therapy recycles many old ideas. However, it's definitely not true that no progress occurs. To pick the cliched example... It used to be believed that panic disorders were biologically determined and virtually untreatable by talking therapy. (For several reasons.) However, in the mid 1980s a huge advance was made by David Clark in the UK, which took the therapy for this condition from "zero to hero" and it is now shown to have one of the highest success rates of any form of psychological therapy.

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Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

Elli Pensa

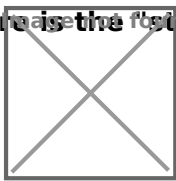
Elli Pensa Donald Robertson Your are kindly requested to not call Epicurean Philosophy as Epicurean-ISM. Epicurean philosophy has nothing to do with ideologies or obsessions like Communism-Nazism-Capitalism, Christianity, Buddhism, Islamism etc,. Because Epicurean philosophy is a philosophy that is confirmed by the the science and has the suffix "Y" as we say PsychologY, PsychiatrY, NeurologY, EndocrinologY, PathologY etc, we say the SAME the Epicurean PhilosophY. Thanks in advance for your understanding. 1f642.png 😊

If someone... would like to find a list with -isms he will find here in this link : <https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3...xmhcTGzFQPTyuAQ>

As we realize there is not at that list the Epicurean Philosophy as Epicurean-ism.

but there is the "Stoicism" and is explained as "a belief in indifference to pleasure or

pain" !!



[Word List: Isms](#)

Definition of words for belief systems and isms
PHRONTISTRY.INFO

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Ron Warrick

[Ron Warrick](#) This is hypersensitive, methinks.

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Elli Pensa

[Elli Pensa](#) No, this was not any hypersensitive thing Mr. [Ron Warrick](#). It is after analysis, after examination on the words. After some written articles and works by our epicurean friends. And finally after many hours of conversations made among our epicurean friends in the greek Gardens and the Symposia.Thanks.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [March 6 at 2:59pm](#) · [Edited](#)

Shana HT

[Shana HT](#) but where is the science, then?

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 3:03pm](#)

Elli Pensa

[Elli Pensa](#) [Shana HT](#) In the usage of the Epicurean Canon is the whole science my dear.

Do you know how to use this epistemic tool ?? Did you read something for this method ?

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 3:07pm](#)

Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) Well, I don't want to offend anyone but to be honest, I don't really share your beliefs about the connotations of those words. As I understand it most authors still use the term "Epicureanism", and find that acceptable, so I think eliminating it would be a bit cumbersome and seems unnecessary. But what do others think? Is this a common feeling among your group?

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [March 6 at 3:19pm](#)

Ron Warrick

[Ron Warrick](#) [Donald Robertson](#) This is the first I have heard of the complaint, but it is something we can take up in the group later. No need to involve you just now.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 3:43pm](#)

Jason Baker

Jason Baker Why not just shorten it to E-ism and Epicurus to Mr. E? 1f609.png



Looking at the late date that -ism entered the English language, it likely doesn't have the same connotation when we use it as when our Greek friends use -ismos in their own language. Given our wholesale appropriation of Greek morphology, I'm happy to defer to the original understanding and use the preferred Greek form Epicurean philosophy instead of Epicureanism when discussing it here amongst friends.

Perhaps if there ever were an incorporated Epicurean Church, using the -ism form in reference to it would be appropriate. In the meantime, does shortening it to Epicureanism save us so much time that it serves our purposes to be so imprecise? Precise language is one of the things that differentiates the ancient Epicurean school from the rest, one of the main complaints against the Garden by its detractors even, iirc.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 4:12pm](#) · [Edited](#)

Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus I see Elli posted more on this at the link below, so I will add my comment there -

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/EpicureanPhilosophy/permalink/1251189141596710/>



Elli Pensa to [Epicurean Philosophy](#) [March 6 at 4:34pm](#) ·

For my epicurean friends of here I translated into the English language some pages of the article entitled "Epicurean philosophy or Epicureanism", by [Dimitris A...](#)

[See More](#)

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Hiram Crespo

Hiram Crespo I don't feel strongly about 'isms', but I understand that some others do. It may have to do with the Platonizing influence of language in the abstract of in the singular instead of plural. It helps to more accurately describe nature.

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<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/151-an-opening-conversation-with-a-committed-modern-stoic-prelude-to-eight-stoic-cha/>

Elli Pensa

Elli Pensa Platonizing yes, but also it has to do with the masses **Hiram**.and our philosophy has first principles to start from the PERSON and his uniqueness.

Like · Reply · 1 · March 6 at 6:39pm

Elli Pensa

Elli Pensa As we read in Liantinis' book entitled : "STOA & ROME", we see that the suffix -ism has its origin from the Latins !

Here we are...

from a remarkable excerpt of Dimitris Liantinis book "STOA AND ROME":

[...“ The big difference at the spiritual attitude of the Greeks and the Romans”.

This difference is indicating at the type of the linguistic fossils of the two cultures that survived in the modern world. The Global Greek words like music, philosophy, theater, geometry, mathematics, physics, astronomy, political, architecture, democracy, words that they declare a youth's shininess and a weight of quality towards to the conditions that the Latin language has saved. Under the conventional shape of : “ismus” the rescue to the terms of the Latin language expresses : the team, the indiscriminate, the unexceptional. But the enviable uniqueness is missing. Eg rationalism (ratio), potentialism (potentia), Imperialism (imperium), socialism (socius), Pacifism (pax), militarism (miles), Realism (res), pessimism (malus), optimism (bonus) etc...]

According to the above excerpt of Dimitris Liantinis, when we say epicurean-ISM we are missing this “enviable uniqueness of the person”. And the epicurean philosophy, has for first principles the uniqueness of the PERSON and not to the impersonal of the MASSES. Thus, for our proper thinking if we use epicureanism and not epicurean philosophy in our terminology and in our reference... our view for the Epicurean Philosophy collapses...and collapses (to use one of his own Liantini's words) συγκορμοδεντρορίζη “syngormodentrorizi”(=tree trunk with its roots).
1f642.png 😊 Thank you !

«I was never anxious to please the mob. For what pleased them, I did not know, and

what I do know, was far removed from their comprehension (Epicurus). All the above was in one of my comments as stated from 23 of July 2014.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [March 6 at 7:00pm](#)

Ron Warrick

[Ron Warrick](#) I think it is a category error to conflate a philosophy and its adherents. The adherents may be individuals while the philosophy is uniform.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 8:46pm](#)

Elli Pensa

[Elli Pensa](#) Who said that we the epicureans are adherents or followers? We are students and we study the specific, genuine, and true hellenic philosophy that was given by Epicurus and his friends who are studied the Nature. The epicureans keep their first principles, and among other pupils of other philosophies were, are and will be the only persons who keep the scientific method all of their written works to be based on sources and making reference to these sources.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [March 6 at 8:59pm](#)

Ron Warrick

[Ron Warrick](#) [Elli Pensa](#) Fine. Change the word to "students" and I still stand by my point.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 9:03pm](#)

Elli Pensa

[Elli Pensa](#) I do not understand your point on the issue of our epicurean first principles. As we say our first principles start from the person, Epicurus addressed to the person and not TO the masses. He had not a willing to be a leader. He was a philosopher and every individual studies his philosophy which is based on the observation of Nature.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [March 6 at 9:09pm](#)

Jason Baker

[Jason Baker](#) This reminds me so much of the arguments about collective vs. individual rights in Con Law.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 9:30pm](#)

Ron Warrick

[Ron Warrick](#) [Elli Pensa](#) I don't think an "-ism" implies anything about whether the ideas are for the individual or for the masses.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 10:01pm](#)

Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) It seems to me that in modern English -ism is just a generic suffix that's commonly used to denote a cluster of ideas related to the root word. And it's commonly used precisely to avoid any specific connotations about the sort of thing being referred ...[See More](#)

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Elli Pensa

[Elli Pensa](#) [Donald Robertson](#) I explained further with an article that I already posted what means ISMS and where they lead...TO THE IDEOLOGIES. As it is well known the Epicurean philosophy is not an ideology and is not addressed to the masses but in the person. As...[See More](#)

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [March 6 at 10:56pm](#)

Elli Pensa

[Elli Pensa](#) And here is another book by an outstanding scientist who wrote for Epicurus these words : 

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [March 6 at 10:59pm](#) · [Edited](#)

Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) [Elli Pensa](#) Sure but I disagree with your claim about what the suffix ISM means. As I understand it, the English suffix doesn't necessarily refer to an "ideology" but is broader in scope than you're suggesting.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 11:20pm](#)

Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) [Elli Pensa](#) Sure but that doesn't make Epicurean philosophy itself a "science" does it? It would be more accurate to say Epicureans have a philosophy or set of doctrines that has some historical links with science or can potentially be supported with f...[See More](#)

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 11:22pm](#)

Elli Pensa

[Elli Pensa](#) [Donald Robertson](#) Right. The epicurean philosophy is not a science itself. But where I did say that ? I copy paste here of what I commented to you exactly :
:"You are kindly requested to not call Epicurean Philosophy as Epicurean-ISM.

Epicurean philosoph... [See More](#)
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [March 7 at 5:50am](#)

Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

[Matt Jackson](#) or type unknown

[Matt Jackson](#) I do have a question for Donald, I'm not well read in Stoicism. But I have a pretty strong background in Neoplatonic philosophy. I was wondering how Stoic thought might relate to Neoplatonic concepts of virtue? Is there a commonality or a big difference?

<https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3...dCwLoXlz0RN6rlo>
[The Enneads of Plotinus: THE FIRST ENNEAD: SECOND TRACTATE: Section 1](#)
The Enneads of Plotinus, at sacred-texts.com
SACRED-TEXTS.COM

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Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) Ok. As I understand it the admins are happy for me to answer these questions here. I'm no expert on Plotinus but it seems to me that his Platonic concept of virtue is more abstract than what the Stoics have in mind. Stoic virtue is knowledge, which consists in applying preconceptions correctly to specific situations in life. I think Plotinus probably means something more like a mystical participation in the Divine. There's bound to be overlap and similarity depending on who you ask and how they interpret the two philosophies, though. On the face of it, Stoic Ethics appears less mystical, but then on closer inspection it does have a sort of mystical quality as well. Virtue is a sort of harmony between the individual and the universe as a whole, or the cosmic Logos, at least from one perspective.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [March 6 at 10:34pm](#)

Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

[Matt Jackson](#)

[Matt Jackson](#) Virtue, like Beauty and other positive qualities are emanations of the One, they bring about a Likeness to the Divine Principle. Is there any commonality of thought in Stoicism? To Plotinus and others like Proclus, the One is the source of the Good in this world. Is there anything in Stoicism that mirrors that? Is there a "God"

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principle in Stoicism?

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Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) Yes, this isn't as much the focus of Stoic Ethics as it is in Plotinus but the Stoics believed in Zeus, whom they equate with the Logos, and virtue is an imitation of the Mind of Zeus by mortals, and also consists in piety and harmony with the cosmos taken as a whole, which as pantheists (or panentheists) they basically equate with Zeus. (That's not usually the aspect of Stoicism that's at the fore in writers like Seneca or in modern approaches to it, though.)

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [March 6 at 10:37pm](#)

Matt Jackson

[Matt Jackson](#) Awesome, thank you for the reply. It sounds in some way very similar in some respects to Plotinian thought, though there is some different terminology. What would you equate the Cosmic logos to? Like the Tao? Or the Dharma? Not really a sentient Cosmic Nous?

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 10:41pm](#)

Matt Jackson

[Matt Jackson](#) The Neoplatonists had the idea that the Nous was a creative element in the Universe, it was an active mind. Is the Logos something similar? Or impersonal like the Tao?

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [March 6 at 10:43pm](#)

Matt Jackson

[Matt Jackson](#) Getting these answers will really help me "grasp" Stoic thought. So i thank you.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [March 6 at 10:44pm](#)

Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) **[Matt Jackson](#)** The Stoic Logos is equated with the Mind of Zeus, who is a rational animal that encompasses the whole universe. I don't think I'd describe it as "personal", though, it's a bit more of a philosophers' god than that, although it's probably more pantheistic than Plotinus' philosophy. It's ultimately drawn to a large extent from Heraclitus.

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Matt Jackson

[Matt Jackson](#) Yes it seems like Zeus or the Logos is a whole that is fragmented into "us." Like a organism with individual parts. So in that way it seems that virtues are derived from human reason not a divine hypostasis.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [March 6 at 11:32pm](#)

Matt Jackson

[Matt Jackson](#) Plotinus was far more panentheistic in the sense that the 3 main hypostasis are separate, though immanent in all things. Therefore, the Cosmic Nous is separate from Man, yet man takes part in it.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [March 6 at 11:34pm](#)

Matt Jackson

[Matt Jackson](#) Virtue trickles down from the perfection of the One, into the contemplating and creative mind of the Nous down to the Animate Soul. Would it be fair to say in Stoic thought that the "reasoning" aspect is not in a divine Mind but rather in each individual taking part in the greater whole?

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [March 6 at 11:43pm](#)

Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

Mish Taylor

[Mish Taylor](#) [Donald Robertson](#) What improvements to my life can Stoicism bring that the philosophy of Epicurus can't?

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · [3](#) · [March 6 at 3:23pm](#)

Shana HT

[Shana HT](#) to cope with difficulty.. maybe its just a personality thing... but thinking of good and pleasure when im in trouble does nothing for me

what stoic philosophy does for me, is it makes me mindful of what my hardship is and how i can overcome and surpass it. i feel like practicing it makes me stronger, richer, happier and more confident

but i have to say, when life isnt so burdensome, some aspects of Epicurian philosophy brings much joy

i just dont understand this animosity towards stoic philosophy and feel alone in trying to find a way to utilize both philosophies

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 5:19pm](#)

Jason Baker

[Jason Baker](#) You're not alone, Seneca led the way for you. He couldn't reconcile them either. 1f609.png 😊

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [March 6 at 5:31pm](#)

[Mish Taylor](#) Image failed to load or type unknown

[Mish Taylor](#) [Shana HT](#) I find it more helpful not to focus on the negative. Things that are beyond your control or influence, will be what they will be. Anything else can usually be overcome with a bit of humour, creative thinking and a bit of support if needed. Whe...[See More](#)

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [March 6 at 5:54pm](#)

Hiram Crespo

[Hiram Crespo](#) [Shana HT](#) it seems like you default to Stoicism when you're down and to Epicurus when you're not down. Might it be that you lack Epicurean friends to support you in those times? Friendship is a huge boost to our confidence.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [March 6 at 6:31pm](#) · [Edited](#)

Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) Well one way of answering that question would just be to say that the Stoics offer a wider variety of psychological strategies than the Epicureans, many of which have been assimilated into modern research-based psychotherapy and resilience training, wh...[See More](#)

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 10:40pm](#)

Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) Donald I understand why Ron said what he said, and the other admins may feel differently, but as far as I am concerned you are a special case and this thread is fine for most anything you want to talk about that is even tangentially related. Your work is well known and as long as we keep it largely within this thread where it doesn't keep popping up as new material I am fine with it. I don't think we want a series of separate posts about stoicism though, as Ron says.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [5](#) · [March 6 at 5:01pm](#)

Elli Pensa

Elli Pensa Donald I remind you what was the post of this thread : "Here you will do well to tarry. Here, we are Epicureans, our highest good is PLEASURE and we achieve it through the criteria of truth set forth in the Epicurean Canon. Please tell us clearly and specifically what is your highest good, and how you seek to achieve that goal for your students and in your own life. Thanks"

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [March 6 at 5:05pm](#)

Donald Robertson

Donald Robertson Okay. See above.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 10:42pm](#)

Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

Donald Robertson

Donald Robertson I'm happy to answer questions about Stoicism to the best of my ability in this thread, if both admins are okay with that. Or people can private message me any comments they don't think are appropriate for this group. You might need to wait a few hours for my replies, though. I'm busy working on something else right now, but I'll check back in later. 1f609.png 😊

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · [3](#) · [March 6 at 5:26pm](#)

Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus Minor point but FWIW there are four admins... More importantly, before we get too far afield I know several of us really what to hear you on your commentary on virtue and happiness and the highest good, as several posts have raised.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [March 6 at 5:38pm](#)

Donald Robertson

Donald Robertson I believe that virtue is a form of mental health in that it consists in the good or healthy functioning of our ability to reason about life. I believe that healthy and pleasant feelings follow as a consequence of that, sometimes but not always. So it's more reliable to focus our efforts on the underlying healthy functioning than on the supervening feelings, although when those occur they're like an added bonus. To put it crudely, it's more important to be good than to feel good. Or as modern therapists often put it, there's an important difference between

"getting better" and merely "feeling better".

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 10:47pm](#)

Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) "To put it crudely, it's more important to be good than to feel good."
Well stated Stoicy - So WHY should we want to be good?

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [March 6 at 10:48pm](#) · [Edited](#)

Donald Robertson

[Donald Robertson](#) **[Cassius Amicus](#)** Because our moral preconceptions are such that its more consistent for us to view virtue as an end in itself than to view it as a means to an end. So then we'd need to go through various examples to illustrate that, such as the one I mentioned earlier about what we praise in others, and also things like our intuitions about what happens in unusual situations where virtue would not be the most expedient way to achieve pleasure, or where virtue might be strongly valued despite being divorced from the possibility of experiencing pleasure as a consequence, etc.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [March 6 at 11:17pm](#)

Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) But how do we know what is virtuous in any particular situation?

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [March 6 at 11:19pm](#)

Elli Pensa

[Elli Pensa](#) **[Cassius Amicus](#)** Because you are doing your duty. It is a duty to be virtuous. Experience : once I've heard a parent who was a good stoic saying that in his child that was 17 years old : It was my duty and the fate to bring you in life and paying for all your expenses until now. Thus, you have the duty and the fate to listen, without any objection, to all of my orders what is good and what is bad for you. The results ? A slight depression to all the members of that family. And if you asked that stoic on happiness, he would say to you that all the members of his family, including himself, that were happy. In the question what he would do if any member of his family will be lost and die. He said in fully Apathy that it is the fate and Eimarmeni to be given back to the giver that is Nature who created by the gods. Could someone say that this father of my experience it was not a good stoic, as he kept his principles : Virtue, Duty, Fate and Apathy ? I do not know what the modern stoics claim about for that specific school of philosophy. If they did not keep their principles of their school, and, if they do not keep the teachings of their teachers.... where the heck are they based on ?!

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [March 7 at 5:10am](#) · [Edited](#)

Elli Pensa

Elli Pensa Dimitris Liantinis was a professor of the greek philosophy in the University of Athens. He wrote a book entitled "Stoa and Rome". Here is an excerpt about stoicism :Image may contain: 1 person, standing and text

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [March 7 at 5:15am](#)

Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

Kris Pliotis HAIRETE KAI YGIAINETE enjoy and be healthy to everybody[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [3](#) · [March 6 at 6:55pm](#)

Donald Robertson There are so many nested comments now that I may miss some, and the nested threads are growing sometimes several comments at a time, so apologies if I don't reply to something. I've probably just not noticed it.[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · [4](#) · [March 6 at 11:27pm](#) **Cassius Amicus Along the lines of that last general comment, it would be a shame if we do not get around to addressing several other issues that Epicurus considered critical, to contrast that with modern Stoicism, such as:1) What role, if any do gods play in human life?2) What happens to the individual consciousness at death?3) Do humans have any control over their affairs (any amount of free will) or is all life predetermined?Epicurus held these to be among the most vexing questions of life, and gave answers to them. Does modern Stoicism? If so, what are those answers? It is relatively easy to come up with answers from the classical stoics to most of these questions, but less so when I read the modern stoics.**[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [4](#) · [March 6 at 11:40pm](#) · Edited **Cassius Amicus Unfortunately I am going to be away from the computer for much of the day. In the meantime, to supplement the three topics I just mentioned (1-gods, 2-death, 3-free will) I also suggest that it will help to get to the heart of the matter if we consider not the stated reason, but the process by which Stoics conclude that they can justify holding virtue to be its own reward. Recall that Lucretius labeled Heraclitus as a muddy thinker who sought to impress with the obscurity of this thinking, When someone suggests that there is nous, or divine fire, or Zeus, or that there is some standard of excellence that we "just know" to be true, what is their process for determining that these things exist?The further out there and the more abstract and obscure the "reasoning" becomes, the more we should realize that it is divorced from commonly and easily available evidence of the senses to validate. And not only to validate - the assertion that there are supernatural gods, or idealistic standards of excellence contradicts other conclusions that ARE validated by the senses - first and foremost that nothing comes from nothing and nothing goes to nothing, at the whim of any god or for any other reason. And when we also validate through observation-based reasoning that the universe is composed of**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/151-an-opening-conversation-with-a-committed-modern-stoic-prelude-to-eight-stoic-cha/>

atoms and void in motion, and of that only, then all these theories about eternal absolutes and standards of excellence are seen to be impossible, and we are able to see that indeed only the faculties of pleasure and pain are given by nature for determining what is desirable and what is painful. I think this leads us to see clearly why it was so important that Epicurus did not hold "logic" or "reason" to be separate faculties and co-equal with the three categories of his canon of truth. Logic and reason have no separate and real existence any more than does nous or Zeus - logic and reason are simply names we give to mental processes that may or may not be consistent with the evidence provided by the three canonical faculties. Logic and reason cannot create evidence from nothing any more than atoms can be created from nothing, nor should they be allowed to contradict conclusions that ARE clearly supported by real evidence. But humans have free will, and the ability to imagine all sorts of things that are unsupported and contradicted by reality. So every assertion that there is a standard of excellence or virtue aside from the natural response of pleasure and pain has to be met with "What is the evidence for that proposition?" And when a stoic says that 'we just know' what excellence is, your personal sense of pain or pleasure may agree with that stoic's conclusion in a particular situation, and you may be tempted to think that the stoic might be on to something. But if you accept the stoic's contention that there is some other process besides the natural faculty of pain and pleasure which validates that conclusion, then you have accepted that it is valid to make an ethical assertion based on nothing but opinion. And when the stoic takes his next logical step, asserting that there is only one true virtue and one true excellence to which you should conform your life, you will find your confidence in the correctness of your own vision of happiness will be drained to nothing. Then like, Marcus Aurelius and stoic opinion leaders of today. as you find yourself watching your world disintegrate around you, rather than confronting hard realities and working to fix the problem, you will decide to "manage your emotions," "keep calm," "worry only about things that are under your control" and drift off into a never-never land where everyone "just gets along" and one mans' fantasy is as good as another's. Like · Reply · 4 · March 7 at 8:12am · Edited Donald Robertson I'll add a few more specific examples of the sort of arguments mentioned above. 1. Suppose some person attains a perfect state of pleasure. (I'll leave it for others to define, as it seems to me there's some disagreement among modern Epicureans about exactly how this should be defined, but that probably doesn't matter.) Compare that to another person who exhibits exceptional moral wisdom and courage. Let's suppose that (likely or not) they appear quite different in other regards: so the pleasure exemplar isn't known for virtue and the virtue exemplar isn't known for "pleasure". Does history not show that the majority of people tend to find the second type of person more admirable and praiseworthy? Is it not the case that those qualities better meet our preconception of what's supremely good in life? (Some people will undoubtedly disagree but I think most would agree with the above.) Suppose, for the sake of argument, that an Epicurean said that on reflection, he probably did find wisdom and courage, in themselves, more admirable than

pleasure/contentment, or whatever. If his doctrine is that pleasure is the supreme good, that would appear to highlight a contradiction between his implicit moral values and his professed philosophy. That's the type of reductio argument, I would expect a Stoic to use with an individual Epicurean. (Again, there will be some individuals who simply reject the premises, but that's okay.) Someone else might admit they admire wisdom and courage (virtue) more than "pleasure" in other people, on reflection, but deny that's a problematic sort of contradiction. They might say they're happy admiring qualities in other people more than they desire them for themselves. The Stoics, though, would challenge that as hypocrisy and argue that we all should (and at some level do) desire to be consistent in our thinking, especially about such important matters as our moral values. I think they'd want to argue that there is a problem if we try to separate what we value most about the character of other people from what we value most for ourselves. They see that sort of conflict in our values as a sort of alienation from the rest of mankind. If what I actually admire most about other people is their wisdom and moral integrity then that sort of thing should be my priority for myself as well. On the other hand, if what I admire most about them is how pleasantly contented their life is, then that should probably be my own number one goal in life too. There aren't very many figures in history whom people admire for being like Epicurus in that respect, though. There are obviously many more examples of historical figures who are admired for what we call virtue, or strength of character. Now that's not intended as a proof, merely an illustration. The individual would need to reflect on their own moral preconceptions and determine whether they're being applied consistently or not, maybe by looking at the range of figures they most admire in life themselves (not merely the ones the rest of society admires). Like · Reply · 1 · March 7 at 5:50pm · Edited Cassius Amicus

A good and clear statement of your position - thank you. Like · Reply · 1 · March 7 at 5:54pm Write a reply... Donald Robertson

2. Suppose someone is about to die in a moment (or just strongly believes that they are). They have a few seconds to make a decision about some important moral action. For instance, in the heat of battle they have the opportunity to give their life to save their comrades. For the sake of argument, let's suppose there's no possibility they're going to have an opportunity to actually notice any sensation of pleasure following this virtuous action. (This example is borrowed from Seneca, incidentally.) Would an Epicurean, based on his doctrines, choose to act "virtuously" in the conventional sense, by saving his comrades, despite the fact there's no opportunity for the consequent enjoyment of pleasure or contentment (or whatever)? The Stoics argue that many people's moral preconceptions would be that the right thing is to act courageously for the welfare of one's loved ones so a doctrine that potentially leads us to believe there's no point in doing so unless it contributes to a pleasant life, would leave them in a state of contradiction. Again, for some individuals, that would constitute a reductio ad absurdum. So I imagine some Epicureans might respond by arguing that they do still have a motive, based on Epicurean doctrine, for self-sacrifice in this case, but I've never seen a very clear articulation of that argument. So how would that actually

work? On the other hand, I've known at least one modern Epicurean who took the opposite line and said he accepted that his doctrines would provide him with no motive for self-sacrifice in this scenario and that he found that morally acceptable. That's also fine, in a sense, although I think other people are more likely to see that as a kind of extreme morality and to struggle a bit more with the apparent contradiction there. Like · Reply · 1 · March 7 at 5:50pm · Edited Mish Taylor Point 1/ Imagine, if you were a person who was wise, courageous & content, what a pleasure that would be! To top it all, you did not put A Nother on a pedestal to be admired or to measure yourself by. Like · Reply · March 7 at 5:43pm Donald Robertson 3. An example from Cicero, also mentioned by Epictetus. Suppose that an Epicurean sees someone they have reason to view as an enemy about to sit on a woodpile with a poisonous snake. They could easily say nothing, and nobody would ever know that they'd seen the snake and could have warned him. Or they could let him sit on it, be bitten, and die. Again, I've met Epicureans who said they'd be happy to do the latter. On the other hand, for many people that will conflict with their moral preconceptions. They'd think it's wrong. So the question for them would be why, as an Epicurean, should they avoid doing it, if there are no negative consequences for their own pleasure/contentment? One way around this would be to argue, as some ancient Epicureans did, that we're bound to be troubled by our conscience. However, that's a weak argument because we know now that "conscience" varies tremendously and many people have a negligible sense of distress in relation to things others consider unethical. (The extreme cases would be sociopaths, but many other people lack this sort of feeling or have it only to a slight degree, whereas other personality types are tortured by guilt over slight moral transgressions.) Again, this would constitute a reductio for some individuals, if they couldn't reconcile the argument that virtue is of value only as a means to "pleasure" with their moral intuition that allowing someone to die is wrong. Like · Reply · 1 · March 7 at 5:51pm · Edited Elli Pensa Donald Robertson a friendly suggestion : If you want your text to be read by others, please put some enter/or paragraphs along the lines. It is very tiring to the eyes. Thanks Like · Reply · March 7 at 5:48pm Alexander Rios I believe that all of Donald's challenges listed above are handled in: Torquatus' Defense of Epicurus, plus the Epicurean Inscription of Diogenes of Oenoanda. Like · Reply · 2 · March 7 at 5:55pm · Edited Donald Robertson 4. Another thought-experiment that other schools used to question Epicurean ethics... Suppose you lived in a world populated by other Epicureans. Would that really be preferable to living in a world full of Platonists, Aristotelians, or Stoics? Would you, e.g., want other people to view your friendship as of value merely insofar as it contributes to their own "pleasure", in the Epicurean sense? (Some modern Epicureans dispute this claim about the instrumentality of friendship, whereas others strongly endorse it, as far as I can tell.) I've heard some people say, e.g., that what appeals to them most is being Epicurean, but for everyone else to be Stoic, i.e., to be virtuous toward them for its own sake. Again, that would arguably form the basis of another reductio. Although, as noted above, some people might say they're happy to accept that

apparent contradiction, I think many others find it more troubling, on reflection. Unlike · Reply · 1 · March 7 at 5:55pm · Edited Alexander Rios Unlike · Reply · 3 · March 7 at 5:58pm Alexander Rios Unlike · Reply · 3 · March 7 at 6:00pm Alexander Rios I wish I lived in a world full of Epicureans. I'd rather put my life in the hands of my Epicurean friends, than any other people I have known in my entire life. Unlike · Reply · 2 · March 7 at 6:15pm Write a reply... Cassius Amicus All four of these are well stated Donald. Thank you again! Nothing advances the ball like a clear statement of a position to which a clear response can be given. if you have more, please be sure to add them! Like · Reply · March 7 at 5:56pm Donald Robertson 5. The following thought-experiment was actually suggested to me by an Epicurean friend... What if there was a machine which could provide you with perfect pleasure. (Modern Epicureans seem to define "pleasure" in several different ways but just insert your definition here.) But it meant spending your life as a brain in a vat, i.e., in a way that many people's conventional moral intuitions would find troubling. Let's suppose there's no risk attached to this procedure -- it's pretty much guaranteed. Some Epicureans have told me that's fine and their doctrines would lead them to accept the procedure, and become a brain in a pleasure vat. I think other Epicureans would feel a conflict, once again, though. You could optionally add another criterion (version 2, let's call it) and make it that the procedure will half your IQ and reduce you to stupidity and a dreamlike state, but one in which you'll feel pleasure and contentment but lose all wisdom and intelligence. Some people may say that pleasure would only be worthwhile insofar as it's accompanied by something like wisdom or intelligence. Seneca points out that would mean pleasure is no longer the supreme good, though, but wisdom has supplanted it as more important, or at least a composite of them has become the supreme good. As Seneca points out, the Stoics value wisdom as the supreme good, upon which they claim joy and happiness are likely to supervene. So if that's what you want, that's actually more akin to the Stoic definition of the goal of life. Whereas the Epicureans, by contrast, generally appear to make wisdom of subordinate value to pleasure. Like · Reply · March 7 at 6:09pm · Edited Mish Taylor Donald, I find your comments quite assumptive, regarding the stance of Epicureans, the arguments are the same old, same old, again quoting Epictetus and now the ridiculous point 5. Wisdom is also a pleasure! Like · Reply · 1 · March 7 at 6:07pm Cassius Amicus Donald are you finished? Please be sure to give us all you have, and then in order to make this manageable I think we should probably break this down into separate posts for each point. Like · Reply · March 7 at 6:07pm Cassius Amicus It might be logical to place a temporary hold on posts after you finish Donald, let me break them down into separate posts, and then unfreeze the thread (???) Like · Reply · 2 · March 7 at 6:08pm Cassius Amicus Some people may post responses before I get these reorganized, or later on, but still each one deserves MUCH discussion, so I don't think Facebook will handle this without separating them. Please let me know when you are finished..... Like · Reply · 2 · March 7 at 6:10pm Cassius Amicus I am here and available to split these up as soon as you are finished Donald Robertson Like · Reply · March 7 at 6:11pm Donald

Robertson Sure, I can add another few arguments which are familiar from the Stoic literature and maybe Cicero, and try to phrase them in more modern language. I think these are the sort of arguments that ancient Epicureans obviously faced and their attempts to answer them quite probably shaped the evolution of their philosophy in some respects. (Just as the attempts to answer criticisms from Academic Skeptics and Epicureans apparently shaped the evolution of Stoicism.) So I think this is pretty much the sort of philosophy we should all be doing - considering these sort of thought experiments. Even if, as Epicureans, you reject them all, doing so will help many (if not all) of you sharpen your definitions and arguments and clarify your thinking about Epicurean ethics. We don't learn much just by talking to people who agree with us, but by trying to answer the common criticisms raised against our doctrines, I believe. That's why I think it's good, and very healthy, for Stoics and Epicureans to talk to one another.

Unlike · Reply · 2 · March 7 at 6:13pm
Cassius Amicus Absolutely. Do you expect to finish soon or how much time do you need? I may start splitting now but it might be better to do them all at once when you finish
Like · Reply · March 7 at 6:14pm
Donald Robertson Well, it could go on, but let's say another half hour or so to give me time to look over some notes.
Like · Reply · March 7 at 6:15pm
Cassius Amicus Ok I will wait and repost them all at once so they appear together in the timeline
Like · Reply · March 7 at 6:16pm · Edited
Write a reply...
Cassius Amicus If anyone posts comments/responses in the meantime I don't see any problems with that. I will try to move at least some of them into the thread of the new post after it is set up (but it won't be movable except as a rough cut and paste)
Like · Reply · March 7 at 6:19pm · Edited
Cassius Amicus Unless I hear from Donald Robertson otherwise I will wait about 30 minutes from his post above (which currently says it is 11 minutes old ... Sure, I can add another few arguments which are familiar from the Stoic literature and maybe Cicero, and try to phrase them in more modern language. ...) and then start reposting
Like · Reply · March 7 at 6:25pm
Donald Robertson 6. From Epictetus... Epicureans believe that pleasure is the highest good. (Again, some people have actually disputed this but I think it's safe to say most Epicureans will go along with that claim, with the usual caveats.) However, most (if not all) pleasures have "intensionality", meaning that they are "about" something, the thing we take pleasure in. In other words, rather than just going around having free-floating pleasures, we're usually enjoying music, or the company of friends, or admiring some idea, or something. If we take pleasure in something, does it not seem (to many people if not all) that it makes more sense to say the thing being enjoyed is good rather than the feeling of enjoyment? When we take pleasure in something, isn't it often because we're judging it to be good at some level? (For Stoics, joy and pleasure, the passions not sensations, are defined as the belief that something good is present, or being experienced by us.) We actually have a transcription of Epictetus employing this as a reductio with an Epicurean who visited his school, incidentally. (Some people might claim it's a fabrication, which is fair enough, although there's nothing to indicate that.) If we take pleasure in something bad, are we willing to say that the pleasure is still good? For example, is

pleasure taken in torturing small children still good? Or would we need to qualify it and say that pleasure is only good if its object is also good? That seems to introduce a much stronger caveat than is implied in the Epicurean definition of pleasure as the highest good, though. Moreover, pleasure can be good or bad depending on whether its object is good or bad, that implies it's actually morally neutral, or "indifferent", as the Stoics put it. Pleasure in itself is neither good nor bad. Pleasure in bad things, like harming people for fun, is bad; pleasure in good things, like helping loved ones, is good. However, that seems to suggest that it's really the object that is good or bad, in itself, and the feeling of pleasure is only good or bad decoratively, i.e., it's actually indifferent in itself. Some people will disagree with those intuitions but for those who accept them, like the Epicurean in the Discourses, it seems to create a contradiction between their professed doctrines and the implications of their moral preconceptions, on reflection.

Like · Reply · March 7 at 6:27pm · Edited Donald Robertson 7. Both Seneca and Epictetus argue that Epicurean philosophy encouraged its followers to view all friendships as fair-weather friendships, i.e., to value others only for their utility and not for their own sake, as means and not as ends in themselves. Again, it seems to me that some modern Epicureans actually agree that Epicurus taught this and are happy with it, whereas others dispute this interpretation of his teachings. "These are the so-called "fair-weather" friendships; one who is chosen for the sake of utility will be satisfactory only so long as he is useful. [...] He who begins to be your friend because it pays will also cease because it pays." (Seneca). Again, reversing perspectives becomes problematic if we read Epicurus this way: you might want to view other people merely as a means to the end of "pleasure", or whatever, but would you want them to view you that way? This is also closely-related to the argument that it's problematic to imagine a whole state or a whole world of people following Epicurean philosophy, rather than an individual or a small community. Suppose you don't want other people to treat you merely as a fairweather friend, and to potentially abandon you as soon as they calculate that would be in their interest, in terms of pleasure. How do you reconcile that with the doctrine that friends are only of instrumental value? (Or do you reject that interpretation of Epicurus -- if so, what do you make of other Epicureans who do interpret the philosophy that way?)

Like · Reply · March 7 at 6:35pm · Edited Donald Robertson 8. Seneca and others also object to the Epicurean doctrine that makes virtue of value only instrumentally, as a means to attaining pleasure, as follows. (Again, some modern Epicureans may dispute this interpretation of Epicurus, although others tell me they accept it and agree with it as a philosophy of life.) Someone who acts bravely for the sake of a reward, arguably isn't really brave at all. (Again, some people will accept this particular moral intuition, others will not.) To endure danger for money isn't real bravery, it's just greed. And the same would apply to rewards such as pleasure: acting bravely to win some reward as a consequence isn't really what we mean by bravery, on reflection. The same would apply to the virtue of temperance. Not snacking on chips for a week because someone's offered me a million dollars to do so, wouldn't, on the face of it,

constitute praiseworthy (virtuous) self-mastery. It's the ability to control our desires in the *absence* of a strong reward for doing so that's actually required for the virtue of temperance. What about justice, kindness, and fairness? If I'm only treating other people kindly and fairly because I believe I'm going to gain some reward for so doing then arguably that's not really the virtue of justice at all. Doesn't the same apply if I see justice as indifferent in itself, and only of value as a means to obtaining "pleasure" (in the Epicurean sense)? So the Stoics, and others, argue that our preconceptions about virtue separate it from people acting in similar ways for personal gain, or pleasure. Someone who wants to preserve that conception of virtue but also professes to follow the Epicurean doctrine is arguably going to have to reconcile those two things somehow or accept that they're in contradiction.

Like · Reply · March 7 at 6:48pm · Edited Donald Robertson Here's a review of similar arguments in Seneca, if that's any help, including more quotations from Epicurus and references to his teachings than I could include above: <http://donaldrobertson.name/what-seneca-really-said.../> What Seneca Really Said about Epicureanism

DONALDROBERTSON.NAME Like · Reply · Remove Preview · March 7 at 6:49pm Donald Robertson Likewise, here's a review of Epictetus' comments about Epicurus, including quotes (allegedly) from Epicurus' writings and a transcription of a dialogue with an Epicurean philosopher who visited his school: <http://donaldrobertson.name/epictetus-stoicism-versus.../> Epictetus: Stoicism versus Epicureanism

Article outlining the criticisms of Epicureanism made by the Stoic Epictetus.

DONALDROBERTSON.NAME Like · Reply · Remove Preview · March 7 at 6:50pm Cassius Amicus I will keep those last two separate but thanks very much for adding them. Do you think you are finished for the moment after posting eight questions? Of course if you come up with others of similar nature in the future we can do them too.

Like · Reply · March 7 at 6:51pm · Edited Donald Robertson Sure, yes, I think that's enough for now. Thanks.

Like · Reply · March 7 at 7:14pm Write a reply... Matt Jackson Hi Donald, I'm interested to know more about the Stoic cosmology and theology and how it relates to Virtue. From what I've gathered there is a "pantheistic reasoning God" called Zeus that fills the role of a Divine Principle. It appears that this being is "fragmented" among the various minds in the universe. It also appears that this being is not a separate entity like a Divine Mind or Nous, but rather a holistic "whole" of separate reasoning minds. It is from these individual reasoning minds that Virtue is conceived. I'm wondering though, is it safe to call this passive being a God? Since the "being" has no external reasoning capability outside of the individual minds that are it's many parts. Objectively, it would appear that it is not a God at all but rather a poetic description of the multiplicity of Nature, and not in any way actually Divine. This would become somewhat problematic for virtue's sake since relativism is rampant among the varied minds in the world (which can readily be seen everywhere). If this God is not autonomous that means he is actually bound to the will of individual reasoning minds. Thus we have varied interpretations of what virtue might be across various individuals and cultures. It is clear that this theological idea is very important because it relates DIRECTLY to Stoic virtue. In

fact, I'm not sure how to proceed any further with a discussion of virtue without clarifying this point. Is this Zeus/God really a "passive" being subject to the contemplation of man? Or do we say that it is actually autonomous and "it" contemplates a standard of Virtue and is a judge? It seems this theological concept is the genesis of Stoic Virtue.Unlike · Reply · 2 · March 7 at 9:34pm Write a comment...