

# Managing Expectations In The Study of Epicurus

Post by "Cassius" of May 8, 2020 at 10:36 AM

Here's an observation about a problem I see recurring over and over:

People who find out about Epicurus in general or our Epicurean forums in particular often start reading because they have heard something general with which they agree. They hear and immediately like things such as: "Epicurus rejected supernatural religion," or "Epicurus rejects the idea of life after death," or "Epicurus held that [pleasure is the guide of life](#)," or "Epicurus taught that the universe is made up of atoms and his views of nature were way ahead of his time," or "Epicurus taught that it is a good idea not to live beyond one's means, because our goal is to be happy whatever means are available to us."

They start reading about Epicurus because they identify with one or more of these general ideas, but over time as they find our more specifics, they sometimes lose interest because the specifics are not what they expect. In many cases their interest fades in disappointment because they think that just because Epicurus agrees with them on one or a couple of basic conclusions, they expect to find that Epicurus agreed with them on **every** conclusion that they themselves reach about how to live.

I think the problem here - and the error on **their** part, which is not a flaw in Epicurus - is that they fail to understand that the Epicurean view of the nature of the universe means that different people are inevitably going to have very different experiences and backgrounds. These different experiences and backgrounds are going to lead people to have different tastes and opinions about what they find pleasing. The result is totally normal, and to be expected: *not every Epicurean will reach the same conclusion on every issue in life.*

It seems to me it would help people manage expectations if we made a point of emphasizing this early in the process of discussing Epicurus. If we emphasize that from the beginning of our discussions, maybe that will lessen the impact of the "disappointment" that people frequently feel when they find some detail in Epicurus that doesn't match their own viewpoint, and they will realize that instead of being a **flaw**, this is a **feature** of Epicurean philosophy.

Here at this Epicureanfriends.com forum we've tried to address this with the "Not Neo-Epicurean But Epicurean" and the "Our Posting Policy" graphics, These are intended to steer people away from the day-to-day political issues where the issue and the conflict and the disappointment most clearly arise.

But I am thinking it would be good to find more ways to emphasize this issue fast and hard.

I get the impression that Epicurus himself had such thoughts when he wrote material like [PD10](#). What is [PD10](#) except an in-your-face warning to put aside your personal viewpoint about what may be "worthy" or what may be "depraved" to you?

Quote

**10. If the things that produce the pleasures of profligates could dispel the fears of the mind about the phenomena of the sky, and death, and its pains, and also teach the limits of desires (and of pains), we should never have cause to blame them: for they would be filling themselves full, with pleasures from every source, and never have pain of body or mind, which is the evil of life.**

The point seems to be that people have a hard time accepting - and need to be taught clearly - that it really is true that Nature's only stop and go signal to each person is the pain and pleasure that ***the individual person*** feels - and yes, this includes the pain and pleasure of our friends and those we value, whose pain and pleasure are important to us as well.

Calculating out the implications of that is not easy to do, and is going to differ with people and with circumstances, but the ultimate point is that there is no single rule that applies to everyone, everywhere, and all the time, and the sooner we disabuse ourselves of that notion the less likely we are to pull back once we realize that this is true.

What are your thoughts about this, and if you agree, possible ways we could work on doing a better job of dealing with this?

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### **Post by "Godfrey" of May 8, 2020 at 4:30 PM**

In the attempt to fully understand and implement a philosophy, each individual to some degree has a back and forth between the examining the doctrine of the philosophy and examining the conditions of their life with respect to the application of the doctrine. This may be a positive attempt to reach a deeper understanding, a negative attempt to undermine, or anywhere in between.

Regarding the doctrine of EP, there is a tremendous amount of discussion and disagreement about the nature of pleasure (pleasure, ataraxia, absence of pain, etc.). To me, pleasure and pain is the key to implementing the philosophy in one's life, it is the culmination of the Physics and the Canon and it is therefore critical to have a deep understanding of the subject, for which

I personally am still striving.

Regarding the practice of EP, specifically with regards to pleasure, there have been a few threads here discussing people's very specific instances of pleasure, and I think that this is helpful to all of us.

Is there a way to examine general frameworks for applying pleasure/pain in our lives without losing sight of the individual nature of experience? Something to bridge the dogma and the specifics. A personal "macro" view to maximize the intelligent pursuit of pleasure. For me as a relative neophyte this seems to be a gap in my understanding. For instance a hedonic regimen is sometimes mentioned, which could be one way of scheduling pleasure into one's life if a person feels that that is useful. A person could also do an evaluation of pains and pleasures in their life as a means to understand for themselves how best to minimize pain and maximize pleasure, if they feel that that is valuable. Perhaps some feel that pleasure is best pursued by following their feelings in the moment. These frameworks would may be different for everybody, but it seems like a fruitful area of discussion and this could be tied in to the texts. Or is this something that everyone needs to do for themselves? I don't know.

One last thought.... Some say that PD 10 contradicts the quote from the letter to Menoeceus: *"So when we say that pleasure is the goal, we do not mean the pleasures of decadent people or the enjoyment of sleep, as is believed by those who are ignorant or who don't understand us or who are ill-disposed to us, but to be free from bodily pain and mental disturbance. For a pleasant life is produced not by drinking and endless parties and enjoying boys and women and consuming fish and other delicacies of an extravagant table, but by sober reasoning, searching out the cause of everything we accept or reject, and driving out opinions that cause the greatest trouble in the soul."* I think that DeWitt makes a good case that such a contradiction doesn't exist. Is it possible that discussing our general frameworks for applying pleasure/pain could help to clarify that these two doctrines are in perfect agreement?

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## Post by "Cassius" of May 8, 2020 at 5:41 PM

Those are good thoughts Godfrey.

### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

To me, pleasure and pain is the key to implementing the philosophy in one's life

I think in my case I have a special perspective on that which may be the result of my age and background.

For me, I don't generally wrestle with particular "types" of pleasure, or how to implement them - I know I make the same mistakes that most people do in terms of over-indulgence, or just mistaken views of what will lead to more pleasure or more pain down the road.

For me, the issue of "pleasure and pain [as] the key to implementing the philosophy" is more the recognition that "pleasure and pain" are what actually stand in the role of "gods" or "idealism" that I see in other people of my generation.

Maybe the time has come when the issues of eternal life, fate, supernatural gods, divine punishment and reward, etc. are largely obsolete and even uninteresting, but I know in terms of how I have grown up the issues of existence of god, etc, were the main and overriding issues of importance.

So in my case it is such a huge issue to recognize that gods and idealism are false leads, and that natural mechanisms of pleasure and pain take the place of those, that I find Epicurean philosophy fully satisfying without looking to Epicurus for specific hints on particular pleasures to pursue or avoid. Certainly his advice as to friendship and living within one's means are highly useful, but I don't find those particularly unique or Epicurus' version of them to be the central items of interest.

I think people today in our much less religious and more secular society start from a much different point than did those in generations past, so maybe that partly explains why so many people are interesting in "techniques" when it seems to me that they should be asking "*What's the right direction to go in the first place, regardless of technique in getting there?*"

*As for the questions about contradictions such as:*

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Is it possible that discussing our general frameworks for applying pleasure/pain could help to clarify that these two doctrines are in perfect agreement?

I am thinking that is sort of a result of the same issue. People come to Epicurus thinking that they are going to read about some Stoic "mind manipulation" technique, and instead of that they find a lot of fundamentals about the nature of the universe and humanity that seems to them irrelevant, because they think they have the "end goal" already figured out and they don't need any lectures on that!

Someone you like who are now fully into the issues won't make that mistake, but I can see what you are observing operating as part of the problem we're discussing - people are looking for a "cookbook" of quick and easy suggestions, and instead they hear lectures on issues they didn't even realize existed!

To those kinds of complaints my general response would have to be a diplomatic version of "that's just too bad that you don't understand the questions that you should be asking." 😊 And a certain number of people like that have already equipped themselves with such blinders that there's not much hope for them to become "committed" members of an Epicurean community anyway.

But I do think that a significant percentage of the type of people who come looking for a cookbook will recognize and say to themselves - "*Wait a minute! I never knew these questions existed but I see why they are important!*" And those are the ones that it would be good to be prepared for with some initial guidance about what to expect and why they need to expect it.

As for those of us who do see and understand the issues, we too need the kind of community you're talking about - with practical advice for those of us who do see the deeper issues on how to dig ourselves out of those weeds regularly enough that we don't get overcome by the work required for the larger tasks.

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### **Post by "Godfrey" of May 8, 2020 at 6:32 PM**

Regarding "cookbooks," I have mixed feelings. I completely agree that there is no one size fits all formula for "how to be an Epicurean." On the individual level I think it can be helpful to have one's own personal go-to "recipes" but there's a danger in mindlessly following them. They can only be one part of the "navigating system" (to mix metaphors).

For my personal context I've come to EP on the verge of a life transition and after several decades of ignoring and/or suppressing pain and pleasure. So this has me 1) re-examining priorities and 2) trying to reawaken to pain and pleasure. I may be unique in this but I would guess that from time to time just about everyone does this to some degree. Also, I was raised as a Presbyterian but long ago left that. I've always lived in the western US so my perspective on religion (and many other things lol) is far removed from what I understand of the South. I get great joy in realizing the folly of gods and idealism but I particularly appreciate that Epicurus came up with an integrated approach to point out that folly and to live a complete life based on this and other observed facts.

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### **Post by "Don" of May 9, 2020 at 11:01 AM**

Just some general thoughts on the topic. An interesting one! Thanks for getting this thread going, [Cassius](#) and [Godfrey](#).

I see what you mean by one size not fitting all, but it seems to me that Epicurus and classical Epicureans were apparently big into supplying epitomes and summaries, both large and small (They were also fans of multi-volume behemoths), for ease in memorizing and really embedding the doctrines in one's mind for easy retrieval in any situation. So the idea of "cookbooks" within the philosophy has a fine pedigree.

What's \*in\* those "cookbooks" is a whole other on-going conversation 😊

As for [PD10](#) and the Letter to Menoikos, we've had an in-depth discussion on that over in that thread on the forum. I've never seen a contradiction between those two. My take is as follows:

1. Pleasure is pleasure.
2. All pleasures are good.
3. BUT. we choose and reject pleasures with an eye to their consequences.
4. There's nothing inherently wrong with enjoying a drink, sex, etc., See 1.
5. BUT the "profligate" try to overindulge those pleasures... Filling the cup after it's already full.
6. Thus leading to pain. See 3.
7. We don't judge the profligates' pleasure but we are within bounds to critique their choices and rejections if they're objectively resulting in pain in their lives.
8. Epicurus offers a way out of those unwise choices and rejections of the profligate.

I don't want to hijack this thread into a [PD10](#) discussion but felt it was ok to weigh in since it came up.

Looking forward to seeing where this thread goes.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of May 9, 2020 at 12:11 PM**

Good comments Eugenios. As I was reading them i was thinking you're right: What's IN the cookbook is the issue!

Because even though I think you feel you shifted your answer from cookbooking to [PD10](#), as for me, I really consider the latter part of your post to be the fundamental start of any cookbook.

Isn't a cookbook supposed to be about making appetizing food, and not just anything that's edible?

I feel the same issues of "lumpiness" in our food over and over, as illustrated by a couple of word choices:

(1) In item three, the "BUT." I explain it the same way, but why is our description so focused on "buts" which imply that what we have said before is not clear. Why is it not clear enough to say "choose pleasure and avoid pain" without having to emphasize the BUT DON'T choose unwisely (or some variation). We end up looking like the "wisdom" is the end goal rather than the pleasure, and we end up sounding sometimes like we are talking to stubborn children. Is it really necessary, once we say that pleasure is the good, to have to harp on the fact that some pleasures are going to come at a cost that is not worth that pleasure? (To repeat, I am not complaining about your formulation, I am complaining about our not being in a position to have this more easily understood).

And that leads to:

(2) Your item 6 ("thus leading to pain")

This is another part of the "rhetoric" issue we face. The act of being alive "leads to pain" so we cannot expect to pursue many of the pleasures we value most without some cost in pain. So the continuing underlying issue is HOW we stack the pleasure up against the pain and decide how much pain is worthwhile. Pretty clearly it is incorrect to focus entirely on duration/time, although that is certainly something to consider. I am thinking the problem is in our inability to articulate fully the "intensity" issue (or whatever word we want to use) is a large part of the problem. I think most people understand the "long term vs short term" issue, or at least they can grasp it as soon as they think about it, and they can see that duration/time is not a sufficient analysis. Possibly the issue of "dying for a friend" may be one of the best ways to express that some pleasures are worth pursuing even if they are achievable only briefly and at great cost in pain, and some pains are worth avoiding due to their intensity even by death which (if avoided) might buy us quite a long period of time.

Both of these comments are intended to focus on the issue that the cookbook, or the presentation, or whatever we do to set and manage expectations needs to be able to convey the issues involved and point the way to how the resolution is both individual according to context but also has a great degree of regularity given our nature as humans and the functioning of our faculty of pleasure and pain.

My general criticism is that cookbooks that focus too much on food and wine and other specific pleasures don't communicate these underlying issues that are of pretty much supreme

importance, but at the same time, it is also true that cookbooks that are nothing but general analysis are of little help unless they have specific examples of the kinds of decisions that are best to make in particular contexts.

Edit 1: By no means do I intend to criticize Epicurus by saying this, but if we had a longer version of the letter to Menoecus, which included specific examples of applications of his statements vs only the very high-level statements of principles that are included, we might have been able to avoid many misunderstandings about what he meant. I am sure Epicurus probably gave those specific examples in "On Nature" and other books, and that is why Lucretius seems to almost drown us in detail. So I guess that is why I think it's essential to combine the study of the letter to Menoecus with Lucretius in order to give life and body to the high-level summary in the letter.

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### **Post by "Don" of May 9, 2020 at 12:44 PM**

Thanks for the comments, [Cassius](#) . And I don't see any major differences of opinion here 😊

On the cookbook idea, my favorite most inviting cookbooks include the following:

- Step by step directions of recipes
- Nice full color pictures to show you what the dish is supposed to look like
- Interesting prose interspersed to share background of the dishes, cultural history, or personal experiences of where the dishes came from.

A cookbook that can be browsed, simply read for enjoyment, and used in the kitchen is a winner in my book (pun intended)

Now, how this translates into an "Epicurean Cookbook for Life" is another conversation. Hmm...

- Summaries of philosophy in bite sized chunks (recipes)?
- Artwork that exemplifies Epicurean tenets?
- Short background readings of biographies, real-like applications of EP, the Tetracharmakos, etc.

Just off the top of my head here.

## Post by “Godfrey” of May 9, 2020 at 2:16 PM

I think that one ingredient that needs to be in the cookbook is:

*...The feelings are two, pleasure and pain...*

*...they would be filling themselves full, with pleasures from every source, and never have pain of body or mind, which is the evil of life.*

*..sober reasoning, searching out the cause of everything we accept or reject, and driving out opinions that cause the greatest trouble in the soul.*

DeWitt points out that the greatest pleasure is escaping from a near death experience and realizing the joy of being alive. Taking this to a more prosaic level I think it, and the above italics, emphasize that we're leaving out the pepper if we focus **solely** on pleasure and the potential pains arising from overindulgence. We also need to address pain, as Epicurus most notably did in remedying the fears of the gods and of death. Great pleasure comes from removing a pain.

There are lots of everyday pains and fears that we all experience but which are unique to each of us. Many of these are mild and/or habituated and are misconstrued by the tranquilists as a neutral zone. Searching these out and examining their causes gives one the opportunity to remedy them, sometimes by removing the cause and sometimes through the application of a related pleasure.

In other words, focusing on either feeling to the exclusion of the other leads to an unbalanced diet. I'm beginning to realize that if we understand and use the faculty (not sure that's the right word) of the feelings as a continual interplay between pain and pleasure then the apparent chasm between "absence of pain" and pursuing pleasure disappears. It's actually extremely practical advice for daily living.

Sorry if I got off topic.... I'm just suggesting that one recipe in the cookbook might be for a person to explore what brings them pain as well as what brings them pleasure, and to taste test the interactions between the two.

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## Post by “Don” of May 9, 2020 at 3:11 PM

I don't think that's off topic at all! By the way, well done here...

Quote

In other words, focusing on either feeling to the exclusion of the other leads to an unbalanced diet.

I liked that! 😊

It's always struck me that Epicureanism is a philosophy of personal responsibility. You are responsible for your choices and rejections. You are responsible for assessing the consequences of those actions. You are responsible for deciding what gives you pleasure and what gives you pain without harming others or letting them harm you. And so on. It's not an easy path but is one that provides for a lot of variation. We're not going to proscribe how to live your life. We can provide a framework and foundation around which you can build a life.

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## Post by "Don" of May 9, 2020 at 4:00 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

(1) In item three, the "BUT." I explain it the same way, but why is our description so focused on "buts" which imply that what we have said before is not clear. Why is it not clear enough to say "choose pleasure and avoid pain" without having to emphasize the BUT DON'T choose unwisely (or some variation). We end up looking like the "wisdom" is the end goal rather than the pleasure, and we end up sounding sometimes like we are talking to stubborn children. Is it really necessary, once we say that pleasure is the good, to have to harp on the fact that some pleasures are going to come at a cost that is not worth that pleasure? (To repeat, I am not complaining about your formulation, I am complaining about our not being in a position to have this more easily understood).

I hear you. It would be nice to put that more positively or integrated instead of **X... BUT Y...** It looks like we're hedging our bets or something.

I must admit that I think I'm liking DeWitt's contention that the *summum bonum* of Epicureanism is **life** itself and that the *telos*/goal is pleasure. I'm still wrapping my brain around that idea but *feel that* I like it.. I think. Maybe that's a way to go? Maybe we're starting too far along the path so we have to use the BUTs...

### Quote

(2) Your item 6 ("thus leading to pain")

This is another part of the "rhetoric" issue we face. The act of being alive "leads to pain" so we cannot expect to pursue many of the pleasures we value most without some cost in pain. So the continuing underlying issue is HOW we stack the pleasure up against the pain and decide how much pain is worthwhile.

Excellent point! The "HOW" could lead to those "recipes". I've also seen the HOW as exemplified by the Principle Doctrines and other list type epitomes. The problem is there is no one HOW for everyone but (AH! There's that BUT!) we can provide principles you can apply to your life.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of May 9, 2020 at 4:04 PM**

I agree with everything written above, and especially with Eugenios that Godfrey's comment is not off topic. Yes we need to be referring to both and "pleasure and pain" can be a little unwieldy and may not be exactly the right term. Clearly "pain" deserves respect as guidance from Nature too. To some extent that is why I find myself referring to "feeling" more so than pleasure or pain sometimes. I gather that the Greek word used to describe the two is some form of "pathe" and I also see (and commented somewhere recently) that Bailey uses the term "internal sensations." It would probably help to do some kind of study on what it is we are really talking about in this "faculty," because "feeling" is close but may not be precisely the right term.

I think the place to start there would be Diogenes Laertius when he says "the feelings are two" and I think there is a reference in the letter to Herodotus where the same word is apparently used.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of May 9, 2020 at 4:07 PM**

I will paste the references here:

The internal sensations they say are two, pleasure and pain, which occur to every living creature, and the one is akin to nature and the other alien: by means of these two choice and avoidance are determined. Of investigations some concern actual things, others mere words. This is a brief summary of the division of their philosophy and their views on the criterion of truth.

Now we must proceed to the letter.

83 Such was his letter on Physics: then follows his letter on Celestial Things.

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## VI. VITA EPICURI

Πάθη δὲ λέγουσιν εἶναι δύο, ἡδονὴν καὶ ἀλγηδόνα, ἰστάμενα  
περὶ πάντων ζῶων, καὶ τὴν μὲν οἰκεῖον, τὴν δὲ ἀλλότριον· δι' ὧν  
κρίνεσθαι τὰς αἰρέσεις καὶ φυγὰς. τῶν τε ζητήσεων εἶναι τὰς  
10 μὲν περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων, τὰς δὲ περὶ ψυχῆς τὴν φωνήν. καὶ  
ταῦτα δὲ περὶ τῆς διαιρέσεως καὶ τοῦ κριτηρίου στοιχειωδῶς.  
Ἀνιτίου δὲ ἐπὶ τὴν ἐπιστολήν.

*Sequitur epistola ad Herodotum.*

83 Καὶ ἦδε μὲν ἐστὶν αὐτῷ ἐπιστολὴ περὶ τῶν φυσικῶν· περὶ  
δὲ τῶν μετεώρων ἦδε.

*Sequitur epistola ad Pythoclem.*

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Ταῦτα αὐτῷ καὶ περὶ τῶν μετεώρων δοκεῖ· | περὶ δὲ τῶν  
βιωτικῶν, καὶ ὅπως χρῆ τὰ μὲν ἡμᾶς αἰρεῖσθαι, τὰ δ' ἐκφεύ-  
γεω, οὕτως γράφει. Πρότερον δὲ διέλωμεν ἃ τε αὐτῷ  
δοκεῖ περὶ τοῦ σοφοῦ καὶ τοῖς ἀπ' αὐτοῦ. βλάβας ἐξ  
5 ἀνθρώπων ἢ διὰ μῖσος ἢ διὰ φθόνου ἢ διὰ καταφρόνησιν  
γίνεσθαι, ὧν τὸν σοφὸν λογισμῷ περιγίνεσθαι. ἀλλὰ καὶ  
τὸν ἅπασι γενόμενον σοφὸν μηκέτι τὴν ἐναντίαν λαμβάνειν  
διάθεσιν μηδὲ πλάττειν ἐκόντα. πάθει μᾶλλον συσχεθῆ-  
σεσθαι, (ὁ) οὐκ ἂν ἐμποδίσαι πρὸς τὴν σοφίαν. οὐδὲ μὴν ἐκ

First of all, Herodotus, we must grasp the ideas attached I J  
to words, in order that we may be able to refer to them <sup>proi</sup>  
and so to judge the inferences of opinion or problems of <sup>be i</sup>  
investigation or reflection, so that we may not either leave <sup>thei</sup>  
everything uncertain and go on explaining to infinity or <sup>mei</sup>  
38 use words devoid of meaning. For this purpose it is  
essential that the first mental image associated with each  
word should be regarded, and that there should be no  
need of explanation, if we are really to have a standard to  
which to refer a problem of investigation or reflection or  
a mental inference. And besides we must keep all our <sup>a</sup>  
investigations in accord with our sensations, and in par- <sup>stai</sup>  
ticular with the immediate apprehensions whether of the <sup>judi</sup>  
mind or of any one of the instruments of judgement,  
and likewise in accord with the feelings existing in us,  
in order that we may have indications whereby we may  
judge both the problem of sense-perception and the  
unseen.

Πρῶτον μὲν οὖν τὰ ὑποτεταγμένα τοῖς φθόγγοις, ὧ  
'Ἡρόδοτε, δεῖ εἰληφέναι, ὅπως ἂν τὰ δοξαζόμενα ἢ ζητούμενα  
ἢ ἀπορούμενα ἔχωμεν εἰς ταῦτα ἀναγαγόντες ἐπικρίνειν, καὶ  
μὴ ἄκριτα πάντα ἡμῖν (ἢ) εἰς ἄπειρον ἀποδεικνύουσιν ἢ  
38 κενοὺς φθόγγους ἔχωμεν. | ἀνάγκη γὰρ τὸ πρῶτον ἐννόημα  
καθ' ἕκαστον φθόγγον βλέπεσθαι καὶ μηθὲν ἀποδείξεως  
προσδεῖσθαι, εἴπερ ἔχομεν τὸ ζητούμενον ἢ ἀπορούμενον καὶ  
δοξαζόμενον ἐφ' ὃ ἀνάξομεν. ἔτι τε κατὰ τὰς αἰσθήσεις  
5 δεῖ πάντα τηρεῖν καὶ ἀπλῶς (κατὰ) τὰς παρούσας ἐπιβολὰς  
εἴτε διανοίας εἶθ' ὅτου δῆποτε τῶν κριτηρίων, ὁμοίως δὲ κατὰ  
τὰ ὑπάρχοντα πάθη, ὅπως ἂν καὶ τὸ προσμένον καὶ τὸ ἀδηλον  
ἔχωμεν οἷς σημειωσόμεθα.

Ταῦτα δεῖ διαλαβόντας συνορᾶν ἤδη περὶ τῶν ἀδήλων  
10 πρῶτον μὲν ὅτι οὐδὲν γίνεται ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος. πᾶν γὰρ  
ἐκ παντὸς ἐγίγνετ' αἰ σπερμάτων γε οὐθὲν προσδεόμενον. |  
39 καὶ εἰ ἐφθείρετο δὲ τὸ ἀφανιζόμενον εἰς τὸ μὴ ὄν, πάντα  
ἂν ἀπωλώλει τὰ πράγματα, οὐκ ὄντων εἰς ἃ διελύετο. καὶ  
μὴν καὶ τὸ πᾶν αἰεὶ τοιοῦτον ἦν οἷον εἶναι ἐστὶ, καὶ αἰεὶ τοιοῦτον  
ἔσται. οὐθὲν γὰρ ἐστὶν εἰς ὃ μεταβάλλει. παρὰ γὰρ τὸ  
5 πᾶν οὐθὲν ἐστὶν, ὃ ἂν εἰσελθὼν εἰς αὐτὸ τὴν μεταβολὴν  
ποιήσαιτο.

Others to consider:

I. TO HERODOTUS 43

through itself to bodies. So that those who say that the soul is incorporeal are talking idly. For it would not be able to act or be acted on in any respect, if it were of this nature. But as it is, both these occurrences are clearly distinguished in respect of the soul. Now if one refers all these reasonings about the soul to the standards of feeling and sensation and remembers what was said at the outset, he will see that they are sufficiently embraced in these general formulae to enable him to work out with certainty on this basis the details of the system as well.

I. TO HERODOTUS 47

that we associate it, and likewise also with internal feelings or absence of feeling, and with movements and states of rest; in connexion with these last again we think of this very perception as a peculiar kind of accident, and in virtue of this we call it time.

And in addition to what we have already said we must believe that worlds, and indeed every limited compound body which continuously exhibits a similar appearance to the things we see, were created from the infinite, and that all such things, greater and less alike, were separated off from individual agglomerations of matter; and that all are again dissolved, some more quickly, some more slowly, some suffering from one set of causes, others from another. And further we must believe that these worlds were

Menoceus:

of the blessed life. For we recognize pleasure as the first good innate in us, and from pleasure we begin every act of choice and avoidance, and to pleasure we return again, using the feeling as the standard by which we judge every good.

Principal Doctrines:

XXIV. If you reject any single sensation and fail to distinguish between the conclusion of opinion as to the appearance awaiting confirmation and that which is actually given by the sensation or feeling, or each intuitive apprehension of the mind, you will confound all other sensations as well with the same groundless opinion, so that you will reject every standard of judgement. And if among the mental images created by your opinion you affirm both that which awaits confirmation and that which does not, you will not escape error, since you will have preserved the whole cause of doubt in every judgement between what is right and what is wrong.

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Post by "Don" of May 9, 2020 at 4:29 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I think the place to start there would be Diogenes Laertius when he says "the feelings are two" and I think there is a reference in the letter to Herodotus where the same word is apparently used.

You know me, doesn't take much to get me to look something like that up 😊

[Πάθη δὲ λέγουσιν εἶναι δύο](#) "and they say the Πάθη are two."

Here's [the link to the Greek Word Study Tool for that word at the Perseus Digital Library](#). There's also [this from Wiktionary](#).

I find it interesting that "what happens" seems to be a common definition:

- (in neutral sense) what is done or what happens to a person
- (in negative sense) suffering, misfortune

I did find [this page on Google Books that discusses pathe](#) and includes a snippet about Epicurus and the Stoics.

This is definitely one of those instances that the connotations of the word don't necessarily map well - one-to-one - with English.

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## Post by “Don” of May 9, 2020 at 5:26 PM

From what I can see, all those "feelings" are translating **πάθη** pathe (citations are to Diogenes Laertius sections in Chapt. X of Lives):

Quote

X.31: Now in The Canon Epicurus affirms that our sensations and preconceptions **and our feelings** are the standards of truth

ἐν τοίνυν τῷ Κανόνι λέγων ἐστὶν ὁ Ἐπίκουρος κριτήρια τῆς ἀληθείας εἶναι τὰς αἰσθήσεις καὶ προλήψεις **καὶ τὰ πάθη**

X.63: Next, keeping in view our perceptions **and feelings**...

Μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα δεῖ συνορᾶν ἀναφέροντα ἐπὶ τὰς αἰσθήσεις **καὶ τὰ πάθη**

X.68: If, then, we bring all these arguments concerning soul to the criterion **of our feelings** and perceptions...

Ταῦτα οὖν πάντα τὰ διαλογίσματα τὰ περὶ ψυχῆς ἀνάγων τις ἐπὶ τὰ πάθη καὶ τὰς αἰσθήσεις

X.73: No further proof is required : we have only to reflect that we attach the attribute of time to days and nights and their parts, **and likewise to feelings of pleasure and pain** and to neutral states, to states of movement and states of rest

καὶ γὰρ τοῦτο οὐκ ἀποδείξεως προσδεῖται ἀλλ' ἐπιλογισμοῦ, ὅτι ταῖς ἡμέραις καὶ ταῖς νυξὶ συμπλέκομεν καὶ τοῖς τούτων μέρεσιν, ὡσαύτως **δὲ καὶ τοῖς πάθεσι** καὶ ταῖς ἀπαθείαις, καὶ κινήσεσι καὶ στάσεσιν, ἴδιόν τι σύμπτωμα περὶ ταῦτα πάλιν αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἐννοοῦντες, καθ' ὃ χρόνον ὀνομάζομεν. (**πάθεσι** is just the dative form)

X.147 PD 24: If you reject absolutely any single sensation without stopping to discriminate with respect to that which awaits confirmation between matter of opinion and that which is already present, whether in sensation **or in feelings** or in any presentative perception of the mind, you will throw into confusion even the rest of your sensations by your groundless belief and so you will be rejecting the standard of truth altogether. If in your ideas based upon opinion you hastily affirm as true all that awaits confirmation as well as that which does not, you will not escape error, as you will be maintaining complete ambiguity whenever it is a case of judging between right and wrong opinion.

PD 24: Εἴ τιν' ἐκβαλεῖς ἀπλῶς αἴσθησιν καὶ μὴ διαιρήσεις τὸ δοξαζόμενον κατὰ τὸ προσμένον καὶ τὸ παρὸν ἤδη κατὰ τὴν αἴσθησιν **καὶ τὰ πάθη** καὶ πᾶσαν φανταστικὴν ἐπιβολὴν τῆς διανοίας, συνταράξεις καὶ τὰς λοιπὰς αἰσθήσεις τῆ ματαίῳ δόξῃ, ὥστε τὸ κριτήριον ἅπαν ἐκβαλεῖς. εἰ δὲ βεβαιώσεις καὶ τὸ προσμένον ἅπαν ἐν ταῖς δοξαστικαῖς ἐννοίαις καὶ τὸ μὴ τὴν ἐπιμαρτύρησιν, οὐκ ἐκλείψεις τὸ διεψευσμένον: ὡς τετηρηκῶς ἔση πᾶσαν ἀμφισβήτησιν κατὰ πᾶσαν κρίσιν τοῦ ὀρθῶς ἢ μὴ ὀρθῶς.

Display More

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## Post by “Cassius” of May 9, 2020 at 5:39 PM

Thank you Eugenios! I have been wanting to investigate this further for a while but not made much headway. It seems like a pretty important subject to me to clarify what is being discussed. Maybe we should split this off into a different thread or start one soon if we are able to find more on this.

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## Post by “Cassius” of May 9, 2020 at 5:46 PM

If Bailey's "internal sensations" is referring to the same subject, then maybe what we're missing is a word or terminology that ties pleasure and pain more tightly to some kind of "internal natural guidance system" that does in fact stand shoulder to shoulder as an equivalent with "divine inspiration" or "logic" as a concept in the fight to determine what is the proper goal of life. As it is, when we talk of "pleasure" the connotation is so tightly tied to "chocolate cake" and the like that it is hard to see the forest for the trees. When we explain to people that "pleasure and pain" are the guides to life, it would be nice to have an articulate way to explain to them that Epicurus was not meaning to list PARTICULAR pleasures or pains, but was referring to the overall mechanism given to us by nature to fulfill that guidance role.

It seems hugely important to me to be able to start with the observation that Diogenes Laertius made that "the feelings are two - pleasure and pain" in order to explain the whole issue of absence of neutral states, limits of pleasure, and especially how the presence of one equals in quantity the absence of the other.

I bet that the ambiguity that we experience in the term "feeling" would almost without a doubt have been addressed and explained by Epicurus if we had more of the texts. On that same point, my bet is also that certain aspects of this, like with the issue of "preconceptions" are buried unrecognized in plain view in front of us in Lucretius - we just fail to recognize it.

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## Post by “Cassius” of May 9, 2020 at 7:24 PM

(Aside: At the moment I think I am going to let this thread run without splitting off the detailed discussion of Feelings/Pathe since I do think this is directly related to the question at hand: the best way to manage expectations surely includes an accurate explanation of the role of pleasure/pain and the goal/guide of life.) However if at any point someone feels otherwise let me know and I can easily divide up the thread.)

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## Post by “Don” of May 9, 2020 at 9:18 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

If Bailey's "internal sensations" is referring to the same subject, then maybe what we're missing is a word or terminology that ties pleasure and pain more tightly to some kind of "internal natural guidance system" that does in fact stand shoulder to shoulder as an equivalent with "divine inspiration" or "logic" as a concept in the fight to determine what is the proper goal of life. As it is, when we talk of "pleasure" the connotation is so tightly tied to "chocolate cake" and the like that it is hard to see the forest for the trees. When we explain to people that "pleasure and pain" are the guides to life, it would be nice to have an articulate way to explain to them that Epicurus was not meaning to list PARTICULAR pleasures or pains, but was referring to the overall mechanism given to us by nature to fulfill that guidance role.

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If you're referring to your first clip as Bailey and "internal sensations", yes, that's the same pathē.

I think you're onto something. Maximizing Pleasure is the goal, but we use both pathē to make our choices and rejections (okay, avoidances, but I dislike that translation). One feeling without the other as part of the Canon is like trying to ride a bicycle with one wheel.

[This abstract I found online I found interesting:](#)

#### Quote

In the first chapter, which is new to this edition, Konstan calls on psychology to flesh out the Epicurean understanding of empty fears and irrational desires—ancient psychology, that is: a science of the soul. Konstan's reading of the relation between sensation (aisthēseis), the passions (pathē) of pleasure and pain, and belief (doxa) in Epicurean doctrine is unorthodox but thorough. Rather than mapping pathē onto either the soul as a whole or the body, Konstan assigns pathē to the non-rational part of the soul, the seat of sensation. He locates the emotions, which "do not seem to have a special name in Epicurean theory," in the rational part (11). Crucial to this schema is Konstan's claim, based on Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* and Diogenes Laertius's

doxography of Epicurus, that Epicureans did not consider emotions such as fear and joy to be pathē at all, since emotions depend on memory and reasoning, whereas pathē do not. The upshot is that fear, as a rational emotion, involves belief and evaluation, and is therefore susceptible to error; whence the psychological roots of pernicious “empty beliefs.”

This is possible direction to talk of unifying the pathē into one description.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of May 10, 2020 at 6:38 AM**

1 - Oh yes that IS extremely interesting and a promising path.

2 - I had forgotten about the word "passions" but yes - I like to use words that appear to derive from the same root so that is one to remember, even though the modern associations will need clarification.

3 - I want to read that article.....

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### **Post by “Cassius” of May 10, 2020 at 6:47 AM**

You have quoted the critical part Eugenios and it immediately jumps out why the pathē are part of the canon of truth - they are analogous to sensations and function "automatically" such as not to be considered subject to error:

Rather than mapping pathē onto either the soul as a whole or the body, Konstan assigns pathē to the non-rational part of the soul, the seat of sensation. He locates the emotions, which “do not seem to have a special name in Epicurean theory,” in the rational part (11). Crucial to this schema is Konstan’s claim, based on Lucretius’s *De Rerum Natura* and Diogenes Laertius’s doxography of Epicurus, that Epicureans did not consider emotions such as fear and joy to be pathē at all, since emotions depend on memory and reasoning, whereas pathē do not. The upshot is that fear, as a rational emotion, involves belief and evaluation, and is therefore susceptible to error; whence the psychological roots of pernicious “empty beliefs ....

--and to emphasize the point that last sentence should say something to the effect "while the pathē do not involve evaluation, and thus, like the senses, are direct contacts with human reality to be considered as truly reported at all times."

In this analysis it is extremely useful to see that "emotions depend on memory and reasoning, whereas pathē do not."

VERY good direction I think!!

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### **Post by "Cassius" of May 10, 2020 at 7:06 AM**

Aside: Ok in the "there he goes again" department 😊 After finding the Konstan book, what do I look for and find, happily, to be a major indication of Konstan perhaps being on the same wavelength (as far as I remember I have not read any Konstan before)?

**Unlike what appears to be the modern trend,** Konstan includes several approving references to DEWITT! 😊

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### **Post by "Cassius" of May 10, 2020 at 8:42 AM**

I see we touched on some of these issues before (four years ago), but not thoroughly: [Passions / Emotions / Feelings - The Second Leg of the Canon of Truth](#)

For example:

Haris Dimitriadis The word passions needs special care because its meaning has been influenced by the definition of the soul that Plato gave. He imagined the soul as a chariot in which, logic-wisdom was the driver, and the two horses were the feelings and the desires. The feelings were obedient to the driver's instructions, and they contributed to the driver's guides to take under control the second horse, which was expressing the desires=passions of the body. To Plato the material body was the source of unhappiness and this was referred by him as the tomb of the mind. So to Plato passions reflected the desires of the body, which by nature are difficult to get hold on to. As regards then Democritus saying is risky to interpret it according to the platonian terminology because they had different views. They both lived in the same time period but Democritus was about 30 years older. Plato by his influence managed to distort the initial meaning of the word passion and hence makes difficult for us to know what Deemocritus meant exactly by the saying.

December 31, 2016 at 11:52amCassius Amicus Those are exactly the kinds of concerns I had in mind. In order to even begin to dig further we would presumably need the greek version of the fragment, and then compare the word choice to the word choice in Diogenes Laertius, who is himself giving his own summary and apparently not a direct quote. But rather than the end of the question I still think we are at the beginning. In discussing Epicurus we really need a firm statement of the "name" of the third leg of the canon as Epicurus used the term. Other than the two statements in DL I quoted I am not sure there is a direct statement in the core texts we have of the name of this third leg.

I personally refer to it as "the faculty of pleasure and pain" but I am not at all sure that that is the best wording. "pleasure" or "pain" alone do not seem appropriate, and "feelings" and "passions" have all the limitations we are noting. It seems clear that this third leg is also a something we commonly think of as a "sensation" but that too is not a satisfactory word. As I think of final remarks to close out 2016 I think this issue is one that would really help to make progress on in 2017. Greater clarity on this central point would be critically helpful - and ought to be doable if we are going to represent that we have a good understanding of Epicurean doctrine.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of May 10, 2020 at 1:32 PM**

I found this part of a review of Konstan [Tsouna - Konstan-AJPReviewbyVoulaTsouna.pdf](#) by Voula Tsouna. I think i agree with Konstan, and disagree with her, particular in the part I underlined in red, where I think Tsouna is wrong (I agree with the blue and disagree with the red):

thesis that the Epicureans draw a distinction between the non-rational and the rational parts of the soul, assigning to the former the *pathē* of pleasure and of pain but to the latter the emotions, for instance, anger, fear, and joy. On this approach, the Epicurean *pathē* (“feelings,” “affects”) are precisely pleasure and pain, do not involve judgments, and function automatically to indicate the moral value of things (13). Part of Konstan’s motivation for defending this position is Epicurus’ inclusion of the *pathē*, alongside sensations (*aisthēseis*) and preconceptions (*prolēpseis*), among the criteria of truth (D.L. 10.31): as the non-rational character of sensations guarantees that they yield unmediated and infallible information about external things, so the non-rational character of pleasure and pain constitutes an unmediated and infallible basis of choice and avoidance for humans and animals alike (15). Konstan adduces, in support of his claim, Epicurean texts which closely associate the *pathē* with the *aisthēseis* (notably, Epicurus, *ad Herod.* 37–38, 55, 63, 82). We may add Sextus’ report of the Epicurean view of time as “an accident of accidents,” in which *pathē* are specified as either pains or pleasures (*M* 10.219–27). But although these texts make it appear likely that, ultimately, all Epicurean *pathē* would be subsumed under “pleasure” and “pain,” nonetheless they do not explicitly problematize or discuss the issue, i.e., whether all *pathē* are indeed subsumed under pleasure and pain. Moreover, although the function of *pathē* as criteria of truth precludes the simultaneous formation of judgments, it does not follow that the *pathē* should be assigned to a non-rational part of the soul: some degree of rationalization appears involved in my *pathos* of a sharp pain in the foot or in the pleasure of tasting honey. Criterial infallibility entails that our sensations, preconceptions, and feelings are not affected by judgment, but not necessarily that their functions are located in the non-rational soul. In any case,

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Maybe to be more precise, I don't have a dog in the fight about "rational or non-rational part of the soul" at least at this point, but I think that the part in blue (absence of rationalizing / opinion) is absolutely necessary for something to make sense to be part of the Epicurean "canon of truth." This is where I strongly disagree with the "other Epicureans" or "Epicureans generally" or whatever, who deviated from Epicurus and included more into the canon of truth, apparently because they did not understand why Epicurus was so adamant about this distinction, as DeWitt points out. (And by doing so they introduce a "feedback loop" which destroys the "neutrality" of the canon and allows "opinion" to take over).

It's not clear to me why Tsouna would want to advocate the position in the parts indicated in red unless she was taking the part of these "other Epicureans" against Epicurus, and she is trying to rescue "reason" to make it more of a component of the canon of truth than Epicurus saw it to be --- and that would be a motivation we would expect many "academics" to take, as a way to water down Epicurus' conclusion and perhaps be accommodating to Epicurus' Platonic/Aristotelian/Stoic enemies.

And I definitely think this part of "managing expectations"..... it's important that people realize that the "Canon of Truth" is not going to mean truth in the sense of "divine revelation" or "absolutely universal ethics" or things like that.

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### **Post by “Don” of May 10, 2020 at 2:48 PM**

The [Wikipedia article on Pain and Pleasure](#) gives a very basic overview of the physiology in this area. The whole idea of nociceptors and dopamine seems like that whole immediate contact with the world without judgement that we've been talking around. [Elayne](#) may have more insight into this area.

I know Epicurus had no knowledge of this physiology but he did have his experience and knew there was some kind of pre-judgemental component of pleasure and pain. Might be another way to get at these concepts.

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### **Post by “Don” of May 10, 2020 at 7:22 PM**

When talking about expectations, I would assume that some people can't wrap their heads around Epicurus's distrust (Is that the right word?) of Reason. It's such a mainstay of Western philosophy as it's come down thru the Socratic/Platonic lineage. Epicurus saw the application of prudence to be positive, but it's not part of the Canon. And I think many people can't get over that. Getting people to see that Reason and our cognitive assessments can deceive us could be jarring. We use our "higher" reasoning but should be wary of it.

IF I've characterized Epicurean philosophy circle.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of May 10, 2020 at 7:42 PM**

Yes I agree that that is an issue that should be introduced early and clearly. Of course the issue really isn't all types of reason but the relative place of dialectical logic, or any form of logical argument that is not tied tightly to the evidence of the senses, plus probably the main observation that ultimately reason/logic relies on the senses for its validity. Once explained I

think that last point is relatively easy to understand and accept, and it really helps to get to the big issue -- which is that these other philosophers are alleging that logic/reason need NOT rest on evidence confirmable by the senses.

I don't think most people realize the extreme to which "logic" is deified in these other systems, so i think most people can get comfortable with Epicurus' perspective relatively quickly -- as for those who can't --- I guess we just have to acknowledge that not everyone is going to be open to accepting the Epicurean view of the universe. And in truth the majority of people, especially today with all the religious indoctrination that we have, probably are not good candidates.

One way of getting to that early too is to discuss the issue that mathematical modeling is not reality, any more than the map, no matter how detailed it is, is the same as the geography that is being mapped. Explaining this clearly ought to help deal with the common allegations that Epicurus is anti-science or anti-reason in the first place.

And that's necessary to explain why Epicurus said without contradiction that:

16. In but few things chance hinders a wise man, but the greatest and most important matters, reason has ordained, and throughout the whole period of life does and will ordain.

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## Post by “Pompadour” of May 13, 2020 at 9:15 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Here's an observation about a problem I see recurring over and over

If I may, I'm not sure the "cookbook" can answer the question "why do I eat?" In other words, philosophy can help people find meaning and I'm not sure its a problem if they stop eating when they're full, to continue the analogy.

From my own perspective, I want to explore Epicurus until I understand the tools well enough to know whether and how they will be useful to me.

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## Post by “Cassius” of May 13, 2020 at 9:34 AM

### [Quote from Pompadour](#)

If I may, I'm not sure the "cookbook" can answer the question "why do I eat?"

I think you're exactly right to make that distinction, and I know that many people (most people?) don't seem to have a problem going straight to the "let's eat" rather than asking first "why do I eat"?

And yet I think the basic question of "why do I eat" is best considered first - for example in trying to diet for overall health, it's pretty much imperative, is it not, to focus the mind on knowing that unless you control what you eat then ultimately you will lose your health and won't be able to eat after that.

We're discussing this in broad generalities but also:

[Quote from Pompadour](#)

philosophy can help people find meaning

But perhaps "meaning" is not what they should be looking for, and it's impossible to know unless that question of "what should I be looking for?" is answered.

[Quote from Pompadour](#)

From my own perspective, I want to explore Epicurus until I understand the tools well enough to know whether and how they will be **useful to me**.

The word "useful" or "utility" is always so ambiguous. Useful **FOR WHAT?** 😊

I always think back to this statement by Torquatus in On Ends:

Quote

IX. I will start then in the manner approved by the author of the system himself, by settling what are the essence and qualities of the thing that is the object of our inquiry; not that I suppose you to be ignorant of it, but because this is the logical method of procedure. We are inquiring, then, what is the final and ultimate Good, which as all philosophers are agreed must be of such a nature as to be the End to which all other things are means, while it is not itself a means to anything else. This Epicurus finds in pleasure; pleasure he holds to be the Chief Good, pain the Chief Evil.

But I continue to have the nagging doubt that Epicurus himself might not have put the question the same way, or - if he did - he would have been quick to point out the limitations in dealing with this as a strictly logical question, just as he did in the comment about walking around

endlessly talking about the meaning of the good.

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**Post by “Pompadour” of May 13, 2020 at 8:45 PM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

The word "useful" or "utility" is always so ambiguous. Useful FOR WHAT? 😊

For living a more pleasant life, of course 😊