

PD04 - Chronic Illness (Pain) - Migraines and PD 4

Post by "Charles" of January 18, 2021 at 9:07 PM

Quote from The Principle Doctrines & The Inscription

"Pain does not last continuously in the flesh, but the acutest pain is there for a very short time, and even that which just exceeds the pleasure in the flesh does not continue for many days at once. But chronic illnesses permit a predominance of pleasure over pain in the flesh." - PD 4

"The extremes pains cannot last long: either they quickly take life and are themselves also taken away with it, or they acuteness is diminished." - Epicurean Maxims, Fr. 107
Diogenes O. Epicurean Inscription

The meaning of this Principle Doctrine is clear enough yet some might struggle to reconcile the end of the first sentence, in that debilitating diseases can very often cause pain to someone for years. Furthermore, I'd imagine that finding such clear examples of this to be rare, especially considering the small number of Epicureans or hedonists out there to share this outlook.

However, in my case, something that I've certainly brought up before elsewhere such as the podcast or on these forums, are the chronic migraines I deal with, and have dealt with for almost as long as I can remember. Calling them a disease may be a stretch to some extent and over the years I've been appointed to a few personal physicians and discussed with various peoples who have a medical background - to no avail on "curing" them beyond extreme solutions.

They have been, since my early teenage years, become manageable due to my increased understanding surrounding them and through keeping a few pill bottles of migraine relief on hand. It wasn't until around I was late 17 to early 18 that I became more "hedonist-centric", understanding the benefits of pleasure that so greatly complimented my atheism and materialism. In turn my attitude towards these often sudden, extremely painful moments had shifted significantly.

No longer did I worry or fear over them to such an extent that I avoided my one known trigger like the plague, and no longer had I thought of it as something that would ruin or put whatever activity I was enjoying in peril. They became a brief lapse of pain between my pleasures, something to be driven out and overcome, the bodily equivalent of casting ones inner demons out one could say.

This mindset has not changed upon becoming Epicurean, and this personal example has resonated this specific Principle Doctrine within me the moment I first read them online, and would be further reinforced when I would later purchase physical books filled with Epicurus' writings (Penguin Classics Ed.) and a small personal booklet containing the Doctrines.

So to conclude: I would finalize my point that, even if my situation is unique to myself, and that the migraines and pain are still present, this quote by Epicurus is absolutely true and sometimes it could take a love of life and pleasure to truly "feel" that.

Post by “Matt” of January 18, 2021 at 9:57 PM

I'll definitely want to discuss this with you, I'm just getting into bed now, but I'll be on tomorrow. Very good topic.

Post by “Matt” of January 19, 2021 at 9:28 AM

This idea of chronic pain and illness is definitely key to us understanding why pleasure is the end.

Recently I was very ill. Though it was very brief it reminded me that I take for granted the pleasures I'm accustomed to. I lost my sense of taste and smell, fortunately it's back at about 80%, nowhere near perfect. But for some it can be permanent.

During the time I was “away” from Epicurean living, I still was often reminded of its truth. But I think my recent illness and the time I spent meditating on the nature of things and how I desired to “feel” normal exceeded any metaphysical ideal or philosophy.

Having an illness may make a person no longer take for granted that pleasure is critical to a healthy mind and body. Kind of an Epicurean revelation or epiphany!

A few years ago, I had a ridiculous accident where I destroyed my knee and also severed a nerve in my leg, giving me a permanent limp, like an Epicurean Epictetus. Lol

I needed multiple surgeries, nerve grafts and finally a tendon transfer. All these things were very depressing and painful. I suppose I could've been swayed to become a Stoic had I met that philosophy first. Coincidentally during that time I discovered EP and the EP group on FB. I think that the things that I absorbed during that time from conversations and reading epicurean

materials absolutely got me through that difficult time.

Post by “Joshua” of January 19, 2021 at 11:51 AM

I reported to the ER one time with visual lights/patterns, transient aphasia, confusion, headache, vomiting—and was diagnosed with complex migraine with aura. Lucky me, I thought I was having a stroke!

It was miserable. I wouldn't say chronic, but I have had them intermittently over the years. My experience tracks with what Charles said. As soon as I understood what was going on (a phenomenon called spreading cortical depression), I began to handle them much better. The physical pain was the same but the suffering was considerably lessened. Now I know what's going to happen before it happens, and I can take measures to mitigate it. It becomes much easier to protect my abiding pleasure in this way.

Post by “Matt” of January 19, 2021 at 12:50 PM

I used to get very serious dizzy spells when I was a little kid, I don't know if it was an inner ear thing or what, but it seems to have subsided when I turned 12 or so and I used to get some serious headaches but fortunately now they seem to be manageable just with ibuprofen.

But even though we experience pain, we can still have plenty of pleasure!