

# Dealing With Friends Who Are Struggling

**Post by "Marco" of June 24, 2021 at 2:36 AM**

How do you respond if you see your friends struggling in the storm and fighting in the battle? Usually they complain about their relationship, money, work, pain.

I answer them that they have to fight their fears, not have to work for something after their death, always have to look for the good, pleasure, wellbeing, and tolerate the bad by thinking about the beautiful days.

That their lives are a result of wrong choices and avoidance.

That the ideal they chase is just a dream, there are only atoms and void.

The reactions are not positive. That's easy talk, what could be learned from an old philosopher, you laughing my troubles away...

Would I better remain silent? Or support their complaints?

Google translate - speaking Dutch.

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**Post by "Don" of June 24, 2021 at 6:12 AM**

Dat zijn lastige vragen! Ik spreek geen Nederlands. Ik zal ook Google translate gebruiken. Vrienden willen soms klagen. Ze willen gehoord worden. Ze willen misschien geen oplossingen. Wees je bewust van de situatie. Als ze advies willen, kun je direct zijn. Epicurus moedigde openhartige spraak of "parrhesia" aan. Wij zijn verantwoordelijk voor ons leven. Ons leven is het resultaat van wat we kiezen en wat we afwijzen. We kunnen onze huidige acties en onze toekomstige acties kiezen. We herinneren ons plezier uit het verleden. We kijken naar de resultaten van toekomstige acties. We kiezen. Er is geen goddelijk regelboek. Er is geen god die onze actie leidt. Er is geen ultieme betekenis. We maken onze eigen betekenis. Als je vrienden advies willen, help ze dan goede beslissingen te nemen voor de toekomst. Luister naar ze. Wees een goede vriend.

[Those are difficult questions! I don't speak Dutch. I will also use Google translate.

Friends sometimes want to complain. They want to be heard. They may not want solutions. Be aware of the situation.

If they want advice, you can be direct. Epicurus encouraged frank speech or "parrhesia".

We are responsible for our lives. Our lives result from what we choose and what we reject. We can choose our present actions and our future actions. We remember past pleasure. We look at the results of future action. We choose. There is no divine rulebook. There is no god directing our action. There is no ultimate meaning. We make our own meaning.

If your friends want advice, help them make good decisions for the future. Listen to them. Be a good friend.]

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## Post by "Cassius" of June 24, 2021 at 6:52 AM

That's a great question and I have a couple of comments.

First, a similar thought has come up in several discussions, and one comment that I associate with Elayne making it is that some people in some situations are not looking for a solution, but for empathy and confirmation of their feelings, and no matter how insightful the information you give might be, they aren't going to hear it and it actually does no good (or even causes more friction between the two of you) to talk about solutions. That way of thinking is very foreign to me but I do agree that it exists in some situations, so first I think it is necessary to determine whether the person you are talking to is looking for solutions or just a shoulder to cry on.

### [Quote from Marco](#)

That their lives are a result of wrong choices and avoidance.

That the ideal they chase is just a dream, there are only atoms and void.

Of the Epicurean suggestions you were listing, I would suggest a finer point on these two.

Remember as to agency that Epicurus said in the letter to Menoecus:

### Quote

(He thinks that with us lies the chief power in determining events, some of which happen by necessity) and some by chance, and some are within our control; for while necessity cannot be called to account, he sees that chance is inconstant, but that which is in our control is subject to no master, and to it are naturally attached praise and blame.

So while I very much agree that in general terms it is likely that the problems are the result of their choices and avoidances, it is also possible that the problem was in fact beyond their control. Depending on the situation it is probably a good idea to be sure to include that possibility so that at least in the beginning, until they come to terms with the view that they are "chiefly" in control of their lives, that we acknowledge that some things (death for instance) are beyond our control.

As to this second item:

[Quote from Marco](#)

That the ideal they chase is just a dream, there are only atoms and void.

I think (again depending on context) that this needs clarification. Yes Epicurus taught that "ideal forms" do not exist, but the way that sentence comes across in English (again, I realize your first language is Dutch) the formulation has a nihilist ring to it that I do not think Epicurus would embrace.

If what is meant by "ideal" is the person's "goal" or "view of life" or many other types of 'conceptions' then I think we have to be careful about condemning those as "ideals." This is one of the reasons that I think it is so important to think about what Epicurus was talking about in discussing "conceptions" and "PRE-conceptions." Our thoughts are extremely important to us, and they are the sources of great pains and pleasures, and so we should not disparage them just because they do not have eternal unchanging properties as do atoms and void. They may not be eternal, but they are all we have at our human level of experience.

In discussing the differences between properties of elemental properties vs. the qualities of "bodies" in the Letter to Herodotus and also in Lucretius, I do not think that the Epicureans were suggesting that we should look at the qualities of things as less significant to us than the properties of the atoms. I think Epicurus was suggesting that it is essential that we understand that one is permanent and the other is not, and that the qualities arise from the movement and combinations of atoms and void and not from supernatural beings. I think that Epicurus would have seen (and did see) nihilism as an enemy just as much as supernatural religion, and that he would stress that even things we consider to be "dreams" can have very potent impact on us. In fact come to think of it there are explicit statements about how the things we experience in "dreams" can impact us.

So as to the "there are only atoms and void" I think what I have said above illustrates the issue. The more precise point is that "the only things that have permanent independent unchanging properties are atoms and void." While that is true, we live on a different level - the level where the qualities of bodies (as discussed in Epicurus) are the only things that rise to our level of sensation and experience. I therefore think at the outset of explaining Epicurus to people that we need to stress this point very strongly so as to avoid any nihilistic implications. We don't

"worship" atoms and void (which is the "weak and beggarly elements" slander from the New Testament). We simply understand that the qualities of things we experience arise from and are limited by the elemental particles of which they are composed (and not by supernatural gods).

Now I realize not everyone agrees with me on this last point, but this is also why I much prefer the translation "events" as the best way to translate the Latin "eventum" in Lucretius rather than "accidents." The 1743 edition uses "events," but many others use "accidents" - in my view influenced by the idea of the swerve and by the deduction they draw from Epicurean philosophy that everything is "accidental."

I think that is a very harmful point of view that is not Epicurean and leads to nihilism too. If this issue interests you I strongly recommend AA Long's article "Chance and Natural Law in Epicureanism." In that article Long emphasizes how in fact the effect of the swerve is not nearly so extensive as many people seem to infer. He emphasizes that in fact the swerve does not appear in the letter to Herodotus at all, and appears in Lucretius primarily as the explanation of "free will" (for which reason David Sedley concludes that the swerve did not originally occur to Epicurus as a principle of physics at all). The point is that most things in the universe do occur in a manner that may not be predictable to us, but which is in essence "mechanical" in the sense of being determined directly by the properties of the atoms and the void and their movements. There is also a reference in Herodotus that supports this conclusion, to the effect that all things continue along the way that they were set in motion "from the formation of our world."

Sorry to be so long-winded on this but your post hits some excellent and very important points. Thank you for posting that!

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## Post by "Cassius" of June 24, 2021 at 7:00 AM

i want to add this:

[Quote from Marco](#)

not have to work for something after their death,

This is the one that always seem to me personally to be one of the most effective. Most of the people in my circle of contact are infected by the belief that there is life after death, so they build in an attitude that this is all just a warm-up for live in heaven (or some kind of existence) after death.

To me it is one of the most motivating things in life to realize that I have a time limit to get done the things i want to get done, and to realize that once I am dead, I will experience nothing ever again.

If people really took that point to heart I think most of us would act much differently, and that's why it appears several times in the remaining Epicurean texts.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of June 24, 2021 at 7:03 AM**

Marco I am going to take the liberty to adjust the title of the thread from

"Friends"

to

"Dealing With Friends Who Are Struggling"

to make the topic easier to find in the future. If you prefer something else, please of course feel free to adjust it again.

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### **Post by “Don” of June 24, 2021 at 7:06 AM**

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

Now I realize not everyone agrees with me on this last point, but this is also why I much prefer the translation "events" as the best way to translate the Latin "eventum" in Lucretius rather than "accidents." The 1743 edition uses "events," but many others use "accidents" - in my view influenced by the idea of the swerve and by the deduction they draw from Epicurean philosophy that everything is "accidental."

I see your point, but that "accident" doesn't mean "accident" like a car wreck. But that's what people think of with that word now.

Eventum is from evenio: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...Aentry%3Devenio> and just means an occurrence or what arises from circumstances, or as the dictionary says in Lucretius:

2. In Lucr. opp. conjunctum, of the external conditions, or accidents, of persons and things (as poverty, riches, freedom, etc.), Lucr. 1, 450; 458; 467; 470 al.—

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### **Post by “Cassius” of June 24, 2021 at 7:16 AM**

Exactly. In my experience many people think "accident" means "could have happened differently" with the implication that it "should have happened differently." I do realize that this is a complex subject, and that's why I like to refer to the A A Long article, but in general, and in many cases, the things people are talking about are not really things that could or should have happened differently but are in fact things that are directly determined by the mix of circumstances that went in to creating the circumstances in the first place.

In that sense, for example, I do not believe Epicurus would have viewed "life on earth" as an "accident" at all. Most of what we are talking about (except for the things influenced by "free will") are best viewed as "events" many or most of which would be predictable if we had the technology and time and energy and desire etc to apply to it.

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### **Post by “Marco” of June 24, 2021 at 10:47 AM**

Thanks for the wisdom and advice. 😊

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of June 24, 2021 at 7:59 PM**

Marco something that I would add is to be sensitive to the context of your conversations with friends. Are they complaining to you, or are you watching them struggle and they are not asking for advice, or are they asking for advice, or are you having a philosophical discussion? I personally would try to listen well and to keep my comments very specific to the situation. Also my conversations with them probably would be quite different depending on their familiarity with, interest in, and agreement with Epicurean philosophy.

Not that I'm a great example of this but often I think it's most effective to do your best to "live like a god among men"; then you will provide an example for your friends to respond to as they

choose. Hopefully to the benefit of you all!

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### **Post by “Marco” of June 25, 2021 at 5:44 AM**

In all the situations you describe.

Flanders used to be very catholic. Suffering in silence was the way to earn heaven. Flanders was also the battlefield of Europe for hundreds of years, with increasingly dominance by strange countries.

‘Keep silent and endure your pain and destiny’, is in the national character. And complain to your friends about that pain and destiny.

If I show them possible solutions, that means the end of their martyrdom, I think.

In fact...they are not choosing happiness, which is quite easy to find in this prosperous country and times.