

# Episode Ninety-Three: Torquatus Leads Us Forward Into Conflict Over Epicurean Ethics

**Post by “Cassius” of October 18, 2021 at 10:01 AM**

Welcome to Episode Ninety-Three of Lucretius Today.

As a forward to this episode, we've now come to a major milestone in the history of the podcast: we have completely gone through the entire poem, and from here we will be looking to take a new direction to assist in the study of Epicurus. I am reminded that over the last year we shortened the opening of the podcast so that regular listeners would not have to hear the same introduction over and over every episode, but now that we have finished the poem this is a good opportunity to remind everyone where we started and where we are still going. Here's a slightly updated version of our original introduction:

This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who lived in the age of Julius Caesar and wrote "On The Nature of Things," the only complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

I am your host Cassius, and together with our panelists from the EpicureanFriends.com forum, we'll walk you through the six books of Lucretius' poem, and discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. Be aware that none of us are professional philosophers, and everyone here is a self-taught Epicurean. We encourage you to study Epicurus for yourself, and we suggest the best place to start is the book "Epicurus and His Philosophy" by Canadian professor Norman DeWitt.

Before we start with today's episode, let me remind you of our three ground rules.

First: Our aim is to bring you an accurate presentation of [classical Epicurean philosophy](#) as the ancient Epicureans understood it, which is not necessarily the same as you will find that modern commentators interpret it as being. We're bringing you our own perspective on Epicurean philosophy, unfiltered through traditional academic viewpoints, and we hope that our fresh perspective will encourage you to rethink the meaning of Epicurean philosophy for yourself.

Second: We won't be talking about contemporary political issues in this podcast, and in fact we will stay as far away from them as possible. At the EpicureanFriends.com forum we term this approach as "Not Neo-Epicurean, But Epicurean." We want everyone to understand that Epicurus had a unique philosophy of his own. Epicurus was not a Stoic, a Humanist, a Buddhist, a Taoist, an Atheist, or a Marxist - and it is very unfair to Epicurus and to ourselves to try to force Epicurus into one of those modern boxes. Epicurus was unique and in many ways a rebel

against the mainstream Greek philosophy that most of us have inherited in one form or another today. Epicurus must be understood on his own terms, and not through the lens of any conventional modern morality or political viewpoint.

Third: Lucretius' poem is mainly concerned with the many details of the Epicurean view of the nature of the universe, but we'll always try to relate those details of physics to show how they were translated directly into conclusions about the best way to live. Lucretius will show that Epicurus was not obsessed with luxury, as many opponents have always alleged, but neither did he teach minimalism or asceticism, as many modern commentators allege. Epicurus taught that feeling - pleasure and pain - are the guides that Nature gave us by which to live, and what that means is that Epicurus taught us that we are not intended to shape our lives based on ideas about supernatural gods, or about idealist abstractions, or about absolute notions of "virtue" of any kind. More than anything else, Epicurus taught that the universe not run by supernatural gods or by fate, and that there's no life after death. That means that any happiness we will ever have must come in this life, which is why it is so important not to waste time in confusion.

If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive to you, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where you will find a thread for discussion of each of our LucretiusToday episodes.

NOW: Let's discuss where we are as we start our ninety-third episode of the podcast:

We have now completed our first reading of the poem, so where do we go now? Here's the plan for the way forward:

Think of yourself as just having been led through the forest of Nature by Lucretius, our faithful Epicurean guide. Lucretius has led us through virtually every aspect of Epicurean philosophy, from the nature of pleasure as the guide of life, to the formation and operation of the universe through the combinations of matter and void, to the issue of the inevitability of death and the end of life, to matters of how to determine what is true, and how to think about life in the rest of the universe.

Lucretius has led us in both the examination of the trees of the forest as well as of the forest in itself, showing us how to go back and forth between the big picture and the details, and how they relate to each other to form both a forest and individual trees. (The forest is not insulted or diminished because it is composed of many trees, nor are we as humans insulted or diminished to be composed of many atoms.)

Now that we have finished the poem, we have come to the edge of the forest. Ahead of us in the clearing we see a number of camps of philosophers, each with separate banners, but all carrying not only their own books but also swords and shields, which tell us that there is danger ahead that blocks our path forward.

Our previous guide Lucretius tells us that it is time for him to step aside. In his place he introduces us to someone new: Torquatus, the latest leader from an old Roman family of distinguished military background. Torquatus tells us that he, too, like Lucretius, is a follower of Epicurus, and that he is now going to lead us forward through dangerous territory. Torquatus tells us that we must be prepared to encounter many philosophers who disagree with Epicurus' conclusions about the proper goal of life, and he tells us that a new method of exploration may be necessary as we encounter these opponents. He tells us, in fact, that in order to get past these enemies, it will be necessary for us to learn about weapons which Epicurus and Lucretius have already warned us against: weapons which goes by the name of "dialectical logic" and "virtue."

Paradoxically, Torquatus tells us that these weapons can bring great good to us when used properly, but that they can also destroy us if used improperly, and that therefore we must understand how they operate before we can use them ourselves without being destroyed.

With that as background, over the next several weeks our guide will in fact be "Torquatus" - a character in Cicero's Book "De Finibus" whose full title means something to the effect of "On Good and Evil Ends."

This first episode you are about to hear is considerably longer than our past episodes, but in this introduction we will lay the groundwork for those that follow, as we examine the most contentious and yet most important issues surrounding Epicurean Ethics and how to live.

Now let's join our panel with today's discussion, with today's text read by Joshua.

[13] V. To begin with the easiest opinions, let the theory of Epicurus first enter the arena. It is to most people thoroughly familiar, and you will perceive that I have set it forth with an exactness which is not commonly surpassed even by the adherents of the school themselves; for my desire is to find truth and not to confound as it were some opponent. Now the tenets of Epicurus concerning pleasure were once carefully advocated by Lucius Torquatus, a gentleman trained in every department of learning, and I replied to him, while Gains Triarius, a particularly serious and well instructed youth, was present at the debate.

[14] Well, both of them having come to me in my villa at Cumae to pay their respects, we had at first a little conversation about literary matters, in which both took the greatest interest....

[28] Then said Torquatus: 'I am quite of your opinion; without adverse criticism there can indeed be no debate, nor is proper debate compatible with passion or obstinacy. But, if you do not object, I have a reply I should like to make to what you have said.' 'Do you imagine,' I answered, 'that I should have said what I did, were I not anxious to hear you ?' 'Do you prefer then that we should run over the whole system of Epicurus, or should confine the inquiry to the one subject of pleasure, on which the whole dispute turns?' 'Well,' said I, 'that must be as you decide.' 'This is what I will do, then,' said he; 'I will expound a single topic, and that the most important; natural science I shall leave for another occasion, when certainly I will demonstrate

to you not only our philosopher's doctrine of the swerving of the atoms and of the sun's size, but will shew that very many blunders of Democritus have been criticised and set right by Epicurus; at present I shall speak concerning pleasure, though of course I have nothing new to say; still I am sure you will yourself yield to my arguments such as they are.' 'You may be sure,' said I, 'that I shall not be obstinate, and if you convince me of your propositions I will freely give them my assent.' 'I shall demonstrate them,' he replied, 'if only you exhibit that impartiality which you promise ; but I would rather deliver an uninterrupted speech than put or answer questions.' 'As you please,' said I. Then he began to speak.

[29] IX. 'First, then,' said he, 'I shall plead my case on the lines laid down by the founder of our school himself: I shall define the essence and features of the problem before us, not because I imagine you to be unacquainted with them, but with a view to the methodical progress of my speech. The problem before us then is, what is the climax and standard of things good, and this in the opinion of all philosophers must needs be such that we are bound to test all things by it, but the standard itself by nothing. Epicurus places this standard in pleasure, which he lays down to be the supreme good, while pain is the supreme evil; and he founds his proof of this on the following considerations.

[30] Every creature, as soon as it is born, seeks after pleasure and delights therein as in its supreme good, while it recoils from pain as its supreme evil, and banishes that, so far as it can, from its own presence, and this it does while still uncorrupted, and while nature herself prompts unbiased and unaffected decisions. So he says we need no reasoning or debate to shew why pleasure is matter for desire, pain for aversion. These facts he thinks are simply perceived, just as the fact that fire is hot, snow is white, and honey sweet, no one of which facts are we bound to support by elaborate arguments; it is enough merely to draw attention to the fact; and there is a difference between proof and formal argument on the one hand and a slight hint and direction of the attention on the other; the one process reveals to us mysteries and things under a veil, so to speak; the other enables us to pronounce upon patent and evident facts. Moreover, seeing that if you deprive a man of his senses there is nothing left to him, it is inevitable that nature herself should be the arbiter of what is in accord with or opposed to nature. Now what facts does she grasp or with what facts is her decision to seek or avoid any particular thing concerned, unless the facts of pleasure and pain?

[31] There are however some of our own school, who want to state these principles with greater refinement, and who say that it is not enough to leave the question of good or evil to the decision of sense, but that thought and reasoning also enable us to understand both that pleasure in itself is matter for desire and that pain is in itself matter for aversion. So they say that there lies in our minds a kind of natural and inbred conception leading us to feel that the one thing is good for us to seek, the other to reject. Others again, with whom I agree, finding that many arguments are alleged by philosophers to prove that pleasure is not to be reckoned among things good nor pain among things evil, judge that we ought not to be too confident about our case, and think that we should lead proof and argue carefully and carry on the

debate about pleasure and pain by using the most elaborate reasonings.

You can find a related thread on that text here: [Torquatus' Statement of the Epicurean View Of The Ultimate Good In "On Ends"](#)

Rather than use the Rackham text which is found in most places on the internet, we are planning to use the text by Reid, which appears somewhat more literal. That text is here: [Cicero's "Torquatus" Presentation of Epicurean Ethics - from "On Ends"](#)

We will do this over several episodes, with each episode having a reading of a short portion, but a full-length version by Joshua being made as well.

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### **Post by “Joshua” of October 19, 2021 at 10:24 PM**

[Cassius](#), I have taken your transcription of the Reid translation and put it into a LaTeX editor for typesetting and cleaning up. Paragraph numbers are back in the margins, for example.

I'm attempting to upload the PDF here.

I am happy to have feedback or suggestions, but in lieu of that I propose we use this as a common "fair" copy; given the document's size, the pagination should help us find what we're talking about more easily.

[Cicero.pdf](#)

Edit; If someone prefers wider margins for note-taking, or line-separations between paragraphs, that's quite easy to accommodate.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of October 19, 2021 at 10:51 PM**

Oh that looks GREAT! thank you! I do have an idea that some amount of line separation between paragraphs would be desirable, but I am not sure how much is appropriate. Probably not a full extra line, because i have a sense there is more space there in most books, but i am not sure. Don is the book expert. Don?

**Post by “Joshua” of October 19, 2021 at 11:07 PM**

[CiceroVersion-1,2.pdf](#)

This is Version 1.2 with a spelling correction and what LaTeX calls a "medium skip" between paragraphs.

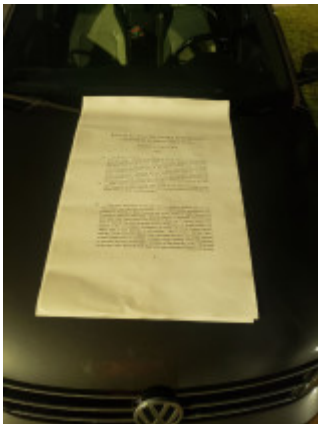
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**Post by “Don” of October 20, 2021 at 6:38 AM**

Very nice!

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**Post by “Joshua” of October 20, 2021 at 8:07 PM**



...oops...

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**Post by “Cassius” of October 20, 2021 at 8:20 PM**

Is that an illustration of the size of the sun problem? 😊 That is a HUGE manuscript, or a small car!

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2231-episode-ninety-three-torquatus-leads-us-forward-into-conflict-over-epicurean-eth/>

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**Post by “Don” of October 20, 2021 at 8:29 PM**

That's some impressive margins!

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**Post by “Joshua” of October 24, 2021 at 11:51 AM**

As I continue to think about the thorny problems we've just discussed, I began to realize that all I'm doing is coming up with a series of great cop-outs.

Time Enough?

One of my other enduring interests is horology, or the study of the human art and science of time-keeping. Perhaps the greatest living watchmaker in the English speaking world is Roger Smith, who lives and works on the Isle of Man. One of the unofficial mottos of that Isle is "Traa Dy Liooar", or Time Enough.

The problem for us is that we are "by nature mortal and ephemeral" (Claudius Ptolemy), and that the one thing we don't have is time: even if we are fortunate enough to study philosophy while young, as Epicurus advised, we cannot go on forever in suspense, and skeptical of the proper End of life.

We are needful of an answer, an operating axiom from which to work. Sooner or later we need to give this tangled semantic web the Gordian treatment—to cut through words and logic and disputation, through dialectic and debate and Ciceronian puppet-strings, and to come down to something visceral and experiential.

...but that's not really an answer, is it.

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**Post by “Cassius” of October 24, 2021 at 11:56 AM**

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

Sooner or later we need to give this tangled semantic web the Gordian treatment—to cut through words and logic and disputation, through dialectic and debate and Ciceronian puppet-strings, and to come down to something visceral and experiential.

No, I think that IS the answer!

We need to do that because in the end there is no other choice.

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## Post by “Cassius” of October 24, 2021 at 11:58 AM

Rather than divert this thread solely in one direction here is a thread to address one of the "big issues" we referenced today:

Thread

**[The "One and the Many" Question - Do You Fancy You Have Found Treasure of Wisdom In This? Do You Puzzle Your Friends And Even Your Dog About It? What In the World Is Socrates Talking About?](#)**

I will link to this thread in the show notes for Episode Ninety-Four, because I think we are going to find that the issue is very relevant. But I want to set it out as a separate thread. The basic question in the thread is "

**"What In The Heck Is Socrates Even Talking About?" Can we help each other by explaining what we think this is about?**

The heart of the question I think becomes most clear in this brief excerpt, which comes from the full [Philebus](#):

[...]

But in order to understand that you...



Cassius

October 24, 2021 at 11:31 AM

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### **Post by “Cassius” of October 24, 2021 at 6:07 PM**

Before we get too far past the material that we covered in Episode one, on the issue of the "highest good" we need to make reference to this cite:

**Plutarch, *That Epicurus actually makes a pleasant life impossible*, 7, p. 1091A:** Not only is the basis that they assume for the pleasurable life untrustworthy and insecure, it is quite trivial and paltry as well, inasmuch as their “thing delighted” - their good - is an escape from ills, and they say that they can conceive of no other, and indeed that our nature has no place at all in which to put its good except the place left when its evil is expelled. ... Epicurus too makes a similar statement to the effect that the good is a thing that arises out of your very escape from evil and from your memory and reflection and gratitude that this has happened to you. His words are these: “That which produces a jubilation unsurpassed is the nature of good, if you apply your mind rightly and then stand firm and do not stroll about {a jibe at the Peripatetics}, prating meaninglessly about the good.”

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### **Post by “Cassius” of October 25, 2021 at 9:50 AM**

Episode Ninety-Three of Lucretius Today is now available! This episode marks both an end and a new beginning for the podcast. We have now completed the entire poem of Lucretius, so it is time to apply what we have learned to the issue of how to live. To carry us forward, we are going to turn from the most complete statement left to us from the ancient world of Epicurean physics to the most complete statement left to us of Epicurean Ethics: the narrative by Torquatus in Cicero's "On Ends." This episode is considerably longer than in the past, but we take the time to introduce the text and discuss carefully the vitally important opening paragraphs. In this episode we frame the question of what it is we are about to discuss: the nature of the "highest good." We will also discuss how Epicurus answered that question - by pointing to the young of all living things, who newly-born have not yet been corrupted by false philosophies and false religions. We hope you will enjoy this episode as much as we did in bringing it to you, and we hope you will stay with the podcast as we continue to explore Epicurean philosophy in the spirit of Lucretius.

**Post by “Cassius” of October 25, 2021 at 10:00 AM**

It's going to take some effort to listen to this one - it is an hour and a half long - but I think you'll see that the panel put a lot of effort into this one, as we are now covering some of the most important material that we're ever going to cover.

We gave some thought to splitting this into two episodes, but one of the main reasons I did not is that I wanted to get the full material out to the world as soon as possible, so that those of us here at the forum who take the most interest in the topic can listen to what is said and then pose questions and comments here in the thread that we can consider as we record the next episode.

So if you have time, please listen, and let us know anything you'd like us to comment on or cover in the upcoming discussions!

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**Post by “Cassius” of October 25, 2021 at 10:42 AM**

Another thing I want to add is that although I am very proud of the panel and know that we are doing the best that we can, there's no doubt that some of what is said in the podcast (especially by me!) may need to be revised and extended later. But the issue is that the only way to get past these confusing issues is to go headlong through them, so I hope everyone will listen and participate on that basis. None of us are claiming to be doing anything more than "the best we can" under our own circumstances. It's the effort, and not the current result, that will move us forward.

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**Post by “Kalosyni” of October 25, 2021 at 11:02 AM**

Can post a link to the text you used, thanks.

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**Post by “Kalosyni” of October 25, 2021 at 11:04 AM**

\*Can you

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**Post by “Cassius” of October 25, 2021 at 11:10 AM**

It is this one - [Cicero's "Torquatus" Presentation of Epicurean Ethics - from "On Ends"](#)

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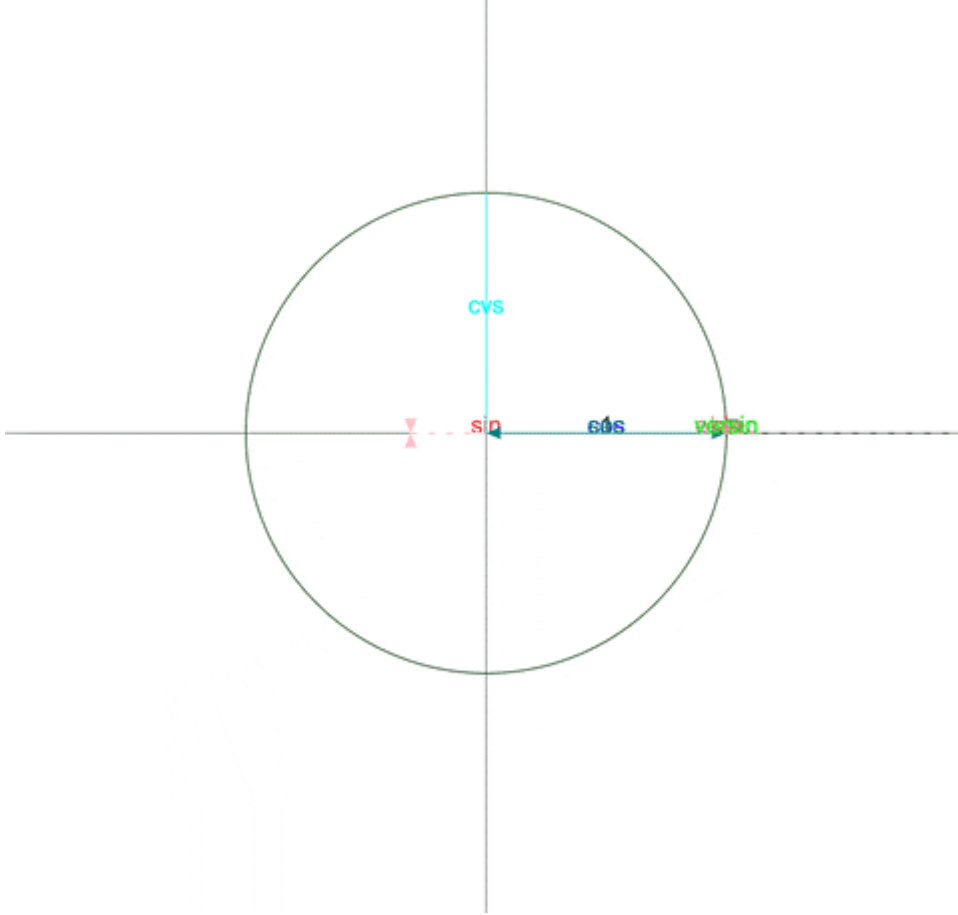
**Post by “Cassius” of October 25, 2021 at 11:24 AM**

Does every child whirling a slingshot around his head carry in his mind a past memory of geometry or trigonometry from before his birth?

Does our ability to see these geometric relationships and calculate them mean that Nature's clerk sat down somewhere and calculated them originally at the foundation of the world?

Does the slingshot whirling around our head whirl the way it does because it is governed by laws which are portrayed in this diagram?

Is knowledge of sines and cosines and geometry a good in and of itself, putting us in touch with a world beyond our senses?



Note: I really just wanted to know if an animated gif would work here - it appears that it does!



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**Post by “Don” of October 26, 2021 at 6:37 AM**



Ah, that is pretty cool 😊

Sic fac omnia tamquam spectet Epicurus! ..et Metrodorus!

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**Post by “Godfrey” of October 26, 2021 at 11:30 AM**

Post #19 might relate to our previous discussions about circumplexes in some fashion, but as I ended up confused as to the exact definition of a circumplex, I'm not sure if it illustrates what one is or what one isn't 🤔

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**Post by “Godfrey” of October 27, 2021 at 12:51 AM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2231-episode-ninety-three-torquatus-leads-us-forward-into-conflict-over-epicurean-eth/>

Good discussion; dealing with Cicero brings up lots of issues!

The foray into mathematics brought to mind a tangentially relevant sci-fi short story, "The Story of Your Life" by Ted Chiang. It concerns an alien first contact and the efforts to understand the alien linguistics and physics, and deftly illustrates possible ramifications of different worldviews. The physics comparison begins with two different ways of approaching the optical problem of a stick apparently bending in water, which I seem to recall from Epicurean texts or a forum post at some point.

The story was made into the movie Arrival a few years ago. I'm sure the treatment in the original story is much more relevant here though.

But that's quite a long way from Cicero. Keep up the good work! 👍 👍

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### Post by "Cassius" of October 27, 2021 at 6:38 AM

I am pretty sure the bent stick is in the form of a bent oar in the discussion of illusions that just precedes the longer discussion of images. I always forget whether that is book four or five....

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### Post by "Don" of October 27, 2021 at 8:44 AM

I would like to offer these lines from the Letter to Menoikeus in support of my contention that Epicurus was saying the same thing as "Torquatus" when it comes to the "highest good" (my emphasis added):

#### Quote

This is why we say that pleasure is the beginning and the end of a completely happy life. For we recognize it as the primary and innate good, we honor it in everything we accept or reject, and we achieve it if we judge every good thing by the **standard** of how that thing affects us. And because this is the primary and inborn good, we do not choose every pleasure...

καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος λέγομεν εἶναι τοῦ μακαρίως ζῆν. ταύτην γὰρ ἀγαθὸν πρῶτον καὶ συγγενικὸν ἔγνωμεν, καὶ ἀπὸ ταύτης καταρχόμεθα πάσης

αἰρέσεως καὶ φυγῆς, καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτην καταντῶμεν ὡς κανόνι τῷ πάθει πᾶν ἀγαθὸν κρίνοντες. καὶ ἐπεὶ πρῶτον ἀγαθὸν τοῦτο καὶ σύμφυτον, διὰ τοῦτο καὶ οὐ πᾶσαν ἡδονὴν αἰρούμεθα...

πρῶτον

πρῶτος

first

earliest

foremost, most prominent

πρῶτον ἀγαθὸν = first, highest, superior, foremost good thing

[Greek Word Study Tool](#)

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## Post by “Cassius” of October 27, 2021 at 11:18 AM

Yes that is definitely key material!

How do you interpret the "this" in "And because this is the primary and inborn good, we do not choose every pleasure...?"

If we substitute "pleasure" there we get "And because pleasure is the primary and inborn good we do not choose every pleasure...."

Are we not left with the same question as to how to distinguish between which pleasures to choose, and is not "pleasure" as used here a very high-level term encompassing many particulars? I don't see how that conclusion can be avoided unless we take the position that "the feeling of pleasure" is exactly the same in every respect in every experience that we find pleasing. And in case the answer to that question doesn't seem immediately clear, don't pleasures vary *at least* in how long they last? (And I would assert that it is clear that pleasures vary in many other ways as well.)

And in fact even in this passage it's clear that we are sometimes even selecting a temporary pain when a "greater pleasure" comes from having endured that pain.

So aren't we left with the clear conclusion that some pleasures are greater (and some are lesser) than others? And if so, the question to "what is the highest pleasure?" is not answered simply by saying "pleasure"? Is it? 😊

Quote

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2231-episode-ninety-three-torquatus-leads-us-forward-into-conflict-over-epicurean-eth/>

"And since pleasure is the first good and natural to us, for this very reason we do not choose every pleasure, but sometimes we pass over many pleasures, when greater discomfort accrues to us as the result of them: and similarly we think many pains better than pleasures, since a greater pleasure comes to us when we have endured pains for a long time. Every pleasure then because of its natural kinship to us is good, yet not every pleasure is to be chosen: even as every pain also is an evil, yet not all are always of a nature to be avoided. Yet by a scale of comparison and by the consideration of advantages and disadvantages we must form our judgment on all these matters. For the good on certain occasions we treat as bad, and conversely the bad as good. And again independence of desire we think a great good — not that we may at all times enjoy but a few things, but that, if we do not possess many, we may enjoy the few in the genuine persuasion that those have the sweetest pleasure in luxury who least need it, and that all that is natural is easy to be obtained, but that which is superfluous is hard."

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## Post by “Don” of October 28, 2021 at 4:20 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

How do you interpret the "this" in "And because this is the primary and inborn good, we do not choose every pleasure...?"

If we substitute "pleasure" there we get "And because pleasure is the primary and inborn good we do not choose every pleasure...."

Right. This = pleasure (overall).

The Epicurus Wiki does a good job of providing commentary on this section, as well as the Letter as a whole:

[http://wiki.epicurism.info/Menoceus\\_130-131/](http://wiki.epicurism.info/Menoceus_130-131/)

Epicurus defined pleasure (after a fashion) in the section directly previous to those I quoted before:

Quote

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2231-episode-ninety-three-torquatus-leads-us-forward-into-conflict-over-epicurean-eth/>

health of the body and the serenity of the soul — since that is the goal of a completely happy life. Our every action is done so that we will not be in pain or fear. As soon as we achieve this, the soul is released from every storm, since an animal has no other need and must seek nothing else to complete the goodness of body and soul. Thus we need pleasure only when we are in pain caused by its absence; but when we are not in pain then we have no need of pleasure.

To provide some inline commentary of my own in ( ) below:

*Because pleasure (writ large) is the primary and inborn good, we do not choose every (activity that provides the feeling of) pleasure. Instead, we pass up many pleasures when we will gain more of what we need (i.e., pleasure) from doing so. And we consider many pains to be better than pleasures, if we experience a greater pleasure for a long time from having endured those pains.*

*So every pleasure is a good thing because its nature is favorable to us, yet not every pleasure is to be chosen — just as every pain is a bad thing, yet not every pain is always to be shunned. It is proper to make all these decisions through measuring things side by side and looking at both the advantages and disadvantages, for sometimes we treat a good thing as bad and a bad thing as good.*

The underlined section again reinforces why pleasure is the standard. We use it to make decisions, measuring our options side by side, looking at advantages and disadvantages between them, in relation to whether they will bring pleasure now or in the future.

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## Post by “Don” of October 28, 2021 at 4:37 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Are we not left with the same question as to how to distinguish between which pleasures to choose

I don't think so.

Pleasure - encompassing the health of the body and "serenity" of the mind throughout one's life - is the standard by which to make choices of which desires to pursue or reject.

We choose those activities/things that bring pleasure now if they will not bring greater pain as a result, or we choose pains (my go-to example of exercise) \*for now\* only if they will bring

greater pleasure in the future.

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

So aren't we left with the clear conclusion that some pleasures are greater (and some are lesser) than others?

No. Some pleasures experienced in the moment will lead to more pain in the end (ex., drinking all night long when you have to be at work the following morning). That doesn't mean the pleasure of intoxication doesn't feel pleasurable in the moment. It's just maybe not a good choice. That doesn't mean the pleasure is greater or lesser. It means it's not choice-worthy judged by the standard.

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

And if so, the question to "what is the highest pleasure?" is not answered simply by saying "pleasure"? Is it?

Yes, it is. But you're asking the wrong question.

It makes no sense to ask "what is the highest pleasure?" because, by definition according to Epicurus, all pleasures are good. The "highest pleasure" is never used to them best of my knowledge. Pleasure is the highest good thing.

Pleasure is the highest good thing when compared to virtue, wisdom, justice, etc., because all good things are judged by the standard of whether they bring pleasure.

What pleasure to pursue is judged by whether it will bring more pleasure or lead to pain.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of October 28, 2021 at 6:49 AM**

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

. That doesn't mean the pleasure of intoxication doesn't feel pleasurable in the moment. It's just maybe not a good choice. That doesn't mean the pleasure is greater or lesser.

We're at an impasse for the moment due to the flat way you make this observation (that there is no greater or lesser pleasure), but I am confident that we will break through it over time.

My position at the moment remains that philosophically "all pleasure is good" and "all goods are good," but that from the "perspective of real life," "some things that are good are better than others" and therefore "some pleasures are more pleasing (greater) than others."

And when I refer to "from the perspective of real life" this is one of those areas where I think there is no satisfactory way for words to capture the full depth of "better" or "more pleasing" other than to broadly indicate that there are degrees. In an analogy to mathematics I would say that words can model real life just like math can model real life, but they are not equivalent and cannot capture the complete issue. I cannot measure or fully understand the difference in pleasure that, for example, Martin may get from vanilla ice cream than I do.

Therefore also I would say that "pleasure is the (highest) good" is a perfectly appropriate way to respond to "holiness is the (highest) good" or "rationality is the (highest) good."

But as another example, I would also so that "pleasure is the good" is not what Torquatus (and we can assume he as an Epicurean par excellence for this analogy) would say to his army as he was directing his son to be executed for disobeying orders.

Torquatus might later deliver a philosophy lesson in which he explained that what he was doing was for the sake of pleasure, yes, but he would not likely choose to describe his analysis in that way at the moment that he was requiring his orders be carried out. He would more likely remind his men and his son of the relative differences in the various pleasures and pains of life and rank them (with the safety of his country as a higher pleasure than the safety of his son) as explanation for what he was doing.

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## Post by "Don" of October 28, 2021 at 8:56 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

My position at the moment remains that philosophically "all pleasure is good" and "all goods are good," but that from the "perspective of real life," "some things that are good are better than others" and therefore "some pleasures are more pleasing (greater) than others."

I get the impression that this is a word game rabbit hole you're falling into.

I'll suggest step one is to begin using "good thing" when were talking about activities. There is no capital-G Platonic Good, and I think using words like "all goods" starts to imply there is Good. As Epicurus said, "I spit on the good/noble/kalos of it doesn't bring pleasure."

Let me look at each of your statements:

*philosophically "all pleasure is good"*

I would say, practically, "everything that elicits a pleasurable response is good."

Why? Because pleasure is a positive feeling.

*"all goods are good,"*

All good things are good things. That's just a tautology, so that's like saying "things that are positive are positive." Things are only good, according to Epicurus, inasmuch as they bring pleasure. That's why it's the standard.

*"some things that are good are better than others"*

Again, good things are only good inasmuch as they bring pleasure. You seem to be trying to make a value judgment among "good things" as well as "things that bring pleasure". That doesn't strike me as Epicurean. It's all contextual. For things that bring pleasure, do they bring more pain in the end or lead to the health of the body and the serenity of the mind, in other words, a pleasurable life. Among "good things" like wisdom, acting justly, etc, is not being "better". It's being the one good thing toward which all other candidates for good things point or lead. According to Epicurus, *\*that\** good thing that is at the "end of the rainbow" let's say, is a pleasure-filled life. All other goods are judged by whether they bring that about. Otherwise, they're spit upon.

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## **Post by "Don" of October 28, 2021 at 9:44 AM**

Oops, forgot the last statement:

*"some pleasures are more pleasing (greater) than others."*

No. All things which bring pleasure are good, a priori (I think I'm using that right).

It's not a matter of being "more pleasing" or "greater."

The criteria is whether the thing that brings pleasureable feelings does so with a minimum of pain attached. If it does, weigh that in your consideration of the choice to pursue it.

Getting into greater or lesser pleasurable activities seems to me to be going down the kinetic/katastematic rabbit hole. I think those distinctions are simply a way to look at different pleasurable things and are not value judgements. Better/worse, greater/lesser seems to be

trying to put value judgments on them. The pleasures of the profligate are not lesser, worse pleasures. They are simply not choice-worthy if one wants to lead a pleasure-filled life.

I'll leave Torquatus and his son for when we get to that section.

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## Post by “Cassius” of October 28, 2021 at 10:14 AM

### [Quote from Don](#)

You seem to be trying to make a value judgment among "good things" as well as "things that bring pleasure".

Not a value judgement, but a judgment that I prefer some pleasures to others.

### [Quote from Don](#)

some pleasures are more pleasing (greater) than others."

No. All things which bring pleasure are good, a priori (I think I'm using that right).

All I can say there is that for myself, some things are more pleasant than others. 😊 I think that's where we are going to have to agree to disagree until we can break this impasse.

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## Post by “Don” of October 28, 2021 at 10:28 AM

Let me ask this:

Why are they "more pleasurable" to you?

What does "more pleasurable" mean to you?

btw: I'm not arguing against feeling that some activities are subjectively more pleasurable than others. But that doesn't make them "better" or "greater" or "higher." So, I want to read what you mean when you use the words "more pleasurable."

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## Post by “Don” of October 28, 2021 at 2:16 PM

FYI: I'm not trying to be argumentive 😊 However, I honestly think your answer to those questions may move us along in the conversation.

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## Post by “Cassius” of October 28, 2021 at 3:56 PM

### [Quote from Don](#)

What does "more pleasurable" mean to you?

For example, I occasionally eat candy.

All candy to me, to the extent it is sweet, involves some degree of pleasure. However I can and do easily rank which candies I like most (find to be the most pleasant).

For example I have in front of me a bag of "Soft Caramel Candies" from "Lidl" (the grocery store). The bag says ("Caramel, Banana, Coffee, Vanilla, Mint, and Chocolate."

After I open the bag I can easily rank them in order of the pleasure they will give me, so I place them in line in this order (the most pleasant first): **Chocolate, Caramel, Vanilla, Banana, Mint, Coffee**

**And I eat them in order, with clearly diminishing pleasure, til I get to the last of the coffee.**

**So I have no problem considering the flavor, intensity, texture (some are softer than others), staying power (some dissolve faster than others) all of which let me easily categorize them as greater or lesser pleasures.**

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## Post by “Don” of October 28, 2021 at 4:55 PM

Okay, we're getting somewhere (and you're making me hungry for Peanut M&Ms... My go-to confection 😊 )

So, we've established:

*Eating "Soft Caramel Candies" gives Cassius pleasure.*

I would also say:

*Thinking about eating "Soft Caramel Candies" gives Cassius pleasure.*

And,

*Thinking about eating Chocolate "Soft Caramel Candies" gives Cassius more pleasure than thinking about eating Coffee "Soft Caramel Candies".*

Let's just take those two for now.

What does having "more pleasure" mean?

I know you can categorize them, put them in order, etc. You say

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

I have no problem considering the flavor, intensity, texture (some are softer than others), staying power (some dissolve faster than others) all of which let me easily categorize them as greater or lesser pleasures.

Those are all aspects of the experience of eating or anticipating eating the candy.

But what do you *mean* when you say or think: This gives me "more pleasure"?

This is a "greater" pleasure?

This is a "lesser" pleasure?

Is it the duration of the pleasure?

Is it a memory that wells up in relation to chocolate vs coffee?

I would suggest you're not actually describing a greater or lesser "pleasure" but something else.

The pleasurable feeling itself may be long and intense, it may be short and almost unnoticeable, it may need delayed, it may be immediate. You have a different emotional reaction to each of those experiences. You enjoy each one differently. Just like you can have different reactions to different mental or sensual (of the sense) activities which produce pleasure. The pleasure experienced is a good thing. The pleasure brings you joy. But the pleasurable feeling is the guide as to whether you'll pursue the choice to eat them.

On the other hand, if someone held you at gunpoint and made you eat 100 bags of Chocolate "Soft Caramel Candies", that would no longer be pleasurable. You may even grow to dislike the Chocolate "Soft Caramel Candies" because of painful memories. The pleasure of eating the candy is not inherent in the candy itself. The feeling is entirely contextual and subjective. So, there's no absolute greater or lesser value to the pleasure derived from the candy that is valid for every circumstance.

And yes I realize I'm using a hypothetical. 😊

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### **Post by "Cassius" of October 28, 2021 at 5:21 PM**

I definitely agree that there is no absolute way to rank them "objectively" - meaning between people.

But each individual can and does rank them moment by moment, and the particular experiences involved are readily evaluatable in terms of greater or lesser pleasure -- at least that is how I see it.

We agree there is no "absolute ranking" but we are apparently disagreeing on whether it is possible for any individual or group of individuals to perceive the experience of pleasure as greater or lesser, and to that I would say "surely so."

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### **Post by "Don" of October 28, 2021 at 5:51 PM**

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

it is possible for any individual or group of individuals to perceive the experience of pleasure as greater or lesser, and to that I would say "surely so."

Ah! But does even your own personal perception of the experience hold for every situation? Here I go with the hypotheticals again 😊

If someone were to wake you in the middle of

the night and ask if you wanted a chocolate candy, would it be as pleasurable as if you were at leisure in the backyard with an open bag?

If you were sick with a stomach ache, would the thought of eating the chocolate candy be as pleasurable?

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### **Post by “Cassius” of October 28, 2021 at 5:53 PM**

No each of those situations would have their unique aspects, but I would have no trouble ranking the respective pleasures and choosing between them as greater or lesser pleasures.

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### **Post by “Don” of October 28, 2021 at 8:16 PM**

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

No each of those situations would have their unique aspects, but I would have no trouble ranking the respective pleasures and choosing between them as greater or lesser pleasures.

Oh, I'm not asking you to rank them. Just the chocolate one. Would you have the same thought of pleasure imagining eating - or take the same pleasure in eating - as you would at sitting at leisure in the yard?

What if, at leisure, and there was no chocolate available, only caramel (one step down on your "ranking")? Would the pleasure you derive match or be qualitatively less than if you had chocolate?

I've gone as far as I care to at this point so I'll stop this, because my aversion to hypotheticals is beginning to pain me, too.

My contention is that there is no absolute standard by which to measure your "greater" and "lesser" so it's all contextual to the individual experience whether for the individual or across individuals.

The only standard is living a pleasurable life writ large as to whether to pursue or reject a given pleasurable activity. Talk of "greater" or "lesser pleasures" is counterproductive in my opinion. The only decision that matters is the one in front of you at any given time.

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## **Post by “Don” of October 28, 2021 at 8:57 PM**

LOL. We really need someone else to weigh in on this dialogue. I think we've got a log jam!

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## **Post by “Godfrey” of October 28, 2021 at 10:38 PM**

If Epicurus were to weigh in, he might say:

Quote

PD3 The limit of enjoyment is the removal of all pains. Wherever and for however long pleasure is present, there is neither bodily pain nor mental distress.

PD9 If every pleasure were condensed and were present at the same time and in the whole of one's nature or its primary parts, then the pleasures would never differ from one another.

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## **Post by “Cassius” of October 29, 2021 at 5:06 AM**

You've probably hit the nail on the head Godfrey by citing those two - especially nine - two of the more "opaque" of the first ten because - I would say - they rely on unstated premises about the subject in order to unravel how they are intended to apply.

Again referring to nine there is clearly a "common denominator" among pleasures, and yet I do not think it is maintainable that all pleasures are the same in every respect - only in some respects.

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## **Post by “Don” of October 29, 2021 at 6:29 AM**

I thought it might be helpful to use Nathan's compilation of PD9 (below). There is surprising consistency among translations on this one.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2231-episode-ninety-three-torquatus-leads-us-forward-into-conflict-over-epicurean-eth/>

I wanted to specifically address Cassius's:

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

there is clearly a "common denominator" among pleasures, and yet I do not think it is maintainable that all pleasures are the same in every respect - only in some respects.

My position is that the common denominator is simply that all things that result in pleasure is simply the fact that they bring pleasure. Sometimes for a short time, sometimes long, sometimes intense, sometimes subtle. But it's \*always\* pleasure.

My contention is that Epicurus, uses the "if" here at the beginning of PD9 like he uses it in [PD10](#) : If X was the case, then Y. But he implies that (I would argue from the Greek tenses/moods/grammar), from observation, we know Y is not the case (Y=pleasures don't differ; the life of the profligate dispels fears). So, things that bring pleasure are the same in that they bring pleasure, but there are many things that bring pleasure, and the job of the human is to make choices among those myriad pleasures that will lead to a pleasureable life... Which makes PD9 a perfect segue to [PD10](#) come to think of it! Just realized that as I was writing. 🤔

PS: So, those who attack Epicurus's philosophy for making pleasure the "highest good" are lumping all pleasures together. Epicurus is making the point that all pleasure is good (If you could lump all the pleasures together...) BUT, by the observable fact that pleasures differ, we have to decide which pleasures to choose and which pleasures to reject if we are to lead the most pleasureable life possible for us.

PD9

"If every pleasure were condensed, if one may so say, and if each lasted long, and affected the whole body, or the essential parts of it, then there would be no difference between one pleasure and another." Yonge (1853)

"If all pleasure had been capable of accumulation, if this had gone on not only in time, but all over the frame or, at any rate, the principal parts of man's nature, there would not have been any difference between one pleasure and another as, in fact, there now is." Hicks (1910)

"If all pleasure had been capable of accumulation,—if this had gone on not only by recurrence in time, but all over the frame or, at any rate, over the principal parts of man's nature, there would never have been any difference between one pleasure and another, as in fact there is." Hicks (1925)

"If every pleasure could be intensified so that it lasted and influenced the whole organism or the most essential parts of our nature, pleasures would never differ from one another." Bailey (1926)

"If every pleasure were alike condensed in duration and associated with the whole organism or the dominant parts of it, pleasures would never differ from one another." (De Witt, Epicurus and His Philosophy 235; 1954)

"If every pleasure were cumulative, and if this were the case both in time and in regard to the whole or the most important parts of our nature, then pleasures would not differ from each other." Geer (1964)

"If every pleasure were condensed in <location> and duration and distributed all over the structure or the dominant parts of our nature, pleasures would never differ from one another." (Long, The Hellenistic Philosophers 115; 1987)

"If every pleasure were condensed and existed for a long time throughout the entire organism or its most important parts, pleasures would never differ from one another." O'Connor (1993)

"If every pleasure were condensed and were present, both in time and in the whole compound [body and soul] or in the most important parts of our nature, then pleasures would never differ from one another." Inwood & Gerson (1994)

"If every pleasure could be prolonged to endure in both body or mind, pleasures would never differ from one another." Anderson (2004)

"If all pleasures could be added together consecutively with respect to space and duration, and across the entire span over which they had all existed, or at least across the principal parts of human nature <which are naturally susceptible to pleasures:> then, pleasures would not be different from each other in any respect." Makridis (2005)

"If every pleasure were condensed and were present at the same time and in the whole of one's nature or its primary parts, then the pleasures would never differ from one another." Saint-Andre (2008)

"If all pleasures could be compressed in time and intensity, and were characteristic of the whole man or his more important aspects, the various pleasures would not differ from each other." Strodach (2012)

"If all pleasure were condensed in space and time, and pervaded the whole aggregate, or the most important parts of our nature, pleasures would never differ, one from another." Mensch (2018)

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**Post by "Cassius" of October 29, 2021 at 7:47 AM**

### [Quote from Don](#)

My position is that the common denominator is simply that all things that result in pleasure is simply the fact that they bring pleasure. Sometimes for a short time, sometimes long, sometimes intense, sometimes subtle. But it's \*always\* pleasure

I have absolutely no problem with that statement so I wonder what you think is the best way to state what it appears to you we are disagreeing about(?)

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## Post by “Don” of October 29, 2021 at 9:15 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

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

My position is that the common denominator is simply that all things that result in pleasure is simply the fact that they bring pleasure. Sometimes for a short time, sometimes long, sometimes intense, sometimes subtle. But it's \*always\* pleasure

I have absolutely no problem with that statement so I wonder what you think is the best way to state what it appears to you we are disagreeing about(?)

Good question 😊

My interpretation of what you're saying (and PLEASE correct me if I'm misinterpreting!) is that your position is that some pleasures are "better"/"greater" than others: e g., Eating chocolate candies is "better" than eating coffee candies (for you). Pleasures can be "ranked."

My position is that ranking pleasures into a hierarchy is a pointless exercise. All things which give pleasure give pleasure, period, by definition. BUT, and this is Epicurus's innovation, they also differ from each other, including importantly the context within which the pleasure is experienced. Pleasure is a common characteristic of pleasurable experiences. We are attracted by pleasure. Pleasure is a good thing. But those who denigrate pleasure try to reduce it to a monolithic hornets nest of vice and something to be shunned and mistrusted. Epicurus says, "No, pleasure is pleasurable. Duh! Why would we reject it?" BUT just because all pleasure is pleasurable, doesn't mean you have to experience EVERY pleasurable thing.

The ONLY thing that matters is the pleasure-giving experience in front of you at any given moment - or that is planned for in the future - and the choice of whether or not to pursue or reject THAT pleasure using the criteria of whether or not THAT pleasure leads to a more pleasurable life experience or not. It's contextual. This pleasure may be indulged in now here, but at another time and place it should be rejected or delayed.

PS: In just reading the De Finibus sections you've laid out for Ep. 94, I think "Torquatus" is laying out this same argument.

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## Post by "Cassius" of October 29, 2021 at 10:53 AM

### [Quote from Don](#)

s that your position is that some pleasures are "better"/"greater" than others: e g., Eating chocolate candies is "better" than eating coffee candies (for you). Pleasures can be "ranked."

I think our key here is that I am distinguishing "better" from "greater." I use "better" when I mean to refer to some kind of intrinsic "nobler" or "worthier," and I am not meaning to refer to that in terms of pleasure, so I don't call one pleasure "better" than another unless I am trying to be very clear that "better" is subjective and really means something else (more intense, longer lasting, or some other feeling.)

When referring to "greater" I think that is more clear. A "greater pleasure" is to me something that has those same attributes (more intense, longer lasting, or some other feeling).

I think in regard to that distinction we are really talking subtle preferences in words.

### [Quote from Don](#)

My position is that ranking pleasures into a hierarchy is a pointless exercise. All things which give pleasure give pleasure, period, by definition.

I am pretty sure we do disagree here. Eating chocolate candy is a pleasure. Pursuing philosophy or some other hobby is a pleasure. I clearly and emphatically in my own life would rank the pleasure of pursuing philosophy or the hobby in a hierarchy such that I devote much more time and attention to it than to eating candy.

Maybe we again have a subtle word issue but I have no problem describing that process as "ranking pleasures in a hierarchy" and I would think that Epicurus is implicitly urging everyone to perform that same calculation process for themselves, just as he did in pursuing his philosophic campaign rather than lounging in the garden all day eating figs.

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## Post by "Don" of October 29, 2021 at 2:19 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I think in regard to that distinction we are really talking subtle preferences in words.

Subtle but important. I think we're getting somewhere now though! 😊

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I use "better" when I mean to refer to some kind of intrinsic "nobler" or "worthier," and I am not meaning to refer to that in terms of pleasure, so I don't call one pleasure "better" than another unless I am trying to be very clear that "better" is subjective and really means something else (more intense, longer lasting, or some other feeling.)

Cool. Okay, I think I'm good with that. So, "better" is just a subjective feeling and not a value judgement. "I like to eat chocolate *better* than coffee candy" is a fine sentence to use in everyday life. Or even "Chocolate candy is *better* than coffee candy" is fine as well as a subjective emotional personal reaction to an experience. And you're using "greater" as a synonym for "better" in this narrow, subjective sense? If that's your take, we're sympatico here.

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I clearly and emphatically in my own life would rank the pleasure of pursuing philosophy or the hobby in a hierarchy such that I devote much more time and attention to it than to eating candy.

Ah! Here we go! The ranking is where our two roads are diverging. Why do you insist a "ranking" is necessary? (Are you?)

You mention that the pleasure of pursuing philosophy is "higher" in your hierarchy of pleasurable activities than eating candy? As if it was predetermined or (gasp) ordained that this is so. 😊

I would say you've simply determined, through reasoned, prudent application of seeing the goal as the pursuit of a pleasurable life, that the pleasure of studying philosophy will lead more assuredly and more efficaciously to a pleasurable life than the mere eating of candy will. You still enjoy eating candy, right? It's still pleasurable? You are just going to devote more time to something (i.e., philosophy) that will be of more help in leading you toward the goal of having a pleasurable life than you will indulging in some candy now and then.

My point is that it doesn't matter where a specific pleasurable activity falls in some conceptual hierarchy that you might sit down and construct. I realize you haven't (I'm assuming) sat down and categorized ALL the possible pleasures in your life into a concrete, written hierarchy that you consult in making a decision. You determine, at any given minute, this is a choice I can make that will lead to a pleasurable life. The hard thing is to do this deliberately, prudently, and consciously and not be buffeted by the winds of fate and chance, pushed along mindlessly. That's where I get that Epicureanism is a philosophy of personal responsibility for one's actions and decisions.

Now, if saying the pursuit of philosophy is a "greater" pleasure than eating candy is your shorthand for that wordy paragraph, we're on the same page. 😎



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### Post by “Cassius” of October 29, 2021 at 3:08 PM

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

Now, if saying the pursuit of philosophy is a "greater" pleasure than eating candy is your shorthand for that wordy paragraph, we're on the same page.

That is EXACTLY what I am saying! 😊

All of this in my mind is purely a relative subjective decision made by the individual under the circumstances then and there existing, with the individual reserving the right at any moment to revise and extend or completely reverse his/her viewpoint on which pleasure will please him/her more extensively. And then the appropriate decision for that person is to pursue that decision with all the energy they can muster:-)

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### Post by “Kalosyni” of October 29, 2021 at 3:28 PM

Just throwing this into the mix for your consideration.

Excerpt from Wikipedia:

"The **felicific calculus** is an [algorithm](#) formulated by [utilitarian](#) philosopher [Jeremy Bentham](#) (1747–1832) for calculating the degree or amount of [pleasure](#) that a specific action is likely to induce. Bentham, an [ethical hedonist](#), believed the moral rightness or wrongness of an action to be a function of the amount of pleasure or pain that it produced. The felicific calculus could, in principle at least, determine the moral status of any considered act. The algorithm is also known as the **utility calculus**, the **hedonistic calculus** and the **hedonic calculus**.

To be included in this calculation are several [variables](#) (or [vectors](#)), which Bentham called "circumstances". These are:

1. Intensity: How strong is the pleasure?
2. [Duration](#): How long will the pleasure last?
3. [Certainty](#) or [uncertainty](#): How likely or unlikely is it that the pleasure will occur?
4. [Propinquity](#) or remoteness: How soon will the pleasure occur?
5. [Fecundity](#): The probability that the action will be followed by sensations of the same kind.
6. [Purity](#): The probability that it will not be followed by sensations of the opposite kind.
7. [Extent](#): How many people will be affected?

[Felicific calculus - Wikipedia](#)

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of October 29, 2021 at 3:33 PM**

Instead of "moral rightness or wrongness" would replace that with "joy and enjoyment vs. "pain".

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of October 29, 2021 at 3:35 PM**

So considering things for their long term pleasure...

A habit of eating candy has a high likelihood of resulting in tooth decay and a trip to the dentist (not fun!).

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## Post by “Don” of October 29, 2021 at 3:58 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

That is EXACTLY what I am saying!

Alright! Look at that. And it only took several days and a number of posts 😄

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

And then the appropriate decision for that person is to pursue that decision with all the energy they can muster:-)

Well, that part sounds like a lot of work. 😊 Is that the pain to endure for a "greater" pleasure?

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## Post by “Don” of October 29, 2021 at 4:04 PM

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

The felicific calculus is an algorithm formulated by utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1747–1832) for calculating the degree or amount of pleasure that a specific action is likely to induce.

Bentham was definitely influenced by Epicurus's philosophy, but Bentham was not an Epicurean. I think we are talking about making a sort of "calculus" in the broad sense, but as I remember the Utilitarian felicific calculus is much more analytical and literally a calculation of adding up hedons (units of pleasure) and the pain units (word escapes me). The circumstances aren't a bad list of characteristics to consider, but I'm skeptical they can really be quantified like the Utilitarians want to.

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## Post by “Don” of October 29, 2021 at 4:06 PM

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Instead of "moral rightness or wrongness" would replace that with "joy and enjoyment vs. "pain".

I could concur with that, I think. Epicurus dealt in justice as a contract, so that morality of the Utilitarians seems problematic to me.

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### **Post by “Don” of October 29, 2021 at 4:08 PM**

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

So considering things for their long term pleasure...

A habit of eating candy has a high likelihood of resulting in tooth decay and a trip to the dentist (not fun!).

Exactly! There's nothing "morally" wrong with getting pleasure from eating candy from time to time. You can make that "calculation" and choose that pleasure. That adds variety to your pleasure if the candy was easily gotten. If you eat candy at every meal and between, that may be pleasurable in the moment, but over time it's going to provide more pain to your life than pleasure.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of October 29, 2021 at 6:39 PM**

Does anybody know if Epicurus ever referred to a hedonic calculus, or did Bentham come up with that? Or was it in Lucretius? I think I recall the phrase turning up in one of Epicurus' letters, but I don't know where and could be mistaken. It might be an interesting item to clarify. I'm asking just for curiosity and not to make any point.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of October 29, 2021 at 6:53 PM**

As far as greater, better, more luscious, tastier &c pleasures.... I keep thinking that the only mechanism that Epicurus (not Cicero, the Cow) explicitly provided for ranking, prioritizing or choosing/avoiding was *desires*. He seems to me to keep saying that "pleasure is pleasure", a *pathe*. Why else would he repeatedly make the point that if all other things are equal (condensing/accumulation, duration, location in the body and so on) then pleasures would never differ from one another?

Maybe the Cow makes this point further on, but look at how much confusion he's wrought in just this brief passage! Very effective rhetoric!

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### Post by "Godfrey" of October 29, 2021 at 7:01 PM

GOALS:

Quote

[PD22](#) You must reflect on the fundamental goal and everything that is clear, to which opinions are referred; if you do not, all will be full of trouble and confusion.

[PD25](#) If at all critical times you do not connect each of your actions to the natural goal of life, but instead turn too soon to some other kind of goal in thinking whether to avoid or pursue something, then your thoughts and your actions will not be in harmony.

[PD15](#) Natural wealth is both limited and easy to acquire, but the riches incited by groundless opinion have no end.

[PD16](#) Chance steals only a bit into the life of a wise person: for throughout the complete span of his life the greatest and most important matters have been, are, and will be directed by the power of reason.

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### Post by "Godfrey" of October 29, 2021 at 7:03 PM

DESIRES

Quote

[PD29](#) Among desires, some are natural and necessary, some are natural and unnecessary, and some are unnatural and unnecessary (arising instead from groundless opinion).

[PD26](#) The desires that do not bring pain when they go unfulfilled are not necessary; indeed they are easy to reject if they are hard to achieve or if they seem to produce harm.

[PD30](#) Among natural desires, those that do not bring pain when unfulfilled and that require intense exertion arise from groundless opinion; and such desires fail to be stamped out not by nature but because of the groundless opinions of humankind.

(LM127ff) One should keep in mind that among desires, some are natural and some are vain. Of those that are natural, some are necessary and some unnecessary. Of those that are necessary, some are necessary for happiness, some for health, and some for life itself. A correct view of these matters enables one to base every choice and avoidance upon whether it secures or upsets bodily comfort and peace of mind – the goal of a happy life.

(LMxxx) Third, keep in mind that some desires are natural whereas others are groundless [note]; that among the natural desires some are natural and necessary whereas others are merely natural; and that among the necessary desires some are necessary for happiness, some for physical health [note], and some for life itself. The steady contemplation of these facts enables you to understand everything that you accept or reject in terms of the health of the body and the serenity of the soul — since that is the goal of a completely happy life. Our every action is done so that we will not be in pain or fear. As soon as we achieve this, the soul is released from every storm, since an animal has no other need and must seek nothing else to complete the goodness of body and soul. Thus we need pleasure only when we are in pain caused by its absence; but when we are not in pain then we have no need of pleasure.

(LMxxx) Fourth, we hold that self-reliance is a great good — not so that we will always have only a few things but so that if we do not have much we will rejoice in the few things we have, firmly persuaded that those who need luxury the least enjoy it the most, and that everything natural is easily obtained whereas everything groundless is hard to get. So simple flavors bring just as much pleasure as a fancy diet if all pain from true need has been removed, and bread and water give the highest pleasure when someone in need partakes of them. Training yourself to live simply and without luxury brings you complete health, gives you endless energy to face the necessities of life, better prepares you for the occasional luxury, and makes you fearless no matter your fortune in life.

Display More

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## Post by “Cassius” of October 29, 2021 at 7:07 PM

### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

He seems to me to keep saying that "pleasure is pleasure", a pathē.

My mind is still open on the issue of the meaning of desire in this context, but I think all of these questions turn on subtle issues of definitions, and in the end all feelings of pleasure have the common denominator of feeling pleasurable, but I do not believe that the feeling is identical except in that strict definitional (conceptual) sense. And that's where I think we have one of these intersections of the limits of conceptual reasoning from totally capturing every aspect of reality.

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## Post by “Cassius” of October 29, 2021 at 7:22 PM

### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

I keep thinking that the only mechanism that Epicurus (not Cicero, the Cow) explicitly provided for ranking, prioritizing or choosing/avoiding was desires. He seems to me to keep saying that "pleasure is pleasure", a pathē. Why else would he repeatedly make the point that if all other things are equal (condensing/accumulation, duration, location in the body and so on) then pleasures would never differ from one another?

There's no doubt in my mind but that this is a very challenging passage.

In my mind, the first part of what you are referring to there "pleasure is pleasure" arises from the conjunction of the feeling and the definition - we have many different types of feelings which are knowable to us directly and without rationalization, but our decision to give them a single name ("pleasure") is a conceptual decision.

As for the hypothetical that if the pleasures could be condensed to fill the whole person then they would never differ from one another I better yield to Don since he is master of the hypotheticals! 😊

However if I were to go ahead rather than wait for Don on [PD09](#) ([PD09](#)). If every pleasure could be intensified so that it lasted, and influenced the whole organism or the most essential parts of our nature, pleasures would never differ from one another.) --- I would say that the point most likely is again some conceptual point of contention (probably with Plato) because I believe that Epicurus would say that the individual experiences of pleasure cannot be so intensified, so that observation of the reverse proves something (perhaps indeed the connection of the experience of pleasure with the particular part of the mind or body. I base that in large part on the presumption that it would be a core premise of epicurus that pleasure does not exist "in the air" but is an emergent property of particular living beings.

As to [PD09](#) I seem to remember DeWitt asserted something about that so his suggestion is probably worth going back and looking up.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of October 29, 2021 at 7:24 PM**

The pleasures are *not* identical, and that’s where so much confusion can be sown by devious minds 😊 I'm thinking that that is a big reason why Epicurus kept pointing out that pleasure is pleasure, a faculty. Rather than argue with Platonists and Academics about what type of pleasure is good, or better or greatest, he made the distinction between *pleasure* and *desire*. This was one of his great innovations! "Everyone knows what pleasure is and pursues it, even babies and Cows. If you want to talk to me about what's greater or good-er, talk to me about desires."

Cassius, I'm suggesting that this is where the opponents won the war, in focusing on ranking pleasures instead of desires. As you know, this separation has been tickling me for a while... I'm not sure if I'm reading it correctly but it seems promising. Plus like so many of Epicurus' ideas, it seems to relate favorably to modern science. Just an added bonus 😊

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### **Post by “Cassius” of October 29, 2021 at 7:28 PM**

Despite the different directions that some of these posts may have indicated, I think we can probably all agree that there is a distinct difference between the alternative guides of life offered by Epicurus vs the other Greeks.

The other Greeks were pointing to gods, or to "virtue," as absolutes which existed outside of the living human, either in heaven or in a realm of ideal forms or some other "external" place.

I think we would all agree that the "pleasure" to which Epicurus was pointing is not something that exists "in the air" in nature and does not exist apart from actual living beings, which to repeat what I wrote above, I think establishes that pleasure is an emergent property of those atoms and void which are so arranged and situated as to constitute living beings. So "pleasure" has no and can have no absolute existence in itself, it's going to be something ("a feeling" or "experience" or "affect" or whatever) that a living being experiences in the moment as part of its own existence, not something the living being pulls from somewhere else.

Anyone disagree or wish to tune that better?

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## Post by "Cassius" of October 29, 2021 at 7:38 PM

### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

The pleasures are not identical, and that's where so much confusion can be sown by devious minds 😏

Yes, I agree Godfrey, but I would say that this is one of those areas where once we identify an absurdity (the assertion that all pleasures are identical in every respect) we immediately reject it as having possibly been Epicurus' position and we immediately go elsewhere looking for a proper understanding of his assertions. And I do think that we can find a logical explanation for what Epicurus seems to be saying if we compare what he is saying to Plato in [Philebus](#) on a conceptual level.

However I am not yet with you on the relationship of pleasure and desire.

*Cassius, I'm suggesting that this is where the opponents won the war, in focusing on ranking pleasures instead of desires."*

I do think that pleasures have to be ranked so that we can intelligently choose between them. I guess I would say much the same thing about "desires." Ranking "pleasures" seems to make more sense to me because that is the method by which I would rank my "desires" if I even thought in terms of ranking desires. My desires flow directly from my evaluation of the possible pleasures and pain, so I am not sure I see the path forward you are suggesting.

## Post by "Godfrey" of October 29, 2021 at 7:45 PM

Referring to post #61, that's why I think it's interesting to compare [PD03](#) and [PD09](#).

*PD3 The limit of enjoyment is the removal of all pains. Wherever and for however long pleasure is present, there is neither bodily pain nor mental distress.*

I think we agree that the first sentence is a refutation of the argument that pleasures have no limits. To me, the second sentence is adding specificity: if you have pleasure in your belly there is no pain in your belly. Same for your foot, and perhaps for your mind. So if *all* pains, throughout your body and mind, are removed, you've reached the limit of pleasure.

*PD9 If every pleasure were condensed and were present at the same time and in the whole of one's nature or its primary parts, then the pleasures would never differ from one another.*

I'm reading this as building on the second sentence of [PD03](#). These acknowledge that you can have pleasure in your stomach, or your foot or your mind or wherever. If the pleasure in your foot filled your whole body and mind for one minute, it would be no different than if the pleasure in your belly filled your body and mind for one minute. So, pleasure is pleasure, which is part of a faculty of pathē.

I actually prefer the Hicks 1925 translation of [PD09](#) as it uses "accumulate" rather than "condense". I'm not sure which is more accurate, but I find accumulate to be more illustrative.

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## Post by "Cassius" of October 29, 2021 at 7:46 PM

I definitely think that one of the undercurrents of our discussion here is this:

My comments are based on a presumption that Epicurus is going back and forth, as the occasion demands, using the word "pleasure" in both a high-level conceptual sense at times, but also at other times strictly as a feelings, with times when his usage almost is intersecting. So I think we have to be flexible in our application of the definition to the context.

I get the impression that some of the comments in this thread are arising from seeing "pleasure" strictly and always as a "feeling" without any conceptual overlay or usage at any time. So we may have disagreement on that point,

But the "multiple definitions according to context" approach (which is very similar to the way DeWitt explains "[all sensations are true](#)") may be the issue that we need to address more directly.

I would say that "[all sensations are true](#)" cannot be understood unless we step back and realize that "true" can mean both "absolutely true" but at other times mean "reported honestly."

Using the same approach, I would say that "pleasure" can (1) sometimes mean "a positive feeling" but (2) at other times mean "a concept in which the goal of life is defined as positive feelings, in distinction from other goals such as piety or rationality or virtue,"

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## Post by "Cassius" of October 29, 2021 at 7:57 PM

### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

PD3 The limit of enjoyment is the removal of all pains. Wherever and for however long pleasure is present, there is neither bodily pain nor mental distress.

I think we are cross-posting so the flow of our comments may not quite work -- so sorry for that confusion!

The point I want to make by quoting PD3 is to reply to your comment about the second sentence, where you say "*To me, the second sentence is adding specificity: if you have pleasure in your belly there is no pain in your belly. Same for your foot, and perhaps for your mind. So if all pains, throughout your body and mind, are removed, you've reached the limit of pleasure.*"

I think you are right as to the "add specificity" conclusion, which I interpret to mean as "the second sentence bolsters the conclusion of the first sentence by looking at the question from another angle."

But the reason I write this is to ask this: Whenever we say that "the feelings are two, pleasure and pain" and that they don't coexist at the same time, is that not significantly a conceptual assertion? What if someone asserted that Epicurus could have chosen to define the feelings as four (mental pleasure, mental pain, bodily pleasure, bodily pain)? And that a mental pleasure of appreciating an artwork can coexist in time (but not in "place") with a pain in my toe that I felt while I was looking at the artwork?

Would you say that such a person who used four categories was "wrong?"

Does Nature herself create a concept called "pleasure" by which we should understand ALL pleasures to be included? What would you say is the intersection between human nature and the words we use to describe it?

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## Post by “Godfrey” of October 29, 2021 at 8:00 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I do think that pleasures have to be ranked so that we can intelligently choose between them. I guess I would say much the same thing about "desires." Ranking "pleasures" seems to make more sense to me because that is the method by which I would rank my "desires" if I even thought in terms of ranking desires. My desires flow directly from my evaluation of the possible pleasures and pain, so I am not sure I see the path forward you are suggesting.

Keeping in mind that much of what we have of Epicurus comes from sources that are to some undetermined degree hostile, I'm doing the exercise of looking more closely at the texts that are generally agreed to be by Epicurus himself. And also keeping in mind that he stated that we need to be clear on what we mean by particular words. (I think I'm channeling Scalia, god forbid!)

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## Post by “Cassius” of October 29, 2021 at 8:03 PM

### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

(I think I'm channeling Scalia, god forbid!)

(Godfrey thereby establishes himself as an "Originalist" or "Original Intent" Epicurean!)

All politics aside, that's pretty much what I mean with the "classical Epicurean" description in the "Not-NeoEpicurean" statement and the podcast introduction.

It's highly useful, and just intellectually honest, to try to first figure out what they believed originally before we consider our own freelancing additions, and always good to clearly mark those as freelancing 😊

One interesting thing there is that Jefferson due to his Epicurean viewpoints probably was not himself an "original intent" kind of guy, except in the way that I think Epicurus would himself be today -- he'd separate the things that don't change (no supernatural gods, no life after death, no absolute virtue, key role of pleasure) but always insist that the way to implement them is contextual and therefore relative to time and place and many other circumstances.

So I guess even in Epicurean terms we freelance according to our circumstances based on the original intent understanding of the key and unchanging observations. (The wording of that could be improved!)

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### Post by “Godfrey” of October 29, 2021 at 8:25 PM

Now I'm cross-posting... usually I'm 2 or 3 hours behind in the discussion 😊

Quote from Cassius

Does Nature herself create a concept called "pleasure" by which we should understand ALL pleasures to be included? What would you say is the intersection between human nature and the words we use to describe it?

Nature does *not* create a concept called "pleasure". The end of the cascade for this question, though, leads to Scepticism. All philosophies are mental models. Epicurus proposed a mental model to describe how he perceived and understood the world, and I find that model to be the best that I've come across. His model relies on faculties of sensation, feeling and anticipations and has been built upon to form the basis of modern science. The combination of Epicurus' model and modern science, to me, is the best description that we have of the universe in which we live and how to live in this universe. The persistent lack of evidence of a providential universe indicates, to me, that "Nature" has no mental models. With this in mind, pleasure is an observed, emergent phenomenon of organic life.

It's my understanding that for clarity of discussion Epicurus was very explicit, in Greek, of the meaning of "pleasure". Over the millennia and through various languages and various intentions, that word "pleasure" has taken on a life of its own. Kind of like the word "Epicurean"



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### Post by “Godfrey” of October 29, 2021 at 8:32 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

My comments are based on a presumption that Epicurus is going back and forth, as the occasion demands, using the word "pleasure" in both a high-level conceptual sense at

times, but also at other times strictly as a feelings, with times when his usage almost is intersecting.

I'm not sure about Epicurus, but his opponents definitely were and eventually his followers had to. Hence our quandary.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of October 29, 2021 at 8:55 PM**

#### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

It's my understanding that for clarity of discussion Epicurus was very explicit, in Greek, of the meaning of "pleasure".

For the sake of readers who come by later in this thread (and because I am not entirely sure myself to what you refer) could you state what you refer to there of his being explicit in greek as to the meaning of "pleasure."

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### **Post by "Godfrey" of October 29, 2021 at 9:21 PM**

Epicurus, Letter to Herodotus:

#### Quote

37... First, Herodotus, we need to have grasped what is denoted by our words, [1] so that by referring to what they denote we can make decisions about the objects of opinion, investigation, or puzzlement and [2] so that all of these things will not remain undecided, [as they would] if we tried to give an infinitely long demonstration, and [3] so that our words will not be empty. 38. For it is necessary that we look to the primary conception corresponding to each word and that it stand in no need of demonstration, if, that is, we are going to have something to which we can refer the object of search or puzzlement and opinion.

This doesn't refer specifically to "pleasure" but to his use of words. "Pleasure" being such a central idea, however, could be understood to be covered by this passage.

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## Post by “Don” of October 29, 2021 at 9:35 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I do think that pleasures have to be ranked so that we can intelligently choose between them.

No, no, no. I thought we had agreed on this one. We choose by applying whether a specific pleasurable activity leads to a more pleasurable life. We don't need to consult a list or ranking or hierarchy. We should not "rank" pleasurable activities in the abstract. There is no absolute hierarchy for all time of pleasures even for the individual.

All we can say is right here, right now, this activity option before me would lead to a more pleasurable life, therefore, at this time, I will choose to engage in this. This activity which I desire to engage in in the future may be pleasurable in that future moment, but will in the end bring more pain into my life. Therefore, I reject it. I reject that anyone can sit down, go through a list of let's say 100 pleasures and rank them and adhere to that list for all time at every moment throughout their life. What is choice-worthy is contextual, dependent on circumstances, and what is choice-worthy now may not be when circumstances are similar in the future.

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## Post by “Don” of October 29, 2021 at 10:06 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I would say that this is one of those areas where once we identify an absurdity (the assertion that all pleasures are identical in every respect) we immediately reject it as having possibly been Epicurus' position and we immediately go elsewhere looking for a proper understanding of his assertions.

That was my point in an earlier post. Epicurus is saying in [PD09](#) "If X were the case, then Y" but he's asserting a counterfactual. [PD09](#) has to do with the impossibility of equating all the possible pleasureable activities in which humans can engage. They're all distinct, but similar in that they bring pleasure. They can't be condensed etc however. There are many pleasures which we can desire and these desires must be chosen or rejected based on measuring them against the criteria of whether those desires fulfilled will lead to a more pleasurable life or not. Not measured against a hierarchy somewhere.

I've also come to think that [PD09](#) is directly related to [PD10](#). That's another counterfactual "If X were the case, then Y." [PD09](#) establishes there are myriad pleasures. [PD10](#) established those pleasures enjoyed by the profligate ARE pleasurable but not necessarily choice-worthy because they don't dispel fears of death, etc., and do not lead to a more pleasurable life.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of October 29, 2021 at 11:33 PM**

[PD03](#), [PD09](#) and [PD10](#) are all interesting in that they are providing counterfactual arguments (I think "absurdities" is too strong of a word) while at the same time adding clarity and details to those looking for it.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of October 30, 2021 at 4:40 AM**

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

No, no, no. I thought we had agreed on this one. We choose by applying whether a specific pleasurable activity leads to a more pleasurable life. We don't need to consult a list or ranking or hierarchy. We should not "rank" pleasurable activities in the abstract. There is no absolute hierarchy for all time of pleasures even for the individual.

All we can say is right here, right now, this activity option before me would lead to a more pleasurable life, therefore, at this time, I will choose to engage in this. This activity which I desire to engage in in the future may be pleasurable in that future moment, but will in the end bring more pain into my life. Therefore, I reject it. I reject that anyone can sit down, go through a list of let's say 100 pleasures and rank them and adhere to that list for all time at every moment throughout their life. What is choice-worthy is contextual, dependent on circumstances, and what is choice-worthy now may not be when circumstances are similar in the future.

It is very interesting to me how when we spoke on the podcast we seemed to more easily agree that we were on the same page, but in putting the positions down in writing we seem to find agreement harder.

To me, you could have started out that passage as Yes Yes Yes rather than no no no because I see us in total agreement, especially when we identify that you are saying two different things

here: "I reject (1) that anyone can sit down, go through a list of let's say 100 pleasures and rank them **and (2) adhere to that list for all time at every moment throughout their life.**

As to point 2 you are certainly correct correct - the ranking will change from day to day, hour to hour, decision to decision. But as to point 1 you certainly \*can\* rank the possible pleasures as you predict them as of any given moment, because that is how you make every decision, looking forward in time to what will happen to you if you make one choice or another.

Don you seem to be requiring that a "ranking" be made against an absolute outside standard. I too reject that, but i consider that my personal ordering of preferences as to which pleasures are greater "to me" to be a proper use of the word "ranking." There is no outside absolute all-time list that can tell us how much pleasure an activity will generate across the board and all the time -- that is why "Utilitarianism" as referenced in a nearby thread must fail. Epicurus was not a Utilitarian and i think would reject that for exactly the reason you are arguing.

Maybe you would prefer to use another word than "ranking" because you think all rankings require an outside standard, but that would again be a definitional choice on which to be clear and it's not my understanding that the word "ranking" and the "process of ranking" must require an absolute standard - it seems to me the word can be used properly referring only to our own individual standard that is in fact contextual, as you say, and changes even within us over time and circumstance.

Maybe I should reiterate on one important point: I completely agree with you Don that there is no absolute unchanging standard by which we can rank pleasures for all people and all time and place - or even with total confidence for we ourselves in the future. From moment to moment we do make that assessment, but that is why we reject "Utilitarianism" because as a political system it is impossible to come up with an absolute standard which applies to everyone at all times and all places.

**That's why I totally agree with your comments to Kalosyni above that Epicurus was not a "Utilitarian" politically. That's an extremely important point that we've made here on the forum several times in the past and need to continue making every time that issue comes up. "Was Epicurus an Utilitarian?" is a very legitimate and natural question to ask, but it's very foundational that the answer is "No.'**

**It's kind of like explaining why Epicurus did not see himself as an atheist even though he rejected the existence of supernatural gods. He meant what he said and he said what he meant. He believed in "gods" but he rejected the definition of "gods" asserted by the establishment.**

As you (Don) indicated above, the factors that K. listed Bentham as considering are in fact relevant considerations about pleasures to keep in mind in making practical decisions about actions to take. But those considerations do not cross the line into quantifiable absolutes that can (or should) be looked upon as allowing us to say "for all times and all places we will

prioritize chocolate ice cream factories over vanilla ice cream factories." To do so would be as perverse as listening to Epicurus talk plainly about [Epicurean gods](#) but still at the same time insisting that he means them to be supernatural. He is making very plain statements about the nature of gods as non-supernatural and pleasure as a feeling which varies by context, and it is essential to absorb those lessons or we've learned nothing.

As a general and final observation for this post, it seems to me that we can with some ease point to certain experiences and with clarity call them "pleasures" or "pains," because in pointing we are pointing at particular people at particular times undergoing particular experiences. But when we sit back and speak or write "pleasure in general" or simply refer to "pleasure in the abstract" (and i do think that is a valid exercise) we are moving from a "pointing" exercise to a "definitional" exercise (inherently a "word game") and we have to be much more careful.

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## Post by “Don” of October 30, 2021 at 6:32 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

It is very interesting to me how when we spoke on the podcast we seemed to more easily agree that we were on the same page, but in putting the positions down in writing we seem to find agreement harder.

Honestly, the time delay in writing and the inability to actually have a conversation might be part of it.

Plus I let my passions get the better of me on that post. I'm gonna give a little mea culpa on that one.

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Maybe you would prefer to use another word than "ranking" because you think all rankings require an outside standard, but that would again be a definitional choice on which to be clear and it's not my understanding that the word "ranking" and the "process of ranking" must require an absolute standard - it seems to me the word can be used properly referring only to our own individual standard that is in fact contextual, as you say, and changes even within us over time and circumstance.

Okay, yes yes. I think we are understanding the word "rank" in two different senses. That's seems to be the crux of my issue. Not that rank doesn't have the two senses but we're let's say

talking past each other. That's the issue with posting rather than talking! That could have been resolved in a back and forth in two minutes rather than multiple posts over a week.

To me the word "rank" is a fixed order. I got no problem with "comparing" two or more options on the fly with the caveat of comparing them again later. So if you use "rank" I'm going to substitute "compare."

So, with reading your thoughtful, methodical post above it seems we ARE in agreement. Whew! LOL! Thank you for your patience!!

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### **Post by “Don” of October 30, 2021 at 6:48 AM**

#### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

Over the millennia and through various languages and various intentions, that word "pleasure" has taken on a life of its own. Kind of like the word "Epicurean"

I would agree. Pleasure, especially in Christian theology, seems to have become equated with sin and vice. Suffering and pain would be rewarded in the afterlife, unless you ended up in the Bad Place or even Purgatory where you had to be purged and purified of your sin. Did/do they use the word "pleasure" even to refer to the Good Place? Or talk around it with words like bliss or rejoicing or something?

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### **Post by “Don” of October 30, 2021 at 7:30 AM**

#### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

[PD03](#), [PD09](#) and [PD10](#) are all interesting in that they are providing counterfactual arguments (I think "absurdities" is too strong of a word) while at the same time adding clarity and details to those looking for it.

Hmm. I not sure [PD03](#) is counterfactual as much as it is an unattainable goal (unless you're a god!). If a person was exclusively experiencing no pain in their body or mind anywhere, they would, by definition, be experiencing nothing but pleasure. Once that state (again only attainable by a god) is reached, pleasure cannot be "increased" but simply varied.

I freely admit I may be using "unattainable goal" to mean the same thing as Godfrey's "counterfactual" like the rank/compare debate I just had with Cassius.

I'm using Nathan's compilation again for reference here:

ὄρος τοῦ μεγέθους τῶν ἡδονῶν ἢ παντὸς τοῦ ἀλγοῦντος ὑπεξαίρεσις. ὅπου δ'ἂν τὸ ἡδόμενον ἐνῆ, καθ'ὄν ἂν χρόνον ἦ, οὐκ ἔστι τὸ ἀλγοῦν ἢ λυπούμενον ἢ τὸ συναμφοτέρον.

"The limit of great pleasures is the removal of everything which can give pain. And where pleasure is, as long as it lasts, that which gives pain, or that which feels pain, or both of them, are absent." Yonge (1853)

"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." Hicks (1910)

"The magnitude of pleasure reaches its limit in the removal of all pain. When pleasure is present, so long as it is uninterrupted, there is no pain either of body or of mind or of both together." (Hicks 1925)

"The limit of quantity in pleasures is the removal of all that is painful. Wherever pleasure is present, as long as it is there, there is neither pain of body nor of mind, nor of both at once." Bailey (1926)

"The removal of all pain is the limit of the magnitude of pleasures. And wherever the experience of pleasure is present, so long as it prevails, there is no pain or distress or a combination of them." (De Witt, Epicurus and His Philosophy 226, 241; 1954)

"The removal of all that causes pain marks the boundary of pleasure. Wherever pleasure is present and as long as it continues, there is neither suffering nor grieving nor both together." Geer (1964)

"The removal of all pain is the limit of the magnitude of pleasures. Wherever pleasure is present, as long as it is there, pain or distress or their combination is absent." (Long, The Hellenistic Philosophers 115; 1987)

"The limit of the extent of pleasure is the removal of all pain. Wherever pleasure is present, for however long a time, there can be no pain or grief, or both of these." O'Connor (1993)

"The removal of all feeling of pain is the limit of the magnitude of pleasures. Wherever a pleasurable feeling is present, for as long as it is present, there is neither a feeling of pain nor a feeling of distress, nor both together." Inwood & Gerson (1994)

"Pleasure reaches its maximum limit at the removal of all sources of pain. When such pleasure is present, for as long as it lasts, there is no cause of physical nor mental pain present – nor of both together." Anderson (2004)

"Pleasure has its <upper> limit in the removal of everything that produces pain. For, wherever that which produces pleasure resides, for as long as it abides, there can be nothing that produces pain, grief, or both." Makridis (2005)

"The limit of enjoyment is the removal of all pains. Wherever and for however long pleasure is present, there is neither bodily pain nor mental distress." Saint-Andre (2008)

"The quantitative limit of pleasure is the elimination of all feelings of pain. Wherever the pleasurable state exists, there is neither bodily pain nor mental pain nor both together, so long as the state continues." Strodach (2012)

"The limit of pleasure is reached with the removal of all pain. Whenever pleasure is present, and for however long, there is neither pain nor grief nor any combination of the two." Mensch (2018)

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## Post by "Cassius" of October 30, 2021 at 9:11 AM

### [Quote from Don](#)

Okay, yes yes. I think we are understanding the word "rank" in two different senses. That's seems to be the crux of my issue. Not that rank doesn't have the two senses but we're let's say talking past each other. That's the issue with posting rather than talking! That could have been resolved in a back and forth in two minutes rather than multiple posts over a week.

I do not believe that this issue is limited by any means to communications in this thread. I really think that this issue in general ("how to communicate the subtleties and different contexts of words") is quite possibly one of the issues that we need to focus on more than anything else -- even in many cases more than we need to focus on some of the more difficult doctrines and passages.

For me, the problem we face here is best exemplified in how people (in general, casual readers) are taking the phrase "by pleasure we mean the absence of pain." Stoic-oriented commentators and self-help readers looking for mental health assistance are looking at that phrase as if it were a clinical prescription - almost like it's a drug like valium. They are thinking that "here is some counterintuitive psychological insight by a 2000-year old doctor, and all I have to do is start viewing pleasure as absence of pain - in other words, aiming for numbness - and my life will be great."

Obviously I think that is not at all what Epicurus intended. Viewing pleasure as absence of pain is in fact not "clinical" and in my view has to be explained first and foremost in a way that conveys that numbness is NOT the goal. That means going into detail about the foundational premises that allow Epicurus to reach this conclusion - foundational premises like "there are only two feelings, pleasure and pain." And that approach is the opposite of being clinical, and can't be done by simply pointing and saying "look there, that absence of pain is pleasure."

We run into this issue over and over in terms of words like "gods" and "pleasure" and "virtue" and I think the list could go on and on. Epicurus has very specific explanations of these words in mind, which frequently conflict with the explanations and definitions of these words that we carry with us today and presume he is talking about.

I'm suggesting that just as DeWitt thought it appropriate to start his book with a synoptic overview, and at the top of that overview put "be prepared to understand that Epicurus was at the same time among the most loved and hated of ancient philosophers" we need to do something similar.

I'm suggesting that as part of our introductory and outreach materials we find a way to emphasize to everyone at the start that before we can understand Epicurus we have to go back and make absolutely clear what his premises were and how those ended up in definitions of important words that carry implications that almost all of us have to take apart and put back together for us to understand what he meant.

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## Post by "Godfrey" of October 30, 2021 at 3:35 PM

### [Quote from Don](#)

Hmm. I not sure [PD03](#) is counterfactual as much as it is an unattainable goal (unless you're a god!). If a person was exclusively experiencing no pain in their body or mind anywhere, they would, by definition, be experiencing nothing but pleasure. Once that state (again only attainable by a god) is reached, pleasure cannot be "increased" but simply varied.

As I think about it more, I think of [PD03](#) as definitional. If you reverse the order of the two sentences, he's saying that (2) if in any part of you you are experiencing pleasure, then in that part you are not experiencing pain. So (1) you would therefore reach the limit of pleasure if you are not experiencing pain in any part of your body or mind.

So he's defining the dichotomous, either/or relationship of pleasure and pain. In [PD03](#) he only deals with accumulation or condensing, but in [PD09](#) and [PD10](#) he adds time, etc.

[PD03](#) isn't an unattainable goal, I think we've all had moments of experiencing the limit. But if we were able to live constantly in that state, then we'd be like the gods!

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### **Post by “Don” of October 30, 2021 at 3:38 PM**

#### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

[PD03](#) isn't an unattainable goal, I think we've all had moments of experiencing the limit. But if we were able to live constantly in that state, then we'd be like the gods!

Ok I think I can give you that one. 😊 It's just not an attainable permanent state.