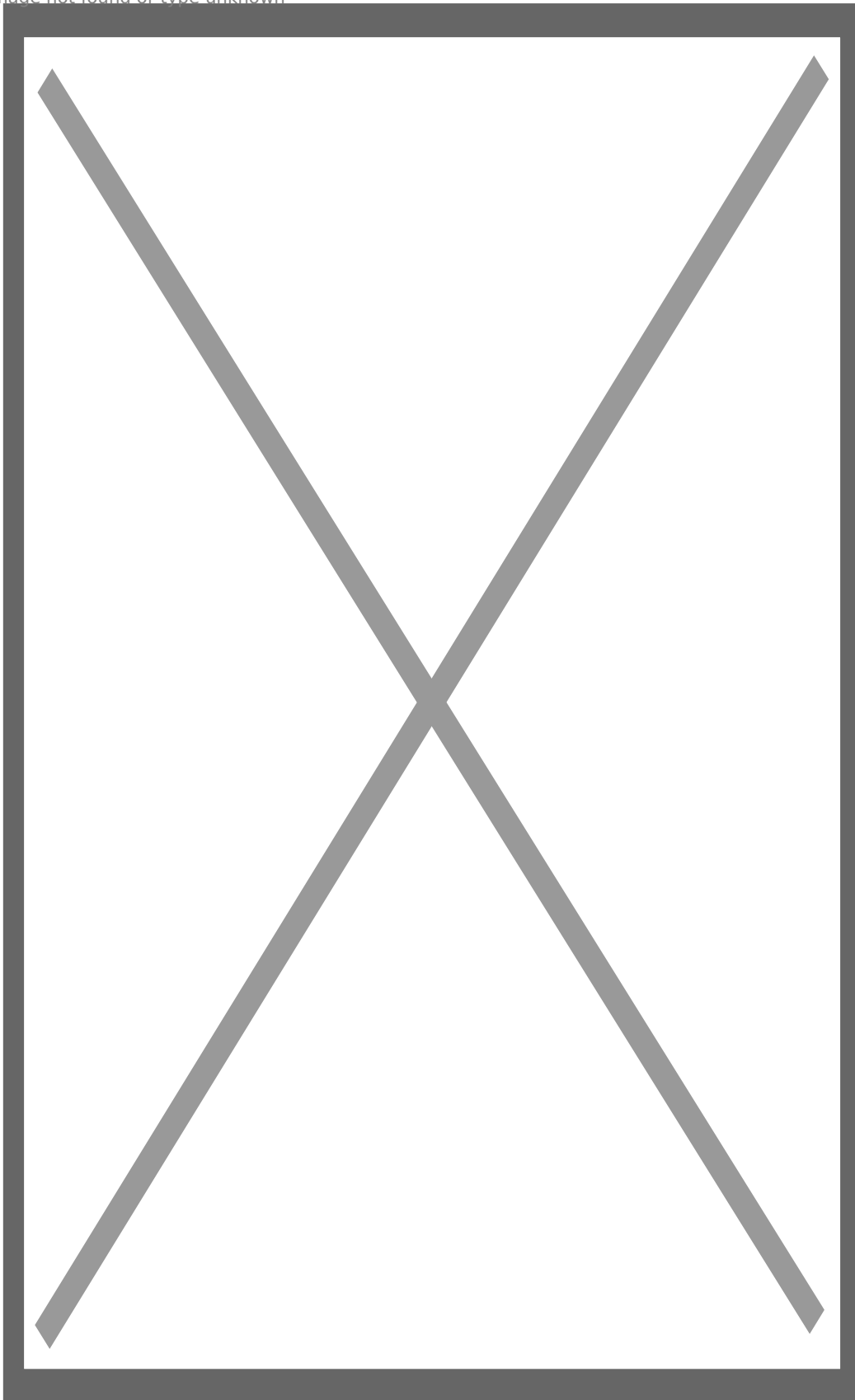


# **Dopamine Nation by Dr. Anna Lembke**

**Post by “Don” of January 4, 2022 at 10:13 AM**

I just finished listening to Dopamine Nation by Dr. Anna Lembke and would recommend it for anyone trying to understand the mechanism of pleasure in the brain and its role in addictive behavior.

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### [Anna Lembke, MD - Dopamine Nation](#)

Dopamine Nation by Dr. Anna Lembke. In Dopamine Nation, Dr. Anna Lembke, psychiatrist and author, explores the exciting new scientific discoveries that explain...  
[www.annalembke.com](http://www.annalembke.com)

I had heard a podcast with the author and, at first, thought the focus on addiction was too narrow. But I was wrong. While some of the patients discussed in the book (with their informed consent!) are difficult to hear/read, Lembke does an excellent job in showing the wide range of addictive behaviors.

I saw many echoes and/or applications to Epicurean philosophy in the book. To me, books like this are important because we can "philosophize" all day, but Epicurus advocates for evidence and knowing the science behind the brain and its reward pathways and how and why "not every pleasure is to be chosen" and "we sometimes choose pain for greater pleasures to come" is a reason to know the current science.

I'll be interested if anyone reads it and has any comments.

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### **Post by "Joshua" of January 4, 2022 at 10:40 AM**

I don't know if I'll have time for this one, but I think you are absolutely right about its application.

I'm curious whether Dr. Lembke goes into the other 4 major hormones/neurotransmitters of serotonin (mood, sleep, digestion), endorphins (mitigation of stress and pain), cortisol (increase of stress, and activation of "fight or flight" response) and oxytocin (associated with empathy, relationships and sex). Probably I do need to make time for this!

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### **Post by "Cassius" of January 4, 2022 at 10:45 AM**

The general topic of the relationship of philosophy to real life is something we need some hard-hitting material on that we feature on the website early in everyone's attention-span.

I think our bottom line through Epicurus is that it is not logic or reasoning at all, but "feeling" that gives meaning to life. So in the end we DON'T look to some logical construct for all the answers, we look to a natural mechanism.

But on the other hand, we can't conceptualize a feeling (other than words like pleasure and pain) and those general words leave the "mind" unsatisfied when we try to defend or state our positions using general words describing feelings and emotions.

We have to therefore come to terms with exactly what Epicurean philosophy (or any philosophy) is and can do, and what it can't.

I think I am going to work on a presentation to make on that topic but it keeps coming up over and over so is appropriate here.

In Don's post it's a subtext -- how does "philosophy" work together with the observational science as to how the atoms and void are actually rolling around. We need to have a confident position on how these work together so that we're not implicitly apologizing for the lack of clarity every time we talk about it. BOTH have their roles but I don't think we've made it clear enough how they work together.

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### **Post by “Don” of January 4, 2022 at 10:55 AM**

#### [Quote from JJElbert](#)

I don't know if I'll have time for this one, but I think you are absolutely right about its application.

I'm curious whether Dr. Lembke goes into the other 4 major hormones/neurotransmitters of serotonin (mood, sleep, digestion), endorphins (mitigation of stress and pain), cortisol (increase of stress, and activation of "fight or flight" response) and oxytocin (associated with empathy, relationships and sex). Probably I do need to make time for this!

The other neurotransmitters do come up repeatedly although her main focus is, of course, dopamine. She talks a lot about the reward pathways in the brain and how they get hijacked (my word, not hers) and lead to addictive behaviors.

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### **Post by “Joshua” of January 4, 2022 at 11:37 AM**

I see that in myself particularly with video games. {...New game -> binge -> tolerance -> increased need -> new variation -> binge...}, and so on. I think 'hijacked' is a fair term.

The pecuniary cost for me is quite small because of the modding community and its infinite variation, but the timesink is considerable.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of January 4, 2022 at 1:01 PM**

I've listened to a podcast with her as well and found it worth pursuing. Just haven't got to it yet! Thanks for the post Don.

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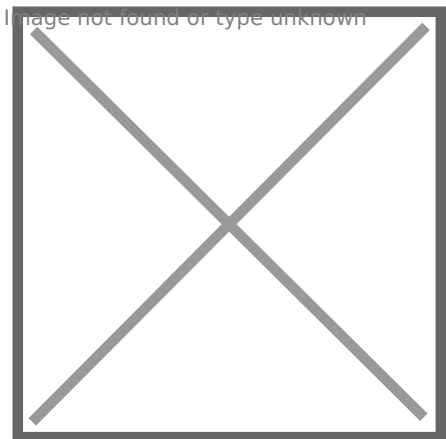
### **Post by “Don” of January 4, 2022 at 1:03 PM**

[Joshua](#) you're right on point with the themes of the book! The author's addiction that she reveals was reading romance novels. Innocuous, one might assume, but it really took over her life in many ways. The patients she talks about are dealing with sex, drugs, alcohol, food addictions. Addiction can manifest itself in myriad ways it seems.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of January 4, 2022 at 1:07 PM**

This is the link to the podcast I listened to if anyone wants the short version before deciding to read the book:



[The Next Big Idea - DOPAMINE NATION: Why the Modern World Puts Us All at Risk for Addiction](#)

In “Dopamine Nation: Finding Balance in the Age of Indulgence,” Dr. Anna Lembke says today’s superabundance of pleasurable stimuli makes us all vulnerable to...  
podcasts.google.com

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**Post by “Marco” of January 5, 2022 at 1:36 AM**

Googel translate:

Almost all people I know find satisfaction of a desire after a while.

Except for my friends who fall heavily in love or who have a desire for even more money. That is also what Epicurus says, there is a limit to pleasure.

In clinical situations, there will be people who become heavily addicted, but those are the exceptions who go to a doctor.

As Elaine states in her overview:

7. It is possible to enjoy life fully, and to be satisfied after attaining a desire. Desire is not fundamentally insatiable. There is no good reason to try and eliminate desires.

8. If a desire appears to be insatiable, it is likely because a person is otherwise unhappy or because the desire is for something impossible.

9. When a person is focused on an impossible desire, such as to live forever, the poor fit of substitute pleasures makes them feel their ordinary desires are insatiable.

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## Post by “Don” of January 5, 2022 at 7:34 AM

I have to disagree with some of your points.

### [Quote from Marco](#)

In clinical situations, there will be people who become heavily addicted, but those are the exceptions who go to a doctor.

Addictive behaviors are much more widespread than I have realized, and the exceptions are those people who seek treatment. I think many people with addictive behaviors don't seek professional help. That was one of the points underlying Dr. Lembke's book.

### [Quote from Marco](#)

Desire is not fundamentally insatiable.

Some desires are, some desires aren't. Epicurus specifically calls out the "empty" desires because they are insatiable. I've come to understand "empty" desires to mean that no matter how much you "fill" the box of an empty desire, it's still empty. Desires for money, fame, power for their own sake and not to achieve a certain goal are insatiable. That box is always going to be empty.

### [Quote from Marco](#)

There is no good reason to try and eliminate desires.

It's maybe not a matter of "elimination" but a matter of choosing which desires are worthwhile to pursue and which aren't. "Eliminating desires" sounds Buddhist. Making choices on which desires to choose and which to reject to lead to a pleasurable life puts it into an Epicurean context.

### [Quote from Marco](#)

If a desire appears to be insatiable, it is likely because a person is otherwise unhappy or because the desire is for something impossible.

It may be the case that someone is unhappy or has some underlying issue, but that still means they're pursuing a desire that's going to be insatiable (or "empty" as I described above)

### [Quote from Marco](#)

When a person is focused on an impossible desire, such as to live forever, the poor fit of substitute pleasures makes them feel their ordinary desires are insatiable.

I would include a desire for immortality as an empty desire, but there are many others, too. I don't think those people are necessarily feeling ordinary desires to be insatiable. I think they find them unsatisfying for any number of reasons, but we might be talking about two separate problems.

If I've misunderstood any of your positions due to a translation problem, my apologies. But I felt I should clarify my understanding of those issues in light of reading Lembke's book as well as Epicurus's texts.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of January 5, 2022 at 7:42 AM**

[Quote from Don](#)

calls out the "empty" desires

Have you done a deep dive on the etymology of the "empty" word? i find that word very empty of meaning and i wonder if we have it right or could do a better job explaining it.

"Vain" is a little better but still needs explanation as well, I would think.

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### **Post by “Don” of January 5, 2022 at 8:03 AM**

Empty (κενός) as a metaphor in the texts is derived from the actual, physical meaning of an empty vessel or box. You can place your hand in an empty box and move it around. It's the word Epicurus also used for void because it implies the atoms are able to move in the emptiness. Likewise, an empty desire is literally empty.

Here's what I wrote in my Menoikeus commentary: "This is a word that carries a wide range of connotations, but all have that sense of emptiness, void, no ground to stand on (literally and figuratively). It carries the physical connotation of an empty box. If a box is κενός, it would be possible to move your hand around in it. There's nothing there to impede your movement."

Here's the LSJ definition:

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, κενός](#)

So, the common thread of κενός is void, empty, not able to be filled.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of January 5, 2022 at 8:52 AM**

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

So, the common thread of κενός is void, empty, not able to be filled.

The main problem I have is that without some further explanation, the "void and empty" do not in my mind go together logically with "not able to be filled."

The "not able to be filled" carries more meaning than "empty", but simply being void and empty does not (standing alone) because the nature of the atoms and void is that they move around, and considering any particular space at a particular time, there's no necessary reason why that space cannot be filled.

Not sure I am being clear yet, and i am not faulting Epicurus, but i think our English usage of "empty" is probably missing the point, without more added to explain WHY it is not able to be filled. And since the allegation in the first place is apparently that the thing is "not able to be filled" then just saying that it is empty adds little or nothing to the statement.

If something is not able to be filled then the question would be "WHY NOT?"

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### **Post by “Don” of January 5, 2022 at 9:02 AM**

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

the nature of the atoms and void is that they move around,

The void doesn't move and it extends infinitely. The atoms will never fill the void.

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## Post by “Eikadistes” of January 5, 2022 at 9:08 AM

### [Quote from Don](#)

So, the common thread of κενός is void, empty, not able to be filled.

I found it to be clever that Epicurus links the idea of conceptual meaninglessness, vanity, superficiality, bankruptcy, uselessness, brokenness, and worthlessness with the physical void, emptiness, space. Thus, he reinforces the idea that those ideas which are not in accordance with the canon are much like space: literally non-existent.

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## Post by “Cassius” of January 5, 2022 at 9:22 AM

### [Quote from Don](#)

The void doesn't move and it extends infinitely. The atoms will never fill the void.

I am not sure that I agree that the void doesn't move, at least in terms of a particular location. You CAN fill a vessel with atoms, can you not, and that displaces the void in that particular location.

As to atoms in total never filling the void in total, absolutely we are in agreement.

But these ambiguities in the use of void/empty are troublesome and would be better clarified.

I feel sure that in the Greek the meaning WAS clear, and it is in our English formulations that the problem mainly exists.

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## Post by “Cassius” of January 5, 2022 at 9:23 AM

And even more so in regard to any analogy of a vessel. Vessels are MADE to be filled up, in human terms, so the first image that this analogy is making to a normal human is going to be incomplete unless there is something about the nature of this particular vessel that makes it impossible to fill (leaking, for example).

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## **Post by “Cassius” of January 5, 2022 at 9:36 AM**

Here is another aspect of this: The "leaking vessel" analogy is clearly an important part of Epicurean analogy, as illustrated at least once in the opening of Lucretius Book Vi.

So the discussion of "filling vessels" is an important aspect of discussing how Epicurus taught to lead a life of pleasure.

I would argue that the key question is what is it about these desires/vessels, other than that they start off empty or are empty at a moment in time, that prevents them from being filled?

The issue cannot be solely that they are "empty" at a moment in time.

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## **Post by “Don” of January 5, 2022 at 10:05 AM**

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I am not sure that I agree that the void doesn't move, at least in terms of a particular location. You CAN fill a vessel with atoms, can you not, and that displaces the void in that particular location.

Void isn't a "thing". It's not composed of atoms. It's the "medium" in which the atoms move if you will, and even "medium" isn't the right word.

I'll have more to write and respond soon. There's a teaser.

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## **Post by “Cassius” of January 5, 2022 at 10:27 AM**

These are great topics to discuss so keep it coming!

I agree with your ultimate analysis of void, but it does have the one characteristic of giving a "place" for atoms to be, if I remember Herodotus and Lucretius correctly.

And THESE / THIS is exactly on the list of things we are supposed to discuss, like infinity, right?

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## Post by “Don” of January 5, 2022 at 10:38 AM

Let's get away from the "unable to be filled" metaphor for now. I still think it's applicable, but it's obviously not helpful in our current context of this discussion.

Possibly a more apt metaphor is the old Western movie set where there appears to be a main street of the town, but it's only a line of facades. The facades may be indistinguishable from actual buildings, but walk through them and you're in the desert. There's nothing there. It's an empty space. Likewise, the empty desires are nothing but attractive shells or facades. There may be bright neon signs on the facades with POWER, MONEY, etc, but there's nothing to back them up. To put it colloquially, "there's no there there."

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## Post by “Cassius” of January 5, 2022 at 10:49 AM

### [Quote from Don](#)

Possibly a more apt metaphor is the old Western movie set where there appears to be a main street of the town, but it's only a line of facades. The facades may be indistinguishable from actual buildings, but walk through them and you're in the desert. There's nothing there. I

Yes that is probably a better analogy, but not one that I would associate with the word "empty." There IS something there, the false front is there.

I don't say that to be disagreeable, though, but only to emphasize the height that will be necessary to climb. 😊

Carry on as I am looking forward to this! That's what "gods among men" are supposed to do - talk about things like this!

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## Post by “Don” of January 5, 2022 at 10:50 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

There IS something there, the false front is there.

Yes. The desire exists. There's just nothing to back it up

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### **Post by “Cassius” of January 5, 2022 at 11:04 AM**

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

Yes. The desire exists. There's just nothing to back it up

Yes that emphasizes how I do not think this terminology makes sense. If you want to say that the type of desire cannot be definition be filled for some reason, then that's one thing, but the word "empty" seems to me to have nothing to do with the discussion.

If we feel the desire, it exists. Maybe the issue is in the definition of desire. I consider a desire to be a feeling, not concept. I "feel a desire" - I don't "feel a concept."

If I can feel something, then it exists, and the word "empty" comes dangerously close to asserting that the feeling does not exist, which would almost certainly be inconsistent with the rest of Epicurean philosophy.

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### **Post by “Don” of January 5, 2022 at 11:36 AM**

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

Yes that emphasizes how I do not think this terminology makes sense

Well, in some ways, you're not really arguing with me; you're arguing with Epicurus. He's the one who decided to use the same word to describe both the structure of the universe (atoms and \*void\*) and a category of desires. Just saying.

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### **Post by “Eikadistes” of January 5, 2022 at 12:49 PM**

### [Quote from Don](#)

He's the one who decided to use the same word to describe both the structure of the universe (atoms and \*void\*) and a category of desires. Just saying.

I **strongly** agree that Epicurus' employment of an inflection of the ancient Greek word for "spatial void" to signify "groundless desire" is significant. I see this stylistic device, among few others, as an unmistakable, poetic signature of a unique mind who re-appropriated tired, traditional connotations for the sake of providing fresh observations.

While he re-defines "pleasure", it was not such a drastic leap for the Hellenistic mind to make (unlike, herein, I argue, is the case with "kenos" / "kenon" / "kenen") because "hedone" still referred to "pleasure", just a more stable, fulfilling type of "pleasure" than they may have been used to supposing. Herein, Epicurus is completely re-defining the idea of a "destructive desire". It's not just [1] a "distraction", "addiction", "obsession", "self-destructive pursuit", or "wasted energy", rather, it is [2] "void", "space", "NULL", "literally, within the category of those things which do not exist". The former meaning [1] connects the notion of a "destructive desire", *inherently*, with desire, **itself**; with "pleasure". Desire, necessarily, was seen as being a destructive thing. Thus, from an Epicurean vantage point, the word one [2] should describe a destructive desire differently than the pleasure that entices desire, *itself*, and, *rather*, **needs** to be **re-defined** within a larger context. The destructiveness of desire has nothing to do with the feeling of desire, but rather, with the intellectual vacuity to which by which it may be motivated. If a desire has no natural meaning, no healthy purpose, then it cannot be connected with the natural canon, with raw sensation, honest feeling, and natural anticipations. It must be connected with some kind of fallacious "Logic" that have been mistaken for those original apprehensions impressed upon the mind.

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### **Post by "Eikadistes" of January 5, 2022 at 12:57 PM**

In an Epicurean dictionary, the only word that *could* exist (since all Epicurean observations refer to real objects that host real existence, as opposed to imaginary speculations) to refer to an idea that was acquired from somewhere besides nature is, literally "the infinite spatial void of nothingness". Epicurus recognizes that the most **FRANK** description of a "delusion", "illusory opinion", "vain excuse", was, truly, "empty space". A proposition that does not correspond with the Kanon of raw, external stimulations, internal emotions, and pre-rational mental impressions can neither be considered, nor is it worth consideration, like void, which can neither act, nor be acted upon. It is the least "real" "thing" there is.

## **Post by “Eikadistes” of January 5, 2022 at 1:12 PM**

It's also a good way to arm yourself with a vocabulary to call your opponent's argument as ZERO, rather than, as American media has shown me, waste your time giving your moronic opponent's utterly vacuous statement the benefit of being a real idea worthy of consideration and genuine reflection. A Skeptic could write a thousand books refuting the most moronic ideas that have ever been proposed by the least functional, least observant people who have lived; a more prudent philosopher would see no need to refute utterly vacuous ideas, and only consider those that currently hold dominion over people who are susceptible to such manipulation. If all "ideas" are void, and only gain substance if they connect with pre-existing natural impulses, then we don't have to waste time supposing that we live in a cave of ideas ... we live in reality and we assume reality to be real, and an idea that does not comport to this reality cannot have come from the substance of the reality, itself, rather, it comes from nothing, void. It is a consequence of a person directing their attention toward something that literally does not exist. Otherwise, they would be engaging a real thing with real consequences. In this case, they are accepting a vain hypothesis as being as definite as the heat of a flame, and it is obvious to everyone who has not swallowed the intellectual kool-aid of "the Logic".

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## **Post by “Don” of January 5, 2022 at 1:27 PM**

Thanks, Nate, for your responses! You are more passionate and articulate than I was.

### [Quote from Nate](#)

While he re-defines "pleasure", it was not such a drastic leap for the Hellenistic mind to make

Before anyone else comments on your comment above, I, too, think Epicurus "re-defined" (or clarified, I might say) the word "pleasure" to include biological homeostasis, namely ataraxia and aponia, specifically as pleasure. Other philosophers of his time posited that there was a neutral state between pleasure and pain. My thought is that Epicurus specifically says "no, when you're feeling in balance, your body's working well, your mind is untroubled, that is a pleasure."

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## **Post by “Cassius” of January 5, 2022 at 2:23 PM**

I do not see myself arguing against what you guys are saying. I see this as an issue similar to use of the term "gods" which does not in American English convey the meaning and definition that Epicurus held to apply to gods.

We cannot use the term "God" without explanation any more than we can use the word "empty" without explanation if we expect people to understand us.

So I see myself as agreeing with your conclusion as long as you are annexing to your conclusion the explanation that you are providing here.

So I would say that "Empty" in American English does not convey the meaning we are wishing to convey. I don't see that you are yet suggesting a short phrase or combination of words that does the job, but that should be the goal, so that the word "empty" does not confuse people just like an unexplained use of the word "gods" confuses people

In both situations, clear speech and meaning requires explanation, just like we cannot throw the original Greek words at Americans and expect them to be understood.

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## Post by “Kalosyni” of January 5, 2022 at 2:33 PM

### [Quote from Marco](#)

8. If a desire appears to be insatiable, it is likely because a person is otherwise unhappy or because the desire is for something impossible.

9. When a person is focused on an impossible desire, such as to live forever, the poor fit of substitute pleasures makes them feel their ordinary desires are insatiable.

(This quote by Marco was originally from Elaine)

I've joined in here a little late...but wanted to say that this really makes sense for me.

Here a helpful analogy from Marshall Rosenberg (originator of Nonviolent Communication):

...Don't go to the hardware store if you want to buy eggs.

So by "empty" we actually mean impossible to fullful.

So much of mental suffering comes when we try to pursue "empty" desires. Some people have stronger habits around pursuing things that are "empty" and are unable to reason what is "empty" and what is real.

About the word "empty" - both the same usage in English and Greek - the word can apply to physical objects or to mental ideas.

Objects that can hold things (boxes, cups, etc.) can at times be empty.

Ideas that can hold things (truth, validity, reason, accuracy) can at times be empty.

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### **Post by “Don” of January 5, 2022 at 2:52 PM**

Points taken, [Cassius](#) .

I like @Nate 's "vacuous."

Cogitating further. More thoughts to come eventually.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of January 5, 2022 at 3:08 PM**

#### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Objects that can hold things (boxes, cups, etc.) can at times be empty.

Ideas that can hold things (truth, validity, reason, accuracy) can at times be empty.

I picked K's comment to quote largely at random, but the point I think is important is there.

I think this is important because I get the idea that in conjunction with discussions (us I mean, not Epicurean necessarily) which reference "empty" there it is also frequently implied that certain types of desires are ALWAYS "empty." That may be as much of my problem with this phrasing as anything else.

Is anyone thinking that there is a list of desires that is "ALWAYS" empty? I am thinking of the classic fame, power, riches, etc. Those may strike me as always dangerous, but NOT always "empty" and some degree of fulfillment of those is generally necessary in life.

So what I am suggesting as part of this discussion that we make clear the "relative nature" and "subjectivity" of these issues, because if we cross the line into saying "XXXX desire is ALWAYS empty" I have a feeling we are on that slippery slope to Platonism. That may apply to "I want to

live forever" which is physically impossible for humans, but I am not aware of too many such desires that might be physically impossible to at least get some benefit from pursuing.

There's a lot of subtlety here to be considered.

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### **Post by "Don" of January 5, 2022 at 3:33 PM**

Honestly, I still like "empty."

Plus, I would say a desire for power only for power's sake is always empty.

A desire for money only for money's sake is always empty.

A desire for fame only for fame's sake is always empty.

Those desires cannot be fulfilled and will end in frustration or, at least, a neverending quest to fulfill them.

But, for example, a desire for enough money to achieve a goal is finite and achievable.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of January 5, 2022 at 3:39 PM**

Well what you are saying there is that the desire for anything other than pleasure itself is just a means to something else, but again power, money, and fame do all have their legitimate uses, I would argue, even under the strictest Epicurean analysis.

You can say that the desire for UNLIMITED amounts of those things are "empty" as impossible to obtain, but if that is what you are saying then to be clear you are saying that it is the UNLIMITED aspect which is impossible to attain and therefore "vain" "delusive" or "whatever words you'd like to use.

But none of that is self-explanatory just by using the word "empty"

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### **Post by "Cassius" of January 5, 2022 at 7:07 PM**

I noticed in the text from Torquatus while editing this week's podcast:

#### Quote

[60] There is also death which always hangs over them like the stone over Tantalus, and again superstition, which prevents those who are tinged by it from ever being able to rest. Moreover they have no memories for their past good fortune, and no enjoyment of their present; they only wait for what is to come, and as this cannot but be uncertain, they are wasted with anguish and alarm; and they are tortured most of all when they become conscious, all too late, that their devotion to wealth or military power, or influence, or fame has been entirely in vain. For they achieve none of the pleasures which they ardently hoped to obtain and so underwent numerous and severe exertions.

Don I presume this ("entirely in vain") is pretty much the same sentiment we are discussing? If so maybe we can find some points of comparison with the Latin from this section.

---

### Post by “Don” of January 5, 2022 at 8:46 PM

Alternate translation:

Moreover, there is death, the stone of Tantalus ever hanging over men's heads; and superstition, that poisons and destroys all peace of mind. Besides, they do not recollect their past nor enjoy their present blessings; they merely look forward to those of the future, and as these are of necessity uncertain, they are consumed with agony and terror; and the climax of their torment is when they perceive too late that all their dreams of wealth or station, power or fame, have come to nothing. For they never attain any of the pleasures, the hope of which inspired them to undergo all their arduous toils.

[LacusCurtius • Cicero — De Finibus, Book I](#)

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### Post by “Don” of January 5, 2022 at 8:50 PM

[60] accedit etiam mors, quae quasi saxum Tantalos semper impendet,<sup>1</sup> tum superstitio, qua qui est imbutus<sup>2</sup> quietus esse numquam potest. praeterea bona praeterita non meminerunt, praesentibus non fruuntur, futura modo expectant, quae quia certa esse non possunt,

conficiuntur<sup>3</sup> et angore et metu maximeque cruciantur, cum sero sentiunt frustra se aut pecuniae studuisse aut imperiis aut opibus aut gloriae. nullas enim consequuntur voluptates, quarum potiendi spe inflammati multos labores magnosque susceperant.

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### **Post by “Don” of January 5, 2022 at 9:12 PM**

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

Don I presume this ("entirely in vain") is pretty much the same sentiment we are discussing? If so maybe we can find some points of comparison with the Latin from this section.

The alternative translation just has "have come to nothing" which is comparable to "in vain" but even better, from my perspective, since it also equates to "empty" (nothing). The applicable Latin appears to be nullas: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...Aentry%3Dnullus>.

Maybe desires that come to nothing instead of "empty" desires?

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### **Post by “Cassius” of January 5, 2022 at 10:46 PM**

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

Maybe desires that come to nothing instead of "empty" desires

I am not wedded to any particular formulation but yes I do think that has a more meaningful ring to it. So we could be talking about an "idiom" here that explains the awkwardness I am sensing in the single word "empty"

I haven't thought of that "idiom" word lately in our context here, but I was just using it in another context earlier this week about someone who was raised overseas and who expressed confusion over the meaning of "throwing the baby out with the bathwater."

Maybe our lexicon or FAQ ought to include a list of actual or probable Epicurean "idioms"

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## Post by “Don” of January 6, 2022 at 7:34 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Maybe our lexicon or FAQ ought to include a list of actual or probable Epicurean "idioms"

If we're going that route, my suggestion would be to have an entry for "Empty" Desires and then make a point of saying "this is the word Epicurus used to describe desires which..." I don't think we should shy away from his modifier but understand it may need some context. I maintain it's a good word and gets at the unsatisfying nature of the empty desires, like "empty" calories, empty handed, empty headed, etc.

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## Post by “Cassius” of January 6, 2022 at 10:43 AM

### [Quote from Don](#)

unsatisfying nature of the empty desires, like "empty" calories, empty handed, empty headed, etc.

Right. Those in themselves are good qualifying explanations. They exist, but they are deceptive as to final result and all the implications that go with them.

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## Post by “Don” of January 6, 2022 at 11:06 AM

To circle back to the topic of this thread, addictions are not predicated on empty desires. It would seem to me that most addictions start out as natural but unnecessary desires. In fact, I would posit that most of our everyday desires fall into the "natural but not necessary" category, but they do add variety to our lives.

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## Post by “Cassius” of January 6, 2022 at 11:24 AM

### [Quote from Don](#)

In fact, I would posit that most of our everyday desires fall into the "natural but not necessary" category, but they do add variety to our lives

Yes and the highlights another peril - that if thinking that "natural but not necessary" desires as a rule should not be pursued because they are not "necessary." Such a general rule would not in my opinion by Epicurean, but Stoic/ascetic.

And I don't think any (or many) people here would infer such a rule, because we hit on that point so hard here in this forum. But in the outside world of people who read Epicurus I think that's a very real problem. They infer that Epicurus suggested we should pursue ONLY natural and necessary desires, even though he himself manifestly did not do that in his own case, nor would it be logical to reach such a conclusion in the first place given the rest of his philosophy.

And if someone wants to argue that point (which they often do in outside Epicurean discussions) I would ask them among many other things: *Exactly how many of the slaves which Epicurus held at his death were "necessary?"*

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### **Post by “Don” of January 6, 2022 at 11:55 AM**

I find it interesting that Epicurus didn't actually use the word "unnecessary" although one could argue it's implied. But it is not explicit:

#### Quote

Furthermore, on the one hand, there are the natural desires; on the other, the 'empty, fruitless, or vain ones.' And of the natural ones, on the one hand, are the necessary ones; on the other, the ones which are only natural; then, of the necessary ones: on the one hand, those necessary for eudaimonia; then, those necessary for the freedom from disturbance for the body; then those necessary for life itself.

Unless he talked about the division of desires somewhere else and used "unnecessary" explicitly. I certainly don't have the texts memorized 😊

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### **Post by “Cassius” of January 6, 2022 at 12:49 PM**

Great point. I know that in general discussion (such as below) that shorthand is used, but maybe the texts don't really justify it?

[PD26](#). Of desires, all that do not lead to a sense of pain, if they are not satisfied, are not necessary, but involve a craving which is easily dispelled when the object is hard to procure, or they seem likely to produce harm.

[PD29](#). Among desires, some are natural (and necessary, some natural) but not necessary, and others neither natural nor necessary, but due to idle imagination.

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### Post by “Don” of January 6, 2022 at 1:04 PM

Ah! The phrase used in those is οὐκ εἶσιν ἀναγκαῖαι "they are not necessary." So, the word unnecessary isn't there, but it is explicitly said "they are not necessary." Mea culpa.

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### Post by “Kalosyni” of January 6, 2022 at 2:24 PM

Quote

Quote

Furthermore, on the one hand, there are the natural desires; on the other, the 'empty, fruitless, or vain ones.' And of the natural ones, on the one hand, are the necessary ones; on the other, the ones which are only natural; then, of the necessary ones: on the one hand, those necessary for eudaimonia; then, those necessary for the freedom from disturbance for the body; then those necessary for life itself

If you visualize this as a flowchart...this shows that there are three categories underneath both "natural and necessary":

- 1) necessary for eudaimonia
- 2) necessary for freedom from disturbance for the body
- 3) necessary for life itself

So "necessary for eudaimonia" could encompass a great number of things (things such as friendship...and you could then go as far as including such things a "sexual expression" as necessary for happiness -and- freedom from disturbance of the body).

I feel certain that back in time, this was much more clearly and exactly explained in Epicurus' teachings, but so much of the written teachings didn't survive. Is there anything in Epicurus' writings where we can gain more detail about what is "necessary for eudaimonia"?

Maybe the only way through all of this is to apply common sense and to "scientifically" test it and to make a list of things, and decide which of the three categories we think they might fall into.

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### **Post by “Don” of January 6, 2022 at 2:29 PM**

I would even speculate where a desire falls in those categories can be contextual and dependent on circumstances at any given time, too.

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of January 10, 2022 at 2:10 PM**

I just happened upon this thread, and thought it might be good to cross reference it here, as it tells a story about addiction and it's consequences, and also gives some Epicurean principles and potential wisdom to help anyone who might be dealing with addiction or who knows someone dealing with addiction. (Addiction is a very complex issue, and may of course need the help of an addiction counselor or therapist).

Thread

[“Love and Marriage, Real Series”](#)

Although we are now forced to devote much of our attention to the nature of viruses, and how to prevent or defeat the pain that comes from them, we should also keep in mind the nature of pleasure, the goal for which we endure the possibility viruses and all other kinds of pain.

Just as we study the details of how viruses operate, and how we can minimize our danger from them, we should remember too that pleasure operates through natural mechanisms, and we should study the details of how...



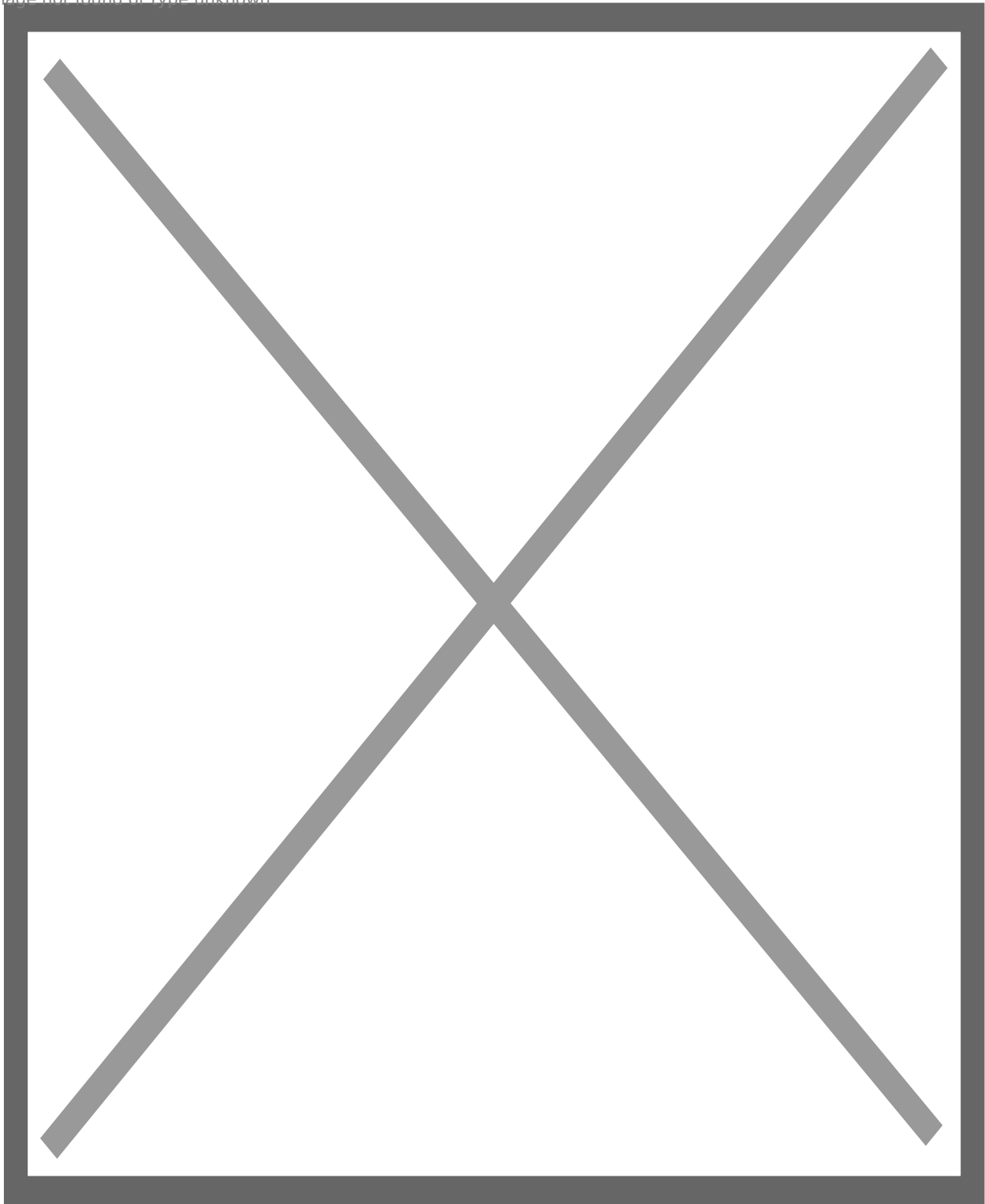
Elli

March 30, 2020 at 12:02 PM

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**Post by “Don” of April 10, 2022 at 1:05 PM**

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[Too much pleasure can lead to addiction. How to break the cycle and find balance : Life Kit](#)

Dr. Anna Lembke, psychiatrist and author, explains when too much pleasure-triggering dopamine upsets the delicate balance of pleasure and pain our brains need...

www.npr.org

New summary article and podcast episode.

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## Post by “Pacatus” of April 10, 2022 at 1:26 PM

I recall that Haris Dimitriadis wrote in his book about neurotransmitters and chemical responses underlying pleasure/happiness. Here is a visual that I found along the way:

