

Is Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy Compatible with Epicureanism?

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 3, 2022 at 5:53 PM

In the past I studied this mode of therapy and attempted to apply it to myself. One is supposed to do this with a certified therapist rather than on one's own. But I did find some benefit from it from studying it. I think this might be compatible with Epicureanism? (even if it might be more likely associated with stoicism). What do you all think?

Here is an brief over-view:

Quote

REBT is the pioneering form of cognitive behavior therapy developed by Dr. Albert Ellis in 1955. REBT is an action-oriented approach to managing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral disturbances.

According to REBT, it is largely our thinking about events that leads to emotional and behavioral upset. With an emphasis on the present, individuals are taught how to examine and challenge their unhelpful thinking which creates unhealthy emotions and self-defeating/self-sabotaging behaviors.

REBT is a practical approach to assist individuals in coping with and overcoming adversity as well as achieving goals. REBT places a good deal of its focus on the present. REBT addresses attitudes, unhealthy emotions (e.g., unhealthy anger, depression, anxiety, guilt, etc.) and maladaptive behaviors (e.g., procrastination, addictive behaviors, aggression, unhealthy eating, sleep disturbance, etc.) that can negatively impact life satisfaction. REBT practitioners work closely with individuals, seeking to help identify their individual set of beliefs (attitudes, expectations and personal rules) that frequently lead to emotional distress.

REBT then provides a variety of methods to help people reformulate their dysfunctional beliefs into more sensible, realistic and helpful ones by employing the powerful REBT technique called “disputing.” Ultimately, REBT helps individuals to develop a philosophy and approach to living that can increase their effectiveness and satisfaction at work, in living successfully with others, in parenting and educational settings, in making our community and environment healthier, and in enhancing their own emotional health and personal welfare.

<https://albertellis.org/rebt-cbt-therapy/>

I wouldn't want to say that anyone should do this on their own, so this is just a reference to a possible mode of therapy. And I am re-visiting it now, due to feeling some life stressors and circumstances which have me feeling off-kilter.

In some sense this is like "worm-wood" medicine. But as Epicureans we need to use some honey with it -- so to be gentle and kind and give oneself some Epicurean pleasure, while applying this.

This link has more specifics: [REBT](#)

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 3, 2022 at 7:47 PM

In addition to the above post, here is more. There isn't anything in Epicureanism like this, but this could be helpful for dealing with feelings of worry which can get in the way of the enjoyment of pleasures.

Quote

Here are the questions to ask yourself, outlined in our [Disputing Irrational Beliefs Handout](#):

1. *What is the self-defeating irrational belief I would like to dispute and reduce?*
2. *Am I able to support this belief with objective facts?*
3. *What proof is there that this belief is false?*
4. *Is there any proof that this belief is true?*
5. *What is the worst possible outcome that could occur if I fail to get what I believe I must? What's the worst possible outcome if I do get what I believe I mustn't? What other negative things could happen to me?*
6. *What positive things could I cause to happen if my undesirable scenarios pan out?*

Source: <https://positivepsychology.com/rebt-technique...ses-worksheets/>

Post by “Cassius” of May 3, 2022 at 8:51 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2501-is-rational-emotive-behavioral-therapy-compatible-with-epicureanism/>

We haven't talked about cognitive behavioral therapy in a long while, and i am not up on the details. In general, it's definitely more related to Stoicism, and in fact the leading internet Stoic, Donald Robertson, is primarily (from what I gather) a CBT teacher.

I seem to remember this section on criticism of CBT at Wikipedia seemed to be longer:

Quote

Philosophical concerns with CBT methods

The methods employed in CBT research have not been the only criticisms; some individuals have called its theory and therapy into question.^[216]

Slife and Williams write that one of the hidden assumptions in CBT is that of [determinism](#), or the absence of [free will](#). They argue that CBT holds that external stimuli from the environment enter the mind, causing different thoughts that cause emotional states: nowhere in CBT theory is agency, or free will, accounted for.^[206]

Another criticism of CBT theory, especially as applied to major depressive disorder (MDD), is that it confounds the symptoms of the disorder with its causes.^[209]

I don't have any doubt but that REBT or CBT or many other types of therapies can be somewhat helpful depending on context, just like some people need medication and all the spoken-word therapy in the word isn't going to help them.

So that's about all I can offer. Therapy is no substitute for a proper philosophy, but probably sometimes it's exactly therapy that someone is needing.

For anyone coming across this post in the future I have found the longer version of the "criticism" section of the CBT wikipedia page, and I posted it [here](#).

Post by “Cassius” of May 3, 2022 at 9:07 PM

I see one of the links states this:

Quote

REBT? What is it?

What is Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT)? Created by Albert Ellis, REBT is a form of the very popular [cognitive behavior therapy](#) and has been dominating approaches to psychological treatment since the 1950s. You might be wondering what distinguishes REBT from other forms of psychotherapy techniques. In essence, Albert Ellis created it as a philosophy of living – its foundation is the belief that it is not the events in our lives that cause our emotions, rather it is our beliefs that cause us to experience emotions such as anger, [depression](#), and [anxiety](#). It is a mode to consider and change our irrational beliefs and has shown to have a favorable effect on reducing emotional pain.

Those are statements that bother me. REBT may be a very effective therapy and technique, but it's certainly not a "philosophy of living."

And this sounds like pure mind-over-matter Stoicism; ' its foundation is the belief that it is not the events in our lives that cause our emotions, rather it is our beliefs that cause us to experience emotions such as anger, [depression](#), and [anxiety](#)." Read in a certain way that may be ok, but to imply that you can change real issues in your life simply by what you "believe" about them is more pseudo-stoic nonsense. If someone has a medical problem they need a doctor, not to change their "belief" about their medical condition.

Much like Stoicism itself it sounds to me like this is making claims on which it can't deliver, and it's offering itself as a full philosophy of life when it's really closer to a coping mechanism.

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 3, 2022 at 11:28 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

We haven't talked about cognitive behavioral therapy in a long while, and i am not up on the details. In general, it's definitely more related to Stoicism, and in fact the leading internet Stoic, Donald Robertson, is primarily (from what I gather) a CBT teacher.

Oh wow, I didn't know that.

For myself, I just notice that occasionally I get caught in some kind of circular thinking which makes me feel sad. And it has to do with something that I want, but it is difficult to get, or it is something that I may never be able to have. And then I might think: "If I can't have (xyz) then I can't be happy in life." Which is followed by "And there is probably something wrong with me

and that is why I can't get it/have it."

So REBT is a way to talk yourself out of your false beliefs about reality. And yet it leaves a sort of empty feeling.

But if this particular "thing" that I want is something which I feel would fall into the Epicurean category of "necessary for happiness" -- and if there was an Epicurean community, then someone could step forward to help resolve the situation, or as a community everyone could put their heads together to figure out a solution. So if we are living in this modern isolated world, and thus there is CBT to deal with the modern world problems, problems coming out of consumerism and individuality, and divisive or guilt-inducing political and religious ideologies. And people go through life with way too serious of an attitude.

Post by "Godfrey" of May 4, 2022 at 1:17 AM

One approach to dealing with a negative thought loop is to work at feeling gratitude for tiny things in your life. The more you do this, the more "blessed" (maybe like a blessed and incorruptible being?) you feel, the more you can enjoy fulfilling the natural and necessary desires. As the joy in your life increases, so does the openness to further blessings.

VS19: He who forgets the good things he had yesterday becomes an old man today.

VS35: Don't ruin the things you have by wanting what you don't have, but realize that they too are things you once did wish for.

VS55: Misfortune must be cured through gratitude for what has been lost and the knowledge that it is impossible to change what has happened.

Post by "Cassius" of May 4, 2022 at 6:44 AM

There are a series of 'practical' observations embedded into the texts that sort of correspond to the kind of wise advice that we traditionally get from parents, or friends, etc. Examples include:

VS43. The love of money, if unjustly gained, is impious, and, if justly gained, is shameful; for it is unseemly to be parsimonious, even with justice on one's side.

VS44. The wise man, when he has accommodated himself to straits, knows better how to give than to receive, so great is the treasure of self-sufficiency which he has discovered.

VS45. The study of nature does not make men productive of boasting or bragging, nor apt to display that culture which is the object of rivalry with the many, but high-spirited and self-sufficient, taking pride in the good things of their own minds and not of their circumstances.

VS46. Let us utterly drive from us our bad habits, as if they were evil men who have long done us great harm.

VS47. I have anticipated thee, Fortune, and I have closed off every one of your devious entrances. And we will not give ourselves up as captives, to thee or to any other circumstance; but when it is time for us to go, spitting contempt on life and on those who cling to it maundering, we will leave from life singing aloud a glorious triumph-song on how nicely we lived.

VS48. We must try to make the end of the journey better than the beginning, as long as we are journeying; but when we come to the end, we must be happy and content.

VS49. It is impossible for someone to dispel his fears about the most important matters if he does not know the Nature of the universe, but still gives some credence to myths. So, without the study of Nature, there is no enjoyment of pure pleasure.

But my main point is that everything wise to do in life isn't philosophy, which is a complete worldview. A series of "therapeutic techniques" can't take the place of a philosophy. And that's especially true since "therapy" divorced from answering questions about "Toward what goal?" can be very manipulative and even dangerous.

That's essentially what has happened in modern Stoicism, and it's why so many Stoics are confused about their philosophy and think it's so similar to Epicurean philosophy. The modern Stoics have stopped stressing their ancient foundations ("virtue" as the goal, in which pleasure is a highly negative thing) to the point where modern Stoicism has little or anything to do with what the Stoics originally developed. I would submit that modern Stoicism is in fact now focused on issues of living 'happily,' while for the ancient Stoics what we think of as living "happily" was one of the major *obstacles* to their goal - living "virtuously."

We could take that observation off in great detail - and i think we have discussed it in the past - but the point under discussion here is not to give Stoicism a well-deserved bashing but to point out the limits of CBT / REBT. (If you want to read a bashing of Stoicism, one unexpected place to read a good one are the parts of Cicero's "On Ends" which are devoted to examining the Stoics.)

One other thing I would point out is that it's important to remember what Epicurus said about pain -- sometimes we DO choose pain in order to avoid a worse pain or achieve a greater pleasure. The "sometimes" is the issue - we have to think through carefully what our goal is and why we may choose to undergo pain.

Is "Behavioral Therapy" going to answer questions like that, if "therapy" is focused purely on "reducing pain" or "coping with pain" without answering the bigger philosophic question of whether the pain a person is going through is "appropriate"?

A medical doctor can pretty uniformly know that "treating pain" is the obvious goal. "Being tired" can be caused by all sorts of disease processes which a doctor will have medications to treat.

But what if you are "tired" because you have just engaged in lengthy exercise toward losing weight or generally improving your health? Would a doctor look to medicate away your "tiredness" simply because you are tired?

A philosophy of life has to identify the goal of living and analyze any current problems in the context of obtaining ultimate goals. Any "therapy" that represents itself as helping to adjust your behavior without first analyzing the reasons for your situation and your ultimate goals in life may just prolong the period of time of wandering in darkness.

Post by "Kalosyni" of May 4, 2022 at 7:22 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

VS46. Let us utterly drive from us our bad habits, as if they were evil men who have long done us great harm.

[Cassius](#) from what you are writing then it seems there is a subtle overlap between modern Stocism and Epicureanism (but not in ancient Stocism), especially as seen with this Vatican Saying.

It is hard to say how the idea within my mind of a particular story regarding the "best life" or the kind of life that will be most pleasurable, came to be. Perhaps it was past moments of a time in which everything seemed right in my life, but now my life is different and uncertain. My particular idea -- sort of a life "recipe" for happiness -- may never come to be again.

So it seems that I may have to settle for a lesser recipe -- one which is rather bland -- no salt or spices -- sure I won't keel over and die -- and maybe I will at times find pleasure. But I suppose this is why some people end up in Buddhism and doing meditation.

Post by "Cassius" of May 4, 2022 at 7:25 AM

Kalosyni what i wrote here is also relevant -- these two threads are similar - [RE: Atlantic article about enjoyment vs. pleasure](#)

Post by "Cassius" of May 4, 2022 at 7:32 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

It is hard to say how the idea within my mind of a particular story regarding the "best life" or the kind of life that will be most pleasurable, came to be. Perhaps it was past moments of a time in which everything seemed right in my life, but now my life is different and uncertain. My particular idea -- sort of a life "recipe" for happiness -- may never come to be again.

So it seems that I may have to settle for a lesser recipe -- one which is rather bland -- no salt or spices -- sure I won't keel over and die -- and maybe I will at times find pleasure. But I suppose this is why some people end up in Buddhism and doing meditation.

Most of the time when I hear people say things like this I think one appropriate response is:

You yourself are the only person who can decide how best to spend your time and what goals are appropriate. Epicurus can tell you about the nature of the universe and what is realistic to expect, but your particular situation is unique to you and you yourself have to think through the best course of action given those circumstances. There is no single "best life" for everyone, and it takes pain to achieve many pleasures, so only you can decide what course to take.

That's a bitter pill for some people to swallow, and maybe that's what you mean by "why some people end up in Buddhism" as a method of coping with that. But that's the nature of the universe (at least in Epicurean terms) so we all have to act as best we can with that sense of

reality.

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 4, 2022 at 7:56 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

You yourself are the only person who can decide how best to spend your time and what goals are appropriate.

So to further elaborate on my idea of a "recipe for a happy life" - I will be more open about what that is - the idea of being in a long-term relationship (which I was in the past, but am no longer) and having the joys of intimacy (both emotional and physical). Statistically women over the age of 50 are much less likely to partner up again (I have researched this. Often any men who are single in older age are either not in the mindset for wanting a relationship, or they have "attachment-avoidance" behaviours and are therefore unfit for long-term relationships.)

So my second "recipe for a happy life" is to create an in person Epicurean philosophy group - this would be my consolation for not being able to cook up my first desired recipe. This would need to be something which would give the emotion intimacy of friendships. But this is a very big project which is proving to be more difficult to get going, and logistically I feel a bit flummoxed. But I do realize that by putting my mind more firmly on my goal of an "Epicurean Garden" then I do start to feel a bit...happier, lol.

So then I must focus on this, and doing what needs to be done to create that.

Post by “Cassius” of May 4, 2022 at 8:47 AM

[An example of practical Epicurean advice for fixing problems and not just "coping" ->](#)

[PD27](#). Of all the things which wisdom acquires to produce the blessedness of the complete life, far the greatest is the possession of friendship.

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 4, 2022 at 2:55 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2501-is-rational-emotive-behavioral-therapy-compatible-with-epicureanism/>

[Quote from Cassius](#)

[PD27](#). Of all the things which wisdom acquires to produce the blessedness of the complete life, far the greatest is the possession of friendship.

Yes! And then also this Vatican saying:

34. The use of friends is not that they are useful, but that we can trust in their usefulness.

So then I take this as meaning to have friends in which we can rely on. And of course friends whom I enjoy being around and spending time with. And it takes time and effort to nurture these kinds of friendships.

Moving away from the REBT (of this thread) -- this morning I remembered being a kid and in 2nd or 3rd grade, a woman came into our classroom to have us do sing-alongs of various songs to her guitar accompaniment.

This was one song:

[lyrics](#): "Hush Little Baby"

or listen:

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=dUqqGpoMcE4>

Researching this I see that it was a folk song lullaby originating from Virginia/North Carolina. And the idea is that there is always something else in which to find enjoyment, though this is rather materialistic in that it is relying on material objects.

As adults there is no Papa to take care of us anymore, nor is there a "Papa in the sky" to whom we pray. So it is up to us to do what we need to do. And sometimes first the pain before we can get to the pleasure, as Cassius wrote in another thread:

"Because Epicurus might well listen to a person's story and their particular set of problems and prescribe something that leads first to "Pain" before only later leading to "Pleasure."

And it comes to me, I wonder what might we say from a wise Epicurean point of view -- sort of a grown-up lullaby. What kind of words would we sing to ourselves when things seem difficult? This is something I will ponder, and perhaps write a song 😊

Post by "Cassius" of May 4, 2022 at 3:01 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

34. The use of friends is not that they are useful, but that we can trust in their usefulness.

We really need Nate to expand his book of alternate translations to the Vatican Sayings, but there aren't that many to choose from.

Is that St Andre? In this case the term "use" strikes me as a little utilitarian, and the Bailey's "help" may ring a little more friendly:

VS34. It is not so much our friends' help that helps us, as it is the confidence of their help.

Post by "Godfrey" of May 4, 2022 at 3:53 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Statistically women over the age of 50 are much less likely to partner up again (I have researched this. Often any men who are single in older age are either not in the mindset for wanting a relationship, or they have "attachment-avoidance" behaviours and are therefore unfit for long-term relationships.)

Kalosyni I don't say this to be harsh, and please forgive me if it comes across in that way. But I don't live my life with statistics in mind: that seems too much like accepting fate.

It's highly unlikely to be struck by lightning, but do the odds matter in the least to the rare individual who does get stricken? One can take prudent safety measures and go about their business.

It used to be thought that genetics determined particular things about a person's future. Now the field of epigenetics has arisen to study the ways in which behaviors can influence whether particular genes are expressed or not. I use this to illustrate that statistics are also, at least to me, "macro" data but underlying that data is "micro" data, the influence of which of which we are often unaware.

Really the best we can do is to take prudent actions to maximize our pleasure and minimize our pain in pursuit of a pleasant life, which it seems like you're doing. So, damn the statistics! Full speed ahead!

Post by “Cassius” of May 4, 2022 at 4:14 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Really the best we can do is to take prudent actions to maximize our pleasure and minimize our pain in pursuit of a pleasant life, which it seems like you're doing. So, damn the statistics! Full speed ahead!

Exactly. By finding your way to EpicureanFriends you have already shown that you are capable of finding a true "needle-in-the-haystack" in the world of philosophy. That proves already that you have the ability to beat odds that have been stacked for 2000+ years! 😊

Quote

For indeed who, think you, is a better man than he who holds reverent opinions concerning the gods, and is at all times free from fear of death, and has reasoned out the end ordained by nature? He understands that the limit of good things is easy to fulfill and easy to attain, whereas the course of ills is either short in time or slight in pain; he laughs at (destiny), whom some have introduced as the mistress of all things. (He thinks that with us lies the chief power in determining events, some of which happen by necessity) and some by chance, and some are within our control; for while necessity cannot be called to account, he sees that chance is inconstant, but that which is in our control is subject to no master, and to it are naturally attached praise and blame.

For, indeed, it were better to follow the myths about the gods than to become a slave to the destiny of the natural philosophers: for the former suggests a hope of placating the gods by worship, whereas the latter involves a necessity which knows no placation.

As to chance, he does not regard it as a god as most men do (for in a god's acts there is no disorder), nor as an uncertain cause (of all things) for he does not believe that good and evil are given by chance to man for the framing of a blessed life, but that opportunities for great good and great evil are afforded by it. He therefore thinks it better to be unfortunate in reasonable action than to prosper in unreason. For it is better in a man's actions that what is well chosen (should fail, rather than that what is ill chosen) should be successful owing to chance.

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 4, 2022 at 4:37 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2501-is-rational-emotive-behavioral-therapy-compatible-with-epicureanism/>

Quote

For, indeed, it were better to follow the myths about the gods than to become a slave to the destiny of the natural philosophers: for the former suggests a hope of placating the gods by worship, whereas the latter involves a necessity which knows no placation.

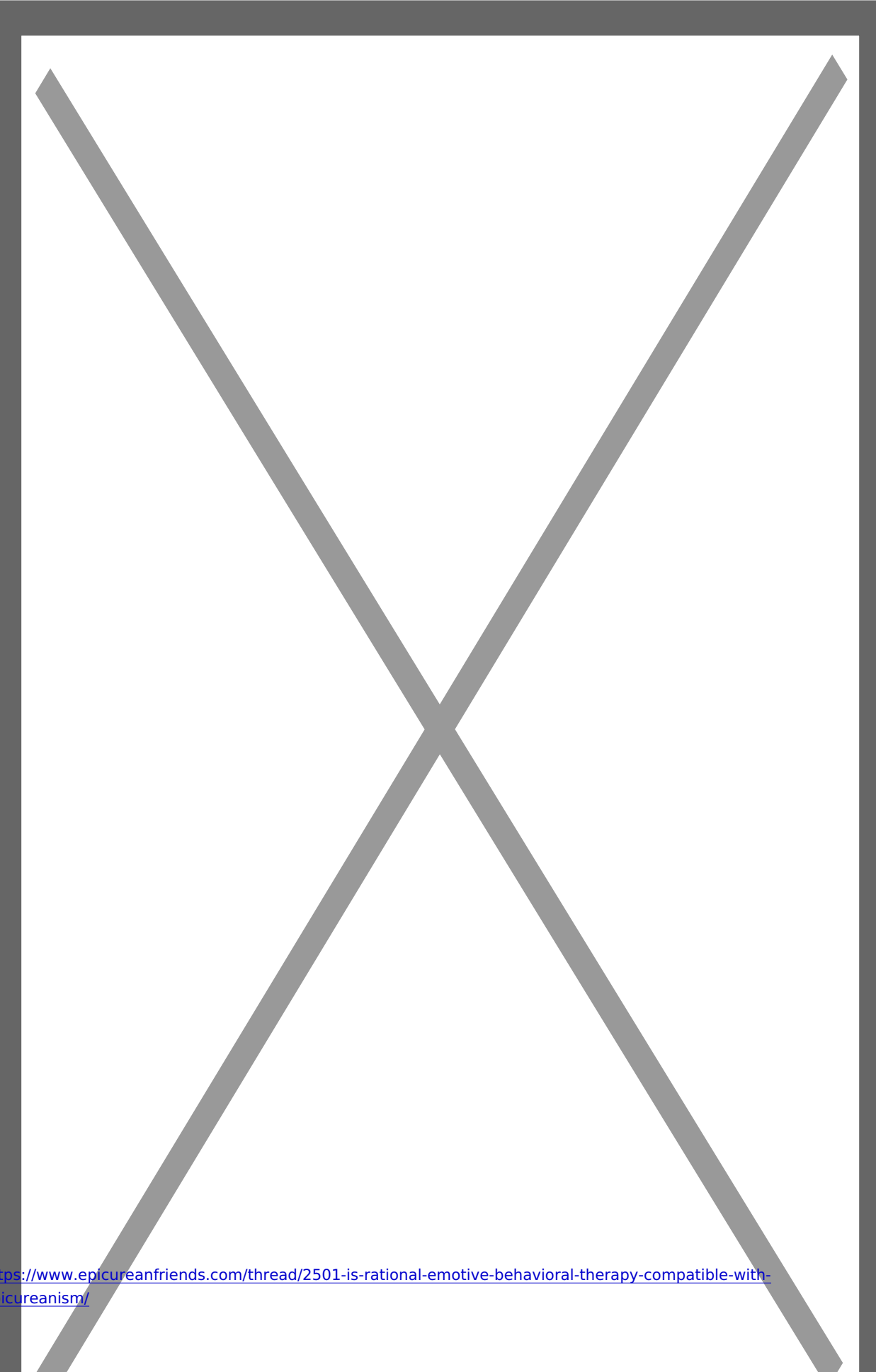
This seems to point toward the retaining of hope that prayer (or sacrifices to the gods) would be effective, rather than believing in a destiny which cannot be changed.

So perhaps I should pray to Aphrodite? -- lol 😊

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 4, 2022 at 4:40 PM

omg -- I just found this very interesting website:

Image not found or type unknown



[“Dear Venus”: Praying to an Ancient Goddess at the Getty Villa](#)

21st-century prayers to an ancient goddess.

blogs.getty.edu

Post by “Eoghan Gardiner” of May 4, 2022 at 6:31 PM

For my own experience, I found EFT or emotional focused therapy much better than CBT. It doesn't deny emotional states and treats emotional states as what they are supposed to be, namely guides for choosing or avoiding.

When you constantly feel a painful emotion it's a sign from nature that you need to do something.

Post by “Cassius” of May 4, 2022 at 7:09 PM

Good to hear from you Eoghan!

Post by “Cassius” of May 4, 2022 at 7:37 PM

You know it would probably be an interesting topic to discuss: Which therapies for depression and similar conditions *are* most consistent with Epicurean philosophy?

[Emotionally Focused Therapy](#)

Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) is a short-term form of therapy that focuses on adult relationships and attachment/bonding. The therapist and clients look at...

www.psychologytoday.com

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 4, 2022 at 7:51 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2501-is-rational-emotive-behavioral-therapy-compatible-with-epicureanism/>

This article from the above website looks good: [dealing with stress](#).

Post by “Godfrey” of May 4, 2022 at 8:10 PM

I took a look at the Getty Aphrodite website. From reading the tags, I get the feeling that writing on the tags and posting them actually could be quite cathartic. It's not as if one's prayers would be answered, but I can see how doing that could help a person to release some pent up emotion. It might have something in common with Catholic confession or Tibetan prayer flags although I don't know much about either of those.

Post by “Don” of May 4, 2022 at 10:53 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Catholic confession

I'm not entirely convinced that the practice of classical Epicurean frank speech by teacher and student didn't influence Catholic confessional practices. (I know, I'm exhibiting Dewittian tendencies here!) Descriptions in Tsouna's *The Ethics of Philodemus* sound very confessional-like.