

# Planning And Execution of A Local Group

Post by "Cassius" of January 8, 2018 at 6:58 AM

## Epicurean Meetings and Conventions

New: [Meetup Handouts](#)

Update: As of 2/10/25 as I am writing this, it is my understanding that the Sydney Australia Epicurean meetup group is no longer operational. I have left the links below in case you want to look for prior versions of the page, but at present i am not aware of any operational Epicurean Meetup groups.

In most parts of the world, there are at present very few opportunities for regular people who are interested in Epicurus to get together to meet each other in person. This is a major problem, as Epicurus emphasized the both the value of friendship and the value of students studying philosophy together with like-minded friends..

A significant part of the problem is that there are few mechanisms to help people find their way to Epicurean philosophy on their own. The odds are stacked against regular people doing so in large numbers, in part because the academic world, with help from misguided fans of "stoicism," "hedonism," "humanism," and related "-isms," has labeled Epicurus as a philosophy for losers, misfits, loners, and recluses.

Important steps have been taken in recent years toward freeing Epicurean from the cage of the university classrooms. As a first step toward personal engagement, we now have available to us a Facebook group led by people who share a genuine and primary interest in Epicurus. At the [Epicurean Philosophy Facebook Group](#), learning about Epicurus is the true focus, and not just a front or a come-on to some other philosophical agenda. However Facebook is only a part of real life, and many of us who communicate there share the goal of attending local meetings and even conventions on a regular basis.

There are several existing prototypes which provide us a model for future action. In Greece, the friends of Epicurus in [Athens](#) and in [Thessaloniki](#) meet regularly. Their yearly convention and regular meetings are documented on their web page, and these are excellent resources .

In Sydney Australia there is an active ["Meetup" group which has existed since 2011 and has proven to be very active.](#) Check that page for a listing of all their prior meetups, including the agenda they followed for each meeting. What better example for those interested in starting their own local meetings?

Experience indicates that it is readily possible to get together several people in Meetup format who are generally interested in “philosophy.” The trick is to find the determination and perseverance to keep things focused on Epicurus as the theme. There are strong temptations to wander into “atheism” or “humanism” or “stoicism” or even “political activism,” and those distractions must be resisted if the group is to stay focused on Epicurus. There is no membership database of existing Epicureans from which to draw, but it is probable that almost any metropolitan area of any size would support a Sydney-style meetup group if even one or two people act with determination to keep the meetings on track and recognize that attendance will likely remain small for an extended period.

In addition to using the [Sydney Meetup group page](#) as an example for meeting agendas, there are other obvious ways to program a series of meetings. There are several recent books which could be used as a “book club” format to discuss a chapter at each meeting. Haris Dimitriadis' "[Epicurus and Pleasant Life](#)" is well organized for that purpose as a balance between introductory theory and practice. Norman DeWitt's "[Epicurus and His Philosophy](#)" can be used to structure a series of meetings on Epicurean theory, and Hiram Crespo's "[Tending the Epicurean Garden](#)" provides a good way to structure a series of meetings on Epicurean practices.

Because so few embrace the label of Epicurean on their own, a new generation of Epicureans must be developed who will say with Thomas Jefferson that “I too am an Epicurean.” The critical first step toward enlarging those numbers is content creation. Before we can ask others to join with us in Epicurean meetings, we first have to be able to set out ourselves what it means to be an Epicurean and to study Epicurean philosophy..

We already have in place some excellent websites to assist leaning about what it means to be Epicurean. For a simplified list of core Epicurean ideas, see [Major Characteristics of the Epicurean View of Life](#) and the [summary of epicurean philosophy](#) on this website. In addition to the material cited already, Haris has set up [EpicurusPhilosophy.com](#) in support of his book, and Hiram has published his [SocietyOfEpicurus.com](#) as part of his work. Many additional resources are available at [NewEpicurean.com](#)

Local Meetups do not require anything more than [the Sydney Meetup prototype](#), but the more extensive websites can be used as examples for producing pages dedicated to promoting and coordinating local meetup and wider convention activity. For a current list of activist Epicurean websites from around the world, [click here](#). For a great example of what kind of meeting activity is possible, check out this page detailing the [February 2017 Symposium in Athens](#).

Let's get started and keep moving forward! If you are interested in setting up a local Meetup group, or working toward a regional convention, please be sure to let us know by posting at the [Epicurean Philosophy Facebook Group](#).

**Post by "Cassius" of January 8, 2018 at 9:17 PM**



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**Post by "Cassius" of June 7, 2019 at 9:37 AM**

I am about to conclude that using Meetup as a method of setting up a local group is a dead end. I think Hiram reported something similar, and I know that my own efforts have yielded nothing. I also gather that Elayne's success has been limited.

Possibly the issue is that the type of person who frequents Meetup is just a casual user looking for something superficial (like Stoicism at the deepest). Even if such people attend an initial meeting or two, they are likely to drop away when they find that Epicurean philosophy challenges them in an uncomfortable way.

In my case I made very clear on my opening Meetup page that the group was not general philosophy, and not Stoicism, and gave details about what it is about. If that scared away people and caused the lack of response, then so be it. Even with that, I got notifications that eight people indicated interest, but I could never get anyone to commit to an organizational first meetup. Probably what's necessary is to go ahead with at least two people (preferably three) at a public restaurant, and then see who is too shy to reply, but actually shows up.

I suppose Meetup can be one arrow in a quiver to use, but relying on it as a primary tool is probably not a good idea.

Which means alternate methods need to be developed.

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### **Post by “Elayne” of June 9, 2019 at 1:17 PM**

There were two people in my Meetup group, out of several who signed up and fewer who actually came, whom I thought might work out... and that would have been ok to start with. Even ONE actual Epicurean in my area would be great, lol! But after we met a few times, it became clear we were not anywhere near to being on the same page, and that they were not willing to spend the time to study on their own between meetings. That wouldn't be so much of an issue if I had a core group to start with, of at least somewhat similar perspectives.

Given the preponderance of competing philosophies, it may be much harder than I had thought to find people who are open to this philosophy, much less people who already get it.

One mistake I made was that the group was not set up in a hierarchical manner. This is mainly because I consider myself a self-led person, but I dislike having followers... I prefer other self-led friends. In the past, when I have done public political things, a crowd of almost groupie-like people tried toglom onto me, and it was quite irritating-- they were more interested in some kind of weird hero worship than they were in doing anything substantial themselves. They didn't treat me like a real person but more of a projection. So I did not set things up where I was clearly the leader of the meetup group--- I wanted it to be more lateral than vertical. But that doesn't work well when the others are so unfamiliar with the subject matter.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of June 9, 2019 at 4:32 PM**

I think what is coming into focus is that in terms of real-life meetings, we're almost going to have to find a way to do some shotgun style advertising to draw as many people as we can into what may almost be a lecture-like environment, and hope that maybe 5% or some very small number will have enough interest to come out.

I am thinking that Meetup is so heavily oriented to a "lonely-hearts club" type person (and I am not criticizing that) that the people we will find there will be even less motivated - maybe substantially less motivated - than facebook.

It might take targeting a very large community (like Atlanta in my general area) and then using meetup maybe for logistics but plan to find a way to solicit interest from local philosophy

departments / schools / colleges and even looking for local facebook groups (if they exist). In other words looking for a wider variety of places to advertise so that we aren't just relying only on Meetup.

When I was younger meeting notices for such things used to be placed in Libraries and other gathering spots but I am not sure that works anymore.

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### **Post by “Hiram” of June 10, 2019 at 1:37 PM**

Facebook, Google and Bing ads allow for targeting people who search for a specific word online in a specific location (for instance, all the people 30 miles away from Chicago who search for the word "Epicurean"). This would be focused enough to attract likely candidates.

But since we lack visibility, I believe that true, sincere Epicureans should be writing more content also for outside outlets who are friendly, like my articles for The Humanist magazine, for infidels.org, Ateístas de Puerto Rico, etc. all of which have slowly expanded the presence of Epicureans online. If we have more English-speaking intellectuals engaged in the public sphere showing people how much moral guidance Epicurean teachings can furnish to modern problems, people will start seeing us as part of the national conversations.

This is a somewhat passive model of recruitment still. In antiquity, the Garden placed statues (if we are to believe "The Sculpted Word") in key places to attract converts. We have to figure out contemporary alternatives to that. Meme publication only attracts superficial sympathy initially, with few guarantees. A proliferation of Epicurean articles may attract people with more substance. Becoming columnists and contributors in sites like Patheos and others might be one way to do it. If we have at least 2-3 bloggers of this sort with a sustained presence for a few years, this may change the paradigm and have many more looking into Epicureanism. I think [Elayne](#) might be the perfect candidate for this because she needs to start building a platform for when she is ready to publish her book.

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### **Post by “Protonus” of February 23, 2021 at 10:07 PM**

I was just considering starting an Epicurean meetup group since I don't use Facebook or any other platform for meeting likeminded folks. I notice the last post here is from 2018, and wondering if anybody had better results since then. I've had mixed results with others meetups I've organized in the past.

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## Post by “Cassius” of February 24, 2021 at 1:37 AM

I have not heard of any efforts except [Elayne](#) since that date. She had several meetings. I eventually dropped my account for lack of response, but in hindsight I should have set up something even though only a few people replied. I kept waiting for more to sign up but I probably should have followed the rule of "strike while the iron is hot" and gone forward shortly after posting the group even though only 2 or 3 responded.

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## Post by “Cassius” of February 25, 2021 at 2:44 AM

Three years after starting this thread my current thought is that a critical component of any local group or online initiative is going to be keeping the focus on just a couple of core unifying ideas and working hard to keep political division and foreign philosophical interests (primarily Stoicism) out of the mix.

Just as with the graphic at the top of the right sidebar, it seems to me that the most key components that are of central interest in 2021 are probably:

- 1 - No supernatural gods
- 2 - No life after death
- 3 - Pleasure as the goal or beginning and end of blessed life
4. - All good and evil consists in sensation (or something else conveying that there is no absolute virtue / the goal of virtue is pleasure)

Any such list is always improvable, but however they are worded each of these are clearly documentable in the texts, have huge numbers of implications, and are not necessarily tied to any specific theory of physics (though of course physics and epistemology would naturally be discussed as part of explaining and studying the top conclusions).

Rigorous insistence on topics like these being the center of focus would probably help politely freeze out the Stoics and keep political divisions and other agendas under control. The main topics have the most appeal to generalists, and for those who really want to dig into the details a local group could refer people to a forum such as this one for more advanced discussions.

It seems to me that exerting leadership to keep the discussion on the main track is probably critical to managing expectations and may be as important as any other factor in making any

"local" effort viable.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of February 25, 2021 at 6:40 AM**

To avoid sidetracking this thread, I am going to start a new thread to document text citations that support each of these four assertions:

1 - No supernatural gods

2 - No life after death

3 - Pleasure as the goal or beginning and end of blessed life

4. - All good and evil consists in sensation (or something else conveying that there is no absolute virtue / the goal of virtue is pleasure)

That thread will be here: [Four Hyper-Relevant Assertions of Epicurus \(Citations From The Epicurean Texts\)](#)

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### **Post by “Elayne” of February 25, 2021 at 8:29 AM**

Well, considering we are not equating sensation with feelings, wouldn't it be more accurate to say all good and evil consist of individual feelings? Vs the senses, which are not the value-assigning functions? With "individual" as a reminder that nothing is absolute.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of February 25, 2021 at 8:52 AM**

That is a very good point Elayne and something that needs to be considered, especially when writing an explanation of the point. In stating the four in most succinct form, however, I think it is important to stay as closely as possible to the wording of Epicurus or the most reliable texts, and the translations of that seem to all say "sensation." Now it might be relevant here to go back to what Don has been pointing out that perhaps "internal sensations" is better than feelings.

This is the kind of thing that needs to be thought through and perhaps should vary with the location where it is being used.

Actually as I type this I am now thinking that this is an issue which is not entirely clear, and we need to be careful. We need to consider whether what we today define as "feeling" what Epicurus was saying in the words translated as "pathe" or "passions" or "internal sensations" or feelings?" And I am not entirely sure whether Epicurus was equating sensations with feelings or not (probably not) nevertheless the way he is relating them may not be something we really have a final finger on.

I guess the place to start would be to examine that segment of the passage in PD2 to see exactly what word was used. [Don](#) or anyone, can you help with that?

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### **Post by “Don” of February 25, 2021 at 12:20 PM**

Here's the Greek:

Ὁ θάνατος οὐδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς· τὸ γὰρ διαλυθὲν ἀναισθητεῖ· τὸ δ' ἀναισθητοῦν οὐδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς.

Ὁ θάνατος οὐδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς· literally "Death is nothing for us."

διαλυθὲν - passive aorist of διαλυω 2. to dissolve into its elements, to break up

ἀναισθητος I. unconscious, insensate, unfeeling; senseless

Here's my translation:

"[Death is nothing to us](#), for that which is dissolved into its elements is without consciousness, and that which is without consciousness is nothing to us."

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### **Post by “Elayne” of February 25, 2021 at 2:06 PM**

How would you know what was good or bad without the feeling, though? With just sensation and no feeling of pain or pleasure? That doesn't make any sense.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of February 25, 2021 at 3:16 PM**

Yes Don and while I have the highest respect and gratitude for your translations, when the "classical experts" seem to agree that some kind of "feeling" or "sensation" is the better translation, we'll need to take a position on whether THEY are the ones who are picking from among the alternatives the word their notion of what is 'correct' or whether we are the ones doing that. I don't begin to have the ability to weigh in on whether they could be wrong, and in the confines of my own analysis I am pretty much unable to take a position on what is correct, other than by "intuiting" the right word, as I think Elayne is doing.

Maybe what we have going on here is what DeWitt talks about the three legs of the canon not operating independently but in some way being integrated together into a single unit.

**T**HE criteria are three, but the prevailing custom is to reduce them to one by merging the Anticipations and the Feelings with the Sensations. This error arises from classifying Epicurus as an empiricist, ascribing to him belief in the infallibility of sensation, and then employing this false assumption as a major premise.

The three criteria are neither three aspects of a single capacity nor yet three discrete capacities which function separately from one another. To Epicurus body and soul are alike corporeal; they are also coterminous. Consequently all reactions of the individual to his environment are total or psychosomatic. Thus in the case of every reaction Nature is on the alert to register approval or disapproval by the signals of pleasure and pain. This is the function of the Feelings in the meaning of the Canon.

It is true that in the Greek language all three criteria may be called *pathe*, in modern parlance "reactions," but they are not identical. It is true also that all three may be components of a given reaction but still they occur in sequence. Sensation is irrational and merely registers a quality, for example, sweetness. It is the intelligence that says, "This is honey," and it is the Feelings that report, "I like it" or "I don't like it." Again, it is positively known that Epicurus postulated the existence of an innate sense of justice and called this an Anticipation. Now injustice hurts and it is the Feelings that register this fact. If a man is condemned to pay an unjust penalty, the pain is a reaction distinct from the aural sensation of hearing the verdict.

When once the criteria have been recognized as three distinct reactions occurring in close sequence, the next point is to recognize the general approach of Epicurus to the problem of the Canon as being biological or, more precisely, genetic. This attitude reflects the contempo-

## Post by "Don" of February 25, 2021 at 5:56 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Yes Don and while I have the highest respect and gratitude for your translations,

I appreciate that. I'm giving it all she's got, Captain 😊

The word in question is ἀναίσθητος *anaisthētos*.  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l...sqhte/w#lexicon>

Look like any English word? It's the basis of "anaesthesia" when we don't feel or sense anything.

I think you're on the right track with the complementary Canon.

Another pertinent fact is the word διαλυθὲν *dialythen* which has the connotation of being dissolved or broken up into pieces or into elements. So, once death breaks us up into our constituent elements, there's nothing to sense, to feel, to think, to reason... No us. \*We\* don't exist.

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## Post by "Cassius" of February 25, 2021 at 6:25 PM

Well we definitely want to get this wording as accurate as possible to avoid having to backtrack immediately in an explanation.

However, at the same time, I doubt that the subtle difference between feelings or sensation or a similar word is the *most* important factor. The real "kick in the gut" to the opposing team is no so much specifying how all good and evil do arise from sensation or feeling as much the point that good and evil DO NOT arise from the gods, or from reason, or from anything absolute that the world of conventional philosophy asserts is the source of their right to give commands to tell everyone else how to live.

And no matter whether we pick feeling or sensation or some other similar word, the real "explanation" of this assertion is really focused on Epicurus' rejection of what everyone else in the world thinks is the source of moral authority, with Epicurus pointing instead, as Elayne points out, to the individuals own "feelings" or whatever word is chosen.

## **Post by “Don” of February 26, 2021 at 10:05 PM**

It seems to me two things are getting conflated here. Let me sort them out, for myself if not for anyone else.

What is good or bad for me personally is determined by whether the action or thought elicits pleasure or pain for me, either in the short or the long term. There is no absolute Good or absolute Evil for me personally apart from my reaction of Pleasure or Pain.

What is good or bad for society is determined by whether actions are just or not. Whether something is just or not is if it (a) keeps others from harming me, or (b) keeps me from harming others (and so in turn keeping them from harming me). My not being harmed is pleasurable for me. That's, by definition, Good.

There are no absolute virtues determined by God. Virtue is instrumental to pleasure.

There is no universal justice determined by God. "Justice" is instrumental to my not harming you and my not being harmed by you. That keeps me safe and society stable to my being able to experience pleasure.

Things people think of as "universal human rights" could be just because they keep people from harming each other and keep people from being harmed. They're not God-given rights. They are conducive to my experience of Pleasure. Your experience of pleasure is advantageous to me. If you're experiencing pleasure, you're less likely to feel the need to harm me. And vice versa.

Everything -- everything!! -- points ultimately to mental and physical pleasure. That's why Epicurus says pleasure is the end-goal, the telos.