

# Help (How To Find Peace of Mind When Facing A Turbulent World)

**Post by “Pacatus” of July 19, 2022 at 6:03 PM**

Because I self-manage a chunk of our retirement funds (trading stocks, mostly), I feel that I have to keep up with the news – not just market/financial news, but geopolitics and local politics. Therefore, I spend a good deal of my daytime hours perusing multiple news sources.

As I do so, I find that I am increasingly plagued by anxiety, dread and even rage (my reaction always to bullying of any stripe) at what I see happening – both in my own country and the world. [I will not identify specific social/political groups and activities, as I do not think that would be appropriate here.]

I do not believe I can “hide” in an Epicurean Garden (not that I think that was what Epicurus advocated – even with his recommendation to, insofar as possible, live an obscure life). Even as I live a quasi-reclusive lifestyle, I am aware that what happens in the larger world can directly impact our lives. (And I am, in consultation with my wife, diverting some resources to what I consider just causes.)

I recall that Cassius (Amicus) has spoken to this kind of thing before: e.g., in discussing the other Epicurean Cassius who participated robustly in Roman politics.

I am just asking for some counsel from the wise people here on how to maintain some *ataraxia* as I confront the burgeoning tumult. Thanks to any and all in advance. (And apologies if this is not appropriate.)

Pacatus

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**Post by “Cassius” of July 19, 2022 at 6:24 PM**

Pacatus I think it is a completely appropriate post, and it sounds like you and I are quite alike.

I work in a field that requires me to stay up on the latest news and developments in society, and I too spend a lot of time monitoring (but not necessarily engaging with) people talking about current events.

And I don't have any problem reconciling that with Epicurus -- he too was very aware of what was going on in the world.

Now in this post I am not making many good suggestions, but I will come back. I just want to first stake out the position that I am convinced that an Epicurean does want to know what is going on around him, at the very least to be able to meet the threats that naturally come our way.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of July 19, 2022 at 7:42 PM**

The first suggestion I would make is something that I try to do myself and sometimes can't avoid even when I forget - remembering that death is going to come all too soon and that will be my last chance for pleasure.

Now I can see that some people would say that would add to anxiety, but I think this is one of the parts of Epicurus (of course he always does this) embraces truth so as to make the most out of life.

I take more comfort in knowing that my time is limited, and that I know I better make the best of it, than I do in thinking I would love longer under an illusion.

Plus that keeps the day to day politics in perspective. Whatever we are facing right now pales in comparison to what most of humanity has had to face in the past, especially when we keep in mind there is no fate and whatever game we are following is not really over for good at least til the world ends.

Of course in any case too I choose to do use my energies on the longer game of what I think is at or near the root cause of most problem - false religions and philosophies. If we are really convinced that Epicurus was right then I think that produces a worldview that makes day to day politics more livable. Most of the people caught up in it don't know or care about the background issues, and they are just pawns in the larger game. Kind of like the opening of book two in Lucretius we can take comfort that for all our troubles we at least have a significant part of the bigger problem figured out.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of July 19, 2022 at 8:14 PM**

Regarding investments:

Many years ago and after much research, I became a passive investor. I moved all of my equity investments into index ETFs. These funds were in several segments of the market, and I allocated them as best as I could based on the research I did at the time. Since then, every six months I do some math and rebalance my allocations as necessary.

Obviously this isn't for everyone. But I have found that I don't worry about investing, and I've stopped feeling the need to check news as regards investing.

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## Post by “Joshua” of July 19, 2022 at 8:28 PM

Ah! That dread and dismal realm of human underachievement called 'politics'!

The first thing I recommend is a corrective--a palate cleanser, if you will. If you cannot steer wide of politics, then at least allow yourself the pleasure of a temporary restorative. In their art the Greeks called this *Catharsis*. In medicine, relief. Sometimes this is as easy as reframing your perspective: say, by gazing at the forbidding immensity of space;

### Quote

The stars are the apexes of what wonderful triangles! What distant and different beings in the various mansions of the universe are contemplating the same one at the same moment! Nature and human life are as various as our several constitutions. Who shall say what prospect life offers to another? Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant?

Or by sitting quietly at the back door.

### Quote

There were times when I could not afford to sacrifice the bloom of the present moment to any work, whether of the head or hands. I love a broad margin to my life. Sometimes, in a summer morning, having taken my accustomed bath, I sat in my sunny doorway from sunrise till noon, rapt in a reverie, amidst the pines and hickories and sumachs, in undisturbed solitude and stillness, while the birds sing around or flitted noiseless through the house, until by the sun falling in at my west window, or the noise

of some traveller's wagon on the distant highway, I was reminded of the lapse of time. I grew in those seasons like corn in the night, and they were far better than any work of the hands would have been. They were not time subtracted from my life, but so much over and above my usual allowance.

Sometimes it takes a single day well spent, going slowly un-mindful of the world.

#### Quote

Let us spend one day as deliberately as Nature, and not be thrown off the track by every nutshell and mosquito's wing that falls on the rails. Let us rise early and fast, or break fast, gently and without perturbation; let company come and let company go, let the bells ring and the children cry -- determined to make a day of it. Why should we knock under and go with the stream? Let us not be upset and overwhelmed in that terrible rapid and whirlpool called a dinner, situated in the meridian shallows. Weather this danger and you are safe, for the rest of the way is down hill. With unrelaxed nerves, with morning vigor, sail by it, looking another way, tied to the mast like Ulysses. If the engine whistles, let it whistle till it is hoarse for its pains. If the bell rings, why should we run? We will consider what kind of music they are like. Let us settle ourselves, and work and wedge our feet downward through the mud and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance, that alluvion which covers the globe, through Paris and London, through New York and Boston and Concord, through Church and State, through poetry and philosophy and religion, till we come to a hard bottom and rocks in place, which we

can call reality, and say, This is, and no mistake; and then begin, having a point d'appui, below freshet and frost and fire, a place where you might find a wall or a state, or set a lamp-post safely, or perhaps a gauge, not a Nilometer, but a Realometer, that future ages might know how deep a freshet of shams and appearances had gathered from time to time. If you stand right fronting and face to face to a fact, you will see the sun glimmer on both its surfaces, as if it were a cimeter, and feel its sweet edge dividing you through the heart and marrow, and so you will happily conclude your mortal career. Be it life or death, we crave only reality. If we are really dying, let us hear the rattle in our throats and feel cold in the extremities; if we are alive, let us go about our business.

Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars. I cannot count one. I know not the first letter of the alphabet. I have always been regretting that I was as the day I was born.

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So much for the Sage of Walden Pond. But how to proceed?

Here are some ideas:

- Throttle your news intake. This is difficult, but I think essential. More copy is printed everyday than a person could possibly read, and there are no points for trying! Curate your news reading, and try to do it efficiently. I used to get the Economist delivered. If I still had a subscription, I'd get an E-reader for it. At all costs avoid the endless 24-hour-news internet click machine! People made it through two world wars with a daily

newspaper. Get through it quickly, and have done with it.

- Read dispassionate reporting, dispassionately. The former is difficult to find, and the latter more difficult to do, but we can try. When I read about the end of the Roman Republic, I'm not rooting for a side; this "old news" means nothing to me. And the day is not far off when the geopolitics of 2022 won't mean much to me either. Try to situate yourself in that context. Imagine what it would be like to read about this year in 2122. BO-RING! This isn't an argument for cynicism or jadedness. This is advice meant to direct our passion to the things we care most about. Thoreau didn't care who sat in the governor's mansion, but he did care deeply about the horror of slavery, and that was where he directed his effort and attention.
- Recognize that you cannot carry the world's traumas on your shoulders, and that it's not even a reasonable thing to ask. It sometimes feels heartless to disconnect from politics, or to neglect the news, when so many people are suffering. But just knowing about it doesn't really help, does it?

#### Quote

The fate of the country does not depend on who you vote for at the polls--the worst man is as strong as the best at that game; it does not depend on what kind of paper you drop into the ballot box once a year, but on what kind of man you drop from your chamber into the street every morning.

All quotes from Henry David Thoreau

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### **Post by "Cassius" of July 19, 2022 at 8:30 PM**

Pacatus I took the liberty of putting a subtitle in the Thread title to make it more explanatory of the topic. Feel free to adjust that as you think appropriate, but it's a good thread so I wanted to make it more findable for the future.

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### **Post by "Don" of July 19, 2022 at 10:42 PM**

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

I do not believe I can “hide” in an Epicurean Garden (not that I think that was what Epicurus advocated – even with his recommendation to, insofar as possible, live an obscure life)

We had an interesting, in-depth discussion on "live unknown" a couple years ago:

Post

### [What "Live Unknown" means to me \(Lathe Biosas\)](#)

Fragment 551 famously reads λάθε βιώσας and is usually translated as "Live unknown." It could also be translated as "Live hidden," "Live unnoticed," or "Live while escaping notice."

But how do we square this coming from Epicurus who is known two thousand years after he died. Did he live by this maxim? We can't say Epicurus was even unknown during his life. So how are we to understand λάθε βιώσας as it pertains to him and ourselves?

Epicurus encouraged people to shun the world of politics and the...



Don

March 7, 2020 at 11:12 PM

You might need interested in what was said in that thread.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of July 20, 2022 at 12:41 AM**

Another way to approach the problem is through the categories of desires. The problem laid out in post #1 involves all the categories: natural and necessary, natural and unnecessary, and unnatural. The problem is to break down the problem and see which parts you would align with which categories. Pleasure as well as pain is involved in the situation; in looking at them and analyzing the various feelings as results of particular categories you might find some clarity.

Without assigning them to categories, because that would reflect my values and not yours, here are some of the pieces:

- desire for financial security
- desire for a massive amount of financial security

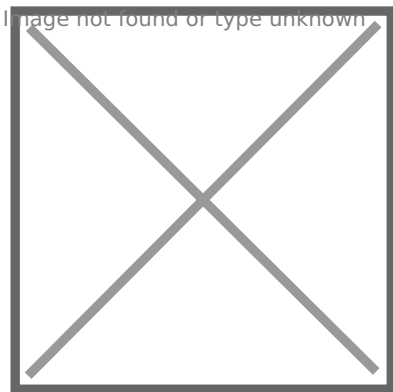
- desire to manage your own finances
- desire to keep up with financial news
- desire to keep up with geopolitical news

There are probably more moving parts than this, but you get the idea. For each desire I've listed, plus any others involved, think deeply as to whether it's a need (natural and necessary), a want (natural and unnecessary), or an unhealthy obsession (unnatural and unnecessary). [Note: I borrowed this language from Nate's excellent introduction to his compilation of Key Doctrines.] This is a method to figure out how to align your actions with your values and with the end goal of pleasure.

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### **Post by “Don” of July 20, 2022 at 6:45 AM**

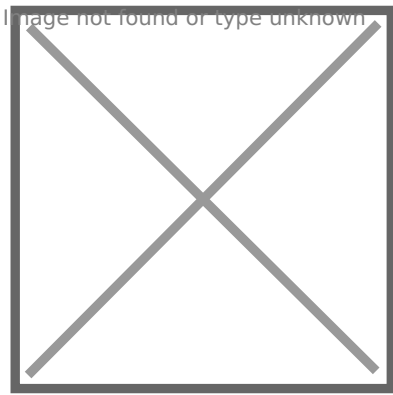
You might want to look up Philodemus' On Property Management for an actual ancient Epicurean's perspective on this topic:



[Philodemus: On Property Management](#)

Voila Tsouna provides a translation, extensive introduction, and notes on Philodemus's treatise "On Property Management." A fragmentary version of...  
[www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu)

Here's an article Hiram wrote:



### [On Philodemus' Art of Property Management](#)

An overview and commentary of a scroll written by 1st Century Epicurean philosopher Philodemus of Gadara titled &quot;On Property Management&quot;. The main...  
[www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu)

I realize this may be too "in the weeds" but I wanted to point out that these topics were being discussed in the Garden 2,000 years ago.

I thought that quote from Philodemus was on point about not feeling distressed by what one loses. I take that to mean don't invest recklessly and stay within your means. But he had much more to say, some applicable to modern life, other advice not so much. But it can be instructive to get a different perspective possibly.

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### **Post by "Pacatus" of July 20, 2022 at 10:57 AM**

First of all: thanks to all for your generous responses. I plan to take the time to read them all carefully (and more than once, including the links that Don provided) -- they deserve no less. My own responses will likely be patchwork, as I go.

I want to say that trading is not, in itself, stressful to me -- but an enjoyable activity. I am not investing to build wealth, but merely to augment our current income a bit (which does have a secondary effect of some capital preservation). To that end, I have found a niche as a "swing trader," which works for me. We are satisfied with our fairly frugal, simple lifestyle. Although we occasionally feast, my wife (perhaps showing her inner Epicurus) often quotes to me: "Enough is a feast."

With that said, I realize that I have neglected a hedonic calculus when it comes to balancing our private life and social concerns (as Godfrey reminds me). I have also been neglecting practices that I already have (such as various forms of meditation). The result is that my life has become out of balance. I need to be more diligent. Also, I hope to incorporate some of the fine

suggestions you guys have offered -- like building in more "Walden time" (thanks, Joshua; Thoreau, who was also an ardent abolitionist and wrote about civil disobedience, is a good example of someone who sustained that kind of balance -- but I would do well to revisit *On Walden Pond*).

I need to screen my news intake: what is helpful, what is not (hedonic calculus again) -- and start to weed out a bunch of it. The same for what I can and cannot reasonably contribute regarding social concerns -- without letting "the world's traumas" weigh me down. To monitor the kind of balance that I think Principal Doctrine 5 might describe.

And I need to remember that life is transient (thanks Cassius): "Memento mori" -- which Don pointed out to me is not reserved to the Stoics ("Epicureans remember death to remind us to pay heed to the sweetness of life in the here and now")

Again, thanks to all.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of July 20, 2022 at 11:32 AM**

Re-reading your last post, Pacatus, reminds me of another obvious point. In my humble opinion, you would be "out of balance" if you did NOT react negatively to many current events. It's the Stoics who think that you can "rise above it all" and be so detached that no negative news affects you. I do not think that Epicurus would say that that is either possible or desirable for us humans. Rather the appropriate quote would be:

#### Quote

There are three motives to injurious acts among men—hatred, envy, and contempt; and these the wise man overcomes by reason. Moreover, he who has once become wise never more assumes the opposite habit, not even in semblance, if he can help it. He will be more susceptible of emotion than other men: that will be no hindrance to his wisdom. However, not every bodily constitution nor every nationality would permit a man to become wise.

If you aren't feeling (responding) positively to good things and negatively to bad things, then you're not alive. The Stoics might think such a state (detachment from emotion) to be desirable, but I do not think Epicurus taught that. He taught lack of feeling as synonymous with death.

This is why the continuing discussion of the implications of "absence of pain." "Absence of pain" cannot be numbness or lack of feeling, but is instead the unalloyed experience (feeling) of

whatever combination of pleasures applies to your experience.

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### **Post by “Pacatus” of July 20, 2022 at 12:04 PM**

Yes. That's helpful. And not letting emotions become a hindrance also harks back to your earlier comments about keeping the day-to-day politics in perspective and embracing a worldview that makes the day-to-day politics "more livable." One can surely avoid becoming mired in what I call the "soap opera" without getting lost in some blank-mind "nirvana" of numbness. The sources I am weeding out are the ones that include too much toward soap-operatic stuff (where I got caught) -- as opposed to information and analysis, and reasoned opinion, which I can get from better sources.

To live is to feel -- both sensation and emotion.

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### **Post by “Pacatus” of July 20, 2022 at 12:13 PM**

[Quote from Don](#)

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

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Yes, that thread is helpful. I especially liked this quote by you: "One may say he lived, let's say at most, unobtrusively but was NOT disengaged from society, his friends, and those that sought him out." Also, Cassius' point about Cassius Longinus.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of July 20, 2022 at 1:18 PM**

Yes - presuming that last comment is a reference to Atticus - We haven't discussed him lately, but his bio is a very good example of how one can be an avowed Epicurean with friends on all sides in troubled times.

[Epicurus.info : E-Texts : The Life of Atticus](https://www.epicurus.info)

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### **Post by “Pacatus” of July 20, 2022 at 4:31 PM**

[Joshua](#)

I just took the time to enjoy an afternoon martini on our shaded deck. This time, I left my smartphone behind -- so that I could not compulsively check the news, etc. Just watched the breeze in the trees, listened to birdsong, and enjoyed the sight of a red-tailed hawk flashing her colors in the sun. Even in our towny setting, a "Walden moment." 😊 Thank you.