

# PD19 And The Meaning Of No "Greater" Pleasure

**Post by "Cassius" of August 11, 2022 at 6:16 AM**

Last night in our Wednesday Zoom meeting we discussion [PD19](#) and [PD20](#), and I have to say that I think many of us (including me) could do a lot to improve our explanation of what these doctrines, and especially [PD20](#) really means. I don't think many of us (again including me) are as quick as we should be to be able to explain what Epicurus' attitude toward "variation" and really was, and whether variation is to be looked on as desirable or not. A very similar issue is Epicurus' attitude toward the length of time of pleasure. Is pleasure of a longer time desirable over pleasure of a shorter time?

The primary issue is that I think we can expect most "regular people" to interpret "Infinite time contains no greater pleasure than limited time, if one measures, by reason, the limits of pleasure." (Bailey) as very close to patently false and nonsensical on its face. They will reason that longer time periods afford more opportunity for pleasure over time, and that more pleasure over time equates to "greater" pleasure. I do not think that interpretation is an unreasonable construction, so if we intend to communicate with people of ordinary experience and understanding, we have to be able to provide an explanation of how "measuring the limits of pleasure by reason" make such an observation supportable.

Personally I think it is absolutely inadequate - and not what Epicurus meant - to try to say something like "The limit of pleasure is met when pain is absent and so therefore once you obtain painlessness for a moment if does you no good to live a longer time." I do not think that is what Epicurus meant, but even assuming for a moment that that is what he meant, I don't find that explanation at all satisfying myself, and I would not ask a hypothetical "younger person studying Epicurean philosophy - or anyone else - to accept it.

Therefore I would like to use this thread to get suggestions as to the best way to explain this doctrine. Before I launch off into what i would suggest myself I will let this thread simmer for a while and see if we can get some suggestions. Don't be afraid to submit them even if they are only half thought out, or to say that you do or don't find the suggestions that are made to be satisfying, because this is a very complicated issue.

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**Post by "Don" of August 11, 2022 at 7:37 AM**

I don't believe you can read [PD20](#) in isolation. You have to read it as it was most likely written, in context with the surrounding text.

In fact, I took a look at the Arundel MS 531 to try and figure out where the breaks in the text were at least in this manuscript from 1450-1500:

[https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=arundel\\_ms\\_531\\_fs001r](https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=arundel_ms_531_fs001r)

(Flip to page f.177r (folio 177 reverse))

In line 9, there seems to be a specific gap right before what we call [PD18](#): Οὐκ ἐπαύξεται... So, we start reading this section from [PD18](#) and read on until we get another gap. I'm using Saint-Andre's translations. The next gap to my eye appears to be in line 3 on the next page (177v)

Lo and behold, that ends with καὶ ταραχῆς ἔσται μεστά. which is the end of [PD22](#).

[PD18](#) through [PD22](#) should then be read as a complete paragraph:

#### Quote

As soon as the pain produced by the lack of something is removed, pleasure in the flesh is not increased but only embellished. Yet the limit of enjoyment in the mind is produced by thinking through these very things and similar things, which once provoked the greatest fears in the mind. Finite time and infinite time contain the same amount of joy, if its limits are measured out through reasoning. The flesh assumes that the limits of joy are infinite, and that infinite joy can be produced only through infinite time. But the mind, thinking through the goal and limits of the flesh and dissolving fears about eternity, produces a complete way of life and therefore has no need of infinite time; yet the mind does not flee from joy, nor when events cause it to exit from life does it look back as if it has missed any aspect of the best life. One who perceives the limits of life knows how easy it is to expel the pain produced by a lack of something and to make one's entire life complete; so that there is no need for the things that are achieved through struggle. You must reflect on the fundamental goal and everything that is clear, to which opinions are referred; if you do not, all will be full of trouble and confusion.

This makes sense in that it begins talking about "thinking through these very things.." and ends with "You must reflect on..."

Those are my initial contributions to the topic: Don't try to parse it in isolation.

I'll no doubt have more to say as the thread continues, but the day calls me and I must answer (if I want to get paid ya know 😊).

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## Post by “Don” of August 11, 2022 at 8:24 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Personally I think it is absolutely inadequate - and not what Epicurus meant - to try to say something like "The limit of pleasure is met when pain is absent and so therefore once you obtain painlessness for a moment it does you no good to live a longer time."

Your comment "for a moment" is off the mark. It's not experiencing "the limit of pleasure" "for a moment" then going about your day. It's experiencing the limit of pleasure as part of your whole life, you experience life with this pleasure filling your mind and body. That's why ataraxia and aponia are important components of an Epicurean life. Once you are experiencing full pleasure without mental troubles or bodily pain, it doesn't matter if it lasts a moment and you die or you live 100 years then die or live an infinite number of years and die. He says, in this state at the limit of pleasure, "the mind does not flee from joy." There are innumerable ways to vary the pleasure, but you can't increase it once the limit has been reached. That's why - "reasoning it out" - a moment or infinity can conceivably contain the same amount of pleasure. Now, is this achievable for any being other than a god? Epicurus seems to think so because we are told that if we do, we live as gods among mortals.

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## Post by “Cassius” of August 11, 2022 at 9:42 AM

Let's say we go with this alternate translation Don quoted above, and forget the "for a moment" for the time being:

### Quote

"Finite time and infinite time contain the same amount of joy, if its limits are measured out through reasoning. "

Is a normal person using these words normally and giving them their normal and ordinary meanings expected to understand that a life of 25 years contains the same amount of joy as a life of 50 years?

If so, please explain how that works. If that's not a clear implication of this statement, how is it not?

[Please remember everyone that I am to some extent playing "devil's advocate" here in an attempt to draw this out more clearly. I do think that this can be made to make sense, but I am also convinced that the way that most people will interpret these words superficially will make no sense at all to them and thus be a barrier to their advancing further in studying Epicurus.]

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## Post by “Don” of August 11, 2022 at 4:14 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Is a normal person using these words normally and giving them their normal and ordinary meanings expected to understand that a life of 25 years contains the same amount of joy as a life of 50 years?

First, the normal/average person would most likely be included in what Epicurus calls the "hoi polloi" "the many/the masses/the crowd", so their understanding of life - almost by definition - may not coincide with what Epicurus would call "correct belief." So their normal understanding may be beside the point. In fact, he says "The flesh assumes that the limits of joy are infinite." That's the "normal" understanding. Epicurus was there to provide medicine not validate someone's preconceived normal understanding. So there's that.

Second, I don't believe it's a quantity, an "amount" of pleasure, that's being referred to. That seems a Platonic or Aristotelian argument against pleasure being able to be the goal of life. Epicurus fought against this "I need to rack up as many hedonic credits as I can. Then I win!"

Third, I am becoming firmly convinced that we need to do away with bulleted list of [Principal Doctrines](#) and begin to read it as it was written. As a prose text, not a list. If read that way, the answer is in the text. How do we "reason" it out? "the mind, thinking through the goal and limits of the flesh and dissolving fears about eternity, produces a complete way of life and therefore has no need of infinite time." We think through what it means for pleasure to have a limit. Well, it seems to me Epicurus is saying that once we have filled every nook and cranny of our minds with peace and pleasure and rid it of fears and anxieties and troubled thoughts and have a sure confidence of not losing that, you're filled up. You can vary your pleasure, but at that point your perspective on life is unassailable, filled with joy, in fact your mind never flees from joy, that is your default mode of being and interacting with the world. Living in that way is what can make one equal to the gods.

If someone thinks they need to try and rack up the hedonic points and need infinite time to do it (which will only end in frustration btw), they're welcome to ring up the Cyrenaics.

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

[Please remember everyone that I am to some extent playing "devil's advocate" here in an attempt to draw this out more clearly.

Ditto.... In some respects 😊

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 11, 2022 at 5:01 PM**

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

Third, I am becoming firmly convinced that we need to do away with bulleted list of [Principal Doctrines](#) and begin to read it as it was written. As a prose text, not a list. If read that way, the answer is in the text. How do we "reason" it out? "the mind, thinking through the goal and limits of the flesh and dissolving fears about eternity, produces a complete way of life and therefore has no need of infinite time." We think through what it means for pleasure to have a limit. Well, it seems to me Epicurus is saying that once we have filled every nook and cranny of our minds with peace and pleasure and rid it of fears and anxieties and troubled thoughts and have a sure confidence of not losing that, you're filled up. You can vary your pleasure, but at that point your perspective on life is unassailable, filled with joy, in fact your mind never flees from joy, that is your default mode of being and interacting with the world. Living in that way is what can make one equal to the gods.

I largely agree with this, especially as to the need to read it as a narrative so as to get the full context.

However I observe that maybe the majority of "scholars" out there are happy to read the sentence in the letter to Menoeceus almost as if Epicurus never said anything else:

"When, therefore, we maintain that pleasure is the end, we do not mean the pleasures of profligates and those that consist in sensuality, as is supposed by some who are either ignorant or disagree with us or do not understand, but freedom from pain in the body and from trouble in the mind."

So I think it would be good training for us to take the most controversial sentences the same way that they are often taken by less-sympathetic writers and look for the best responses.

In this case I do think that the key is going to be found in Epicurus' intent as to the word translated here as "greater." We are regularly hitting a wall in our discussions as to whether one pleasure is "greater" or "better" or "more desirable" than another, and I think the answer is that at least as to the individual, the answer is clearly yes. And as Epicurus said as to the man at the banquet, we don't look for the longest but the "most pleasant."

Ultimately I think we have to dive into the issues involving what "most pleasant" really means. I feel certain that we can eliminate "duration" as the primary meaning, although duration is probably one component of several. We've discussed "intensity" and other words in the past. I think what you have written Don here is key "once we have filled every nook and cranny of our minds with peace and pleasure and rid it of fears and anxieties and troubled thoughts and have a sure confidence of not losing that, you're filled up..." but I think it takes further explanation to really make that clear -- explanation of the issue of "variation" and our proper attitude towards it, for example.

In fact right now I think "variation" is a prime subject to explore, because a lot of our wording seems to deprecate variation further than I think Epicurus probably intended for us to understand his teaching to be.

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### **Post by “Don” of August 11, 2022 at 5:49 PM**

Imma gonna let some others weigh in before I spout off again... Just in case anyone is waiting for my response to [Cassius](#) . So...

Tag! You're it, y'all!

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of August 11, 2022 at 8:09 PM**

Quote

Finite time and infinite time contain the same amount of joy, if its limits are measured out through reasoning.

At the risk of over-simplifying, this line jumps out at me. A human lifespan is by nature limited and there is no afterlife. So I'm seeing this line as contrasting a limited, natural lifespan with an unlimited amount of time. One's life contains a fixed amount of joy, no matter that time may be infinite. He's referring to his reasoning on the vanity of the fear of death. There's no need for hypotheticals here, just sensible reasoning.

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### Post by “Cassius” of August 11, 2022 at 9:03 PM

Godfrey you are saying that he is saying that because human lifespans are by nature finite then it is useless to talk about infinite time(?)

I think that is true and possibly a part of the issue, but for a man who prodes himself on clarity I think Epicurus could have said exactly that had that been the main point he wanted to make. If that was intended to be his main point, that strikes me as a "too cute" way of stating a subject on which he would likely have been deadly earnest.

Rather than me be the heavy here and always sound like I am disagreeing maybe the best way to eventually approach this is to round up some volunteer 20 to 30 year olds and run our proposals by them for reaction.

We are far from being finished with our proposals so we need more first, but my personal litmus test is whether those intelligent 20-30 year olds will say that they (1) find the proposed point understandable AND (2) find it convincing given what they know themselves regardless of what they think of Epicurean philosophy.

I am hoping we can draft [Charles](#) and [reneliza](#) and @smoothiekiwi and @Root304 and [DavidN](#) as a start. Who am I missing who is generally in that "youthful" category? If you think of others please tag them here in this thread too. I apologize if I missed someone but I am not sure of all the ages we have here.

No offense to those of us who are "aging out" but I think this is one of those real litmus test questions where people tend to gloss over taking a position by fitting it into the black box of "limit of pleasure is absence of pain", and I think it would help to get a more youthful "vigorous" perspective.

We know that Epicurus has clearly said (to Menoeceus) that we do not pick the largest quantity at a banquet, but the "most pleasant." Do we not therefore think that there is something at work here in [PD19](#) other than a reference to our limited lifespan?

To call up another memory, I suspect that Reneliza's pink circles are relevant here. I wonder if she thinks they are?

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 11, 2022 at 9:11 PM**

I really think it is useful to talk in terms of picture analogies like the pink circles.

Another useful analogy is the jelly bean jar that is filled to the brim with jelly beans.

Once filled, the jar cannot hold any further beans. But if we force more into it with the result of crowding some out that spill, we have "variation" of the contents of the jar.

Do we agree that variation of the contents is desirable, if not absolutely necessary?

What of the amount of time which the jar survives to hold those beans while they are varying? Is the amount of time the jar holds together not at least relevant in some way to the total number of beans gathered within it over time?

It makes perfect and obvious sense to say that once filled the jar cannot hold more at a single moment.

But I would submit that it makes no sense at all to totally ignore the larger total number of jelly beans that a jar that lasts 50 years can gather over a jar that lasts ten years.

Do not BOTH observations have to be considered in summarizing the big picture?

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### **Post by "Kalosyni" of August 11, 2022 at 9:18 PM**

This all very good, and I will need to ponder on it for while!

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 11, 2022 at 9:20 PM**

I would add that I think it would be a major mistake to think that Epicurus would suggest that "word games" can change reality. The reality is that a person who lives 50 years can experience a much larger total number of pleasurable experiences than can a person who lives only 20 years and dies. No fine words from Epicurus or anyone else could hope to change the "inequity" of that situation. Life is not fair - there are no gods or fate to make it so.

But is it not still useful to point out to people that no matter how many years they live, each day is still essentially a repetition in many ways of past days - from a "nothing new under the sun" perspective. And that at some point if we think about it closely enough we can recognize that an endless series of similar experiences would eventually tire us out in a Bill Murray "Groundhog Day" kind of way. And that if we concentrate on filling our jelly bean jars on the days we have available to us, then when our end nears we can understand that we did the best we could with our time, and that if we had longer to live we would not be able to experience a more intense form of pleasure that we had somehow missed out on, but simply more time filling and refilling the same amount of jelly beans in our jar.

At least for me, the older I get the more I do in fact see that doing the same things over and over again does in fact "get old" no matter how much I like them the first times around.

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### **Post by "Godfrey" of August 12, 2022 at 1:33 AM**

[Cassius](#) I think these PDs are making the same point that you frequently make: one's life is finite and there's no afterlife, so make the most of the time you have. As we don't pick the most at a banquet (which is also finite) but the most pleasant. The more I read them, the more I see that as the point. No talk of jellybeans is necessary for these PDs, that discussion only confuses the point here.

At least that's my current take. I found these rather baffling before reading this thread, but this seems to me to be the clearest reading. I don't think Epicurus was playing word games. I think he was making the above point, and elaborates by emphasizing the language he uses elsewhere regarding the goal of life. He doesn't use word games but he does write things in such a way that you have to think about them and thereby make them your own.

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### **Post by "Titus" of August 12, 2022 at 1:52 AM**

Personally, I would interpret [PD19](#) in the sense that we should not worry about the idea of infinitive ages but focus on a good standing in our nowadays condition and be happy about it. The only characters enjoying constant and infinitive pleasure are the unshakable "gods" but our consistency is bound on the atomic variability of the universe. Therefore we should enjoy and not disturb ourselves with unrealistic ideas of perfect and infinitive forms.

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## **Post by “Cassius” of August 12, 2022 at 6:51 AM**

### [Quote from Titus](#)

Personally, I would interpret [PD19](#) in the sense that we should not worry about the idea of infinitive ages but focus on a good standing in our nowadays condition and be happy about it.

Yes i think that is the lesson to be learned, but is there not also in here a "why we shouldn't worry" aspect beyond the fact that it is not possible for us to rival the length of life that the "gods" enjoy?

### [Quote from Titus](#)

Therefore we should enjoy and not disturb ourselves with unrealistic ideas of perfect and infinitive forms.

And to ask the question the same way, isn't he saying that there is no "need" for a longer or infinite lifespan, because from a certain mental perspective the longer lifespan does not translate into an improvement?

What I am saying is that pretty clearly, as everyone so far is observing, we don't "need" an infinite span of life, even if it were available to us. He's saying there is some mental perspective from which a longer time is not "better" than a shorter time (thus the banquet analogy). Can we not improve our ability to articulate what that perspective is, describing also how "variation" (additional experiences) do not improve the picture?

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## **Post by “Don” of August 12, 2022 at 8:38 AM**

I am very intrigued by [Godfrey](#) 's Interpretation and as it's expanded on by others.

Let's take a look at what [pd19](#) actually says, because I think a case could be made for [Godfrey](#) 's novel (to me) take on it.

That specific line says:

Ὁ ἄπειρος χρόνος ἴσην ἔχει τὴν ἡδονὴν καὶ ὁ πεπερασμένος (χρόνος)...

I've added the second χρόνος for clarity.

So we're dealing with:

Ὁ ἄπειρος χρόνος infinite time (khronos)

καὶ ὁ πεπερασμένος (χρόνος) and finite (time)

The infinite is the same word used to describe the number of worlds, the extent of the universe, and atoms.

πεπερασμένος is finite, limited, bounded

Greek can split up phrases like that so the arrangement is no big deal other than that he might emphasized the infinite time by placing it first.

ἴσην ἔχει τὴν ἡδονὴν has equal pleasure

isēn ekhei tēn hēdonēn

isēn is from isos where we get isometric, isosceles, etc. It means Same, equal, etc.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 12, 2022 at 8:41 AM**

Don how would you restate what Godfrey is saying?

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### **Post by "Godfrey" of August 12, 2022 at 2:50 PM**

A key point for me is that infinite and finite *time* are being discussed, not infinite and finite *life*. Those are two completely different discussions.

Quote

The flesh assumes that the limits of joy are infinite, and that infinite joy can be produced only through infinite time. But the mind, thinking through the goal and limits of the flesh and dissolving fears about eternity, produces a complete way of life and therefore has no need of infinite time;

I think that this passage is specifically making that point. If you understand the limits of the flesh and don't fear being dead, then you can focus on the goal without stressing over the fact that you won't live forever. There's no point in thinking about infinite pleasure because the flesh doesn't last forever. Revel in the time you have, as it were.

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### Post by “Don” of August 12, 2022 at 3:08 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Don how would you restate what Godfrey is saying?

Actually, I think [Godfrey](#) has done a good job right there of what I might have said 😊

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### Post by “Godfrey” of August 12, 2022 at 7:20 PM

Why thank you [Don](#) !

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### Post by “Cassius” of August 12, 2022 at 8:37 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

At least that's my current take. I found these rather baffling before reading this thread, but this seems to me to be the clearest reading.

And that is the point of this thread! 😊

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### **Post by “Don” of August 12, 2022 at 9:38 PM**

[Godfrey](#) , I'm going to take a shot at paraphrasing my understanding of your interpretation. Please correct me if I'm wrong!

- Bounded, finite time is contained within infinite time.
- We can only experience finite time as mortal beings.
- Therefore, the only pleasure we can actually experience is finite no matter how we might desire infinite pleasures; so we need not (nor should not) concern ourselves with worrying about infinite time or infinite pleasures.

Am I close?

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of August 13, 2022 at 12:31 AM**

[Don](#) : yes, that's a good paraphrase!

I would add that the PDs are stated in terms of limits and of nature, which ties into other uses of those terms. But yours is a good summary of the point of these particular PDs, at least as I currently understand them.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 13, 2022 at 2:26 AM**

Here is *some* of the key material on this from DeWitt's chapter on "The New Hedonism". This excerpt starts in the middle of the previous section before the immortality discussion.

It is impossible to whip up a thirst or an appetite superior to that created by natural hunger and thirst. To the youthful Menoeceus Epicurus writes: "Plain-tasting foods bring a pleasure equal to that of luxurious diet when once the pain arising from need has been removed, and bread and water afford the very keenest pleasure when one in need of them brings them to his lips." 22 This is the fixed ceiling for pleasure, which he endeavors to establish in opposition to Plato, who compared the appetitive part of the soul to "a many-headed beast" and held to the opinion that desires increase endlessly and that pleasure defied the fixing of a limit.<sup>23</sup>

The natural and necessary desires that still await mention are those for clothing and shelter. The authorized teaching concerning these will be made plain by the first half of Authorized Doctrine 18: "The pleasure in the flesh is incapable of increase when once the pain arising from need has been removed but is merely embellished." The Greek word here rendered "embellished" has also been translated by "varied" and by "variegated," but these renderings fall short of revealing the meaning. Seneca does better when interpreting the word as "to season, as it were, and divert."<sup>24</sup> This is correct; to luxurious men it is a fact that eating is a way of passing the time. Epicurus himself applies the word *poikilmata*, "embellishments," to food, Vatican Saying 69: "It is the ingratitude of the soul that makes the creature endlessly lickerish of embellishments in diet."

Cicero, however, happens to be our best guide, because the meaning of his version is made clear by Lucretius. He says "the pleasure can be *variari distinguique* but not increased." <sup>25</sup> The first of the verbs italicized applies properly to color and the second to needlework, as may be gleaned in the lexicon. Lucretius confirms this: "It hurts us not a whit to lack the garment bright with purple and gold and embroidered with striking designs, provided there still be a plain cloak to fend off the cold." <sup>26</sup>

When once the meaning of *poikillo* has been fixed as "embellish" and applicable alike to diet, clothing, and housing, the doctrine can be extended with precision. The function of walls is to afford protection from the weather; the enjoyment of this is a basic pleasure, and, being basic, cannot be increased. If the walls are decorated, the enjoyment of them is merely a decorative pleasure. Similarly, the function of a garment is to avert the pain arising from cold and the resulting pleasure is basic and, being such, cannot be increased but is merely embellished if the cloth is gaily colored or brocaded.

The case is not different in respect of diet. The satisfaction of natural hunger is the basic pleasure, which is not increased but merely embellished by richness of diet. Epicurus is recorded by a late doxographer as saying: "I am gorged with pleasure in this poor body of mine living on bread and water." <sup>27</sup> Porphyry records him as saying: "It is better for you to lie down upon a cheap cot and be free of fear than to have a gilded bedstead and a luxurious table and be full of trouble." <sup>28</sup>

In the same Authorized Doctrine, 18, in which the ceiling of pleasure for the flesh is defined, the ceiling of pleasure for the mind is set forth: "As for the mind, its limit of pleasure is begotten by reasoning out these very problems and those akin to these, all that once created the worst fears for the mind." These words need not seem enigmatical: the worst fears are created for the mind through false opinions concerning death and the gods, the topic of Authorized Doctrines 1 and 2. These fears rank in point of importance with false opinions concerning pleasure and pain, the topic of Doctrines 2 and 4. The cure for all these false opinions and the fears they entail was dubbed by detractors the tetrapharmakon, or fourfold remedy. It is charmingly elaborated by Epicurus in the letter to Menoecus, which alone of his extant writings possesses literary grace.

In this letter the doctrine of the basic pleasures and the consequent fullness of pleasure is elaborated: "It is for this that we do everything, to be free from pain and fear, and when we succeed in this, all the tempest of the soul is stilled, the creature feeling no need to go farther as to something lacking and to seek something else by which the good of soul and body shall be made perfect."<sup>29</sup> In speaking of "going farther" and "seeking something more" he refers to the superfluous or merely embellishing pleasures.

#### PLEASURE NOT INCREASED BY IMMORTALITY

At the same time that the denial of immortality resulted in placing body and soul upon a parity and required the formulation of a dualistic good, it demanded a doctrinal counterpoise for the surrender of belief in immortality. That this surrender was recognized in the reasoning of Epicurus as a further delimitation of the scope of pleasure is indicated by the position of the Authorized Doctrine in which the remedial doctrine is stated; it is No. 19 and follows that on the ceilings of pleasure: "Infinite time and finite time are characterized by equal pleasure, if one measures the limits of pleasure by reason." This is both paradoxical and subtle. It is shocking to Christian feeling and was hardly less so to the pagan of antiquity. To the multitude, as Lucretius observed, it was a gloomy and repulsive thought.<sup>30</sup> To Platonists, with their stately, elaborate, and mystical eschatology, it must have seemed like nihilism.

Its subtlety is equally manifest. As will presently be shown, Epicurus maintained that pleasure is not altered in kind by the fact of duration or extension; here he declares that it is not increased in quantity. All pleasures have fixed ceilings and fixed magnitudes. When in the words of the Doctrine he speaks of "measuring the limits of pleasure by reason," he means recognition of the fact that for the body health and the expectation of its continuance is the limit of pleasure, and that for the mind the limit is the emancipation from all fear of the gods or death. The attainment to this state, he now declares, is a condition of one dimension. He seems to think of it as an Alpinist would regard the ascent of an arduous mountain peak. The pleasure would not be increased by remaining on the peak.

#### THE FULLNESS OF PLEASURE

It is possible, however, to arrive at a higher degree of precision, always a chief objective in the reasoning of Epicurus. This higher precision depends upon discerning the subsidiary doctrine of the fullness of pleasure. For this there is a double logical basis: the first basis is the infinity of time, from which it is deduced that there can be nothing new. As the Epicurean Ecclesiastes expresses it, 1:9: "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun." Lucretius reminds us in similar vein "that all things are always the same" and "no new pleasure can be devised."<sup>31</sup> From this it follows that the exhaustion of pleasures is feasible and the fullness of pleasure is attainable.

The second basis of this subsidiary doctrine is the existence of natural ceilings of pleasure, which, being thus limited, could be enjoyed to the full. Out of this was begotten the familiar metaphor of the aged sage as taking leave of life like a satisfied banqueter. This theme was chosen by Lucretius for the ringing finale of his third book; he personifies Nature and represents her as rebuking the complainer because he cannot depart "as a guest who has had his fill of life" or "as one who is full and has had his fill of experience." <sup>32</sup> The wise man, on the contrary, can say *bene vixi*, "I have lived the good life." This is the cry of triumph uttered by old Diogenes of Oenoanda; to quote his own words: "Facing the sunset of life because of my age and on the verge of taking my leave of life with a paean of victory because of the enjoyment of the fullness of all pleasures." <sup>33</sup>

If still further precision on this topic be sought, it may be observed that this doctrine of the fullness of pleasure is supplementary to the doctrine that death is anesthesia. The latter may help to reconcile men to the state of being dead but it fails to compensate for the surrender of immortality.

Only the possibility of having enjoyed all pleasures to the full in this life can counterbalance the relinquishment of the hope of enjoying eternal pleasures in the afterlife. This is the "true understanding" of which Epicurus speaks: "Hence the true understanding of the fact that [death is nothing to us](#) renders enjoyable the mortality of existence, not by adding infinite time but by taking away the yearning for immortality." <sup>34</sup> What cancels the yearning for immortality is the conviction that the fullness of pleasure is possible in this mortal life. The ingenuity of this argument is undeniable; it means the victory over death and we have proof of its wide acceptance in the vigor with which St. Paul in his ardent plea to the Corinthians champions the resurrection of the dead as a new means of victory over death.

Incidentally, without close scrutiny it is difficult to discern by what sort of logic this doctrine could be reconciled with the perfect blissfulness of the gods. If pleasure is not increased by the length of its duration, how could the lot of the gods seem more desirable than that of the mortal sage? With this problem Epicurus did not fail to deal. The topic must await detailed treatment in the ensuing chapter on the True Piety. Here it will suffice to say that the superiority of the happiness of the gods is represented as consisting in the perfect assurance of its continuance. Involved with this judgment is a startling paradox: what renders the happiness

of the gods eternal is this perfect assurance of its continuance; its eternity is a result, not a factor of causation. It is a quality of life.

The paradox that ranks major to this, that happiness is not increased in magnitude by immortality, has found its way into Western thought through the literature of consolation. Obviously, if happiness is not increased by immortality, neither can it be increased by length of mortal life. The philosopher Seneca expatiates upon this inferred aspect of the doctrine, though without mentioning its source, and comforts his correspondent by dwelling feelingly upon the wisdom of measuring a human life by its achievement rather than its length.<sup>35</sup> In the course of this homily he compares the long and merely vegetative life to that of a tree and this detail survives for us in the poem of Ben Jonson which begins,

It is not growing like a tree, in bulk,

Doth make man better be.

But the last lines of the poem hark back definitely to Epicurus:

In small proportions we just beauty see

And in small measure life may perfect be.

The sentiment recurs in Christian hymnology:

He liveth long who liveth well.

Such is often the fate of Epicurus, to be quoted anonymously if approved, by name if condemned.

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## **Post by "Cassius" of August 13, 2022 at 2:35 AM**

And DeWitt connects this to the "unity of pleasure"

### THE UNITY OF PLEASURE

If at this point the attention be recalled to the synoptic view, it may be observed that the telos has been presented under three aspects: first, as a unitary good it is pleasure; second, as a dualistic good it is health of mind and health of body; third, in a seemingly negative aspect it is freedom from fear in the mind and pain in the body. This seeming negativism was spotted by the antagonists of Epicurus as a chink in his armor, and the arrows of their dialectic were concentrated upon it. The weakness alleged was that of calling two disparate things by the one name of pleasure.

It is plain to see how Epicurus was led to switch emphasis to this aspect of pleasure. As usual, he was working his way to greater precision in his analysis of the subject and, as will presently be shown in more detail, he discerned that according to Aristippus and Plato no such thing as continuous pleasure was possible; they recognized only peaks of pleasure separated by intervals either devoid of pleasure or neutral or mixed. From this it followed with inevitable logic that the wise man could not be happy at all times. This conclusion was repugnant to Epicurus as a thoroughgoing hedonist and was repudiated. This repudiation could be made good only by vindicating for freedom from fear and pain the status of a positive pleasure. This in turn resulted in a doctrine of the unity of all pleasure.

Though we certainly fall short of possessing the whole argument of Epicurus, there is ample evidence upon which to construct the skeleton of a case. The Feelings, as usual, are the criterion. It may be recalled how he proved life itself to be the greatest good by pointing out that the greatest joy is associated with the escape from some dreadful destruction. By a similar argument, even if not extant, it could be shown that the recovery of health is a positive pleasure when the individual has recently survived a perilous illness. It would be a positive pleasure also to be freshly relieved from the fear of death and the gods through the discovery of the true philosophy.

To substantiate this drift of reasoning it is not impossible to quote a text: "The stable condition of well-being in the flesh and the confident hope of its continuance means the most exquisite and infallible of joys for those who are capable of figuring the problem out." S6

This passage marks a distinct increase of precision in the analysis of pleasure. Its import will become clear if the line of reasoning already adumbrated be properly extended: let it be granted that the escape from a violent death is the greatest of joys and the inference must follow that the possession of life at other times cannot rank greatly lower. Similarly, if the recovery from a dangerous illness be a cause for joy, manifestly the possession of health ought to be a joy at other times. Nevertheless the two pleasures differ from one another and it was in recognition of the difference that Epicurus instituted the distinction between kinetic and static pleasures. The difference is one of intensity or, as Epicurus would have said, of condensation. At one time the pleasure is condensed, at another, extended. In other words the same pleasure may be either kinetic or static. If condensed, it is kinetic; if extended, it is static.

There is a catch to this reasoning, however; it holds good only "for those who are capable of figuring the problem out." This marks Epicurus as a pragmatist, insisting upon the control of experience, including thought. His reasoning about kinetic and static pleasures is sound, but human beings do not automatically reason after this fashion; they fail to reason about the matter at all. Although they would spontaneously admit the keenest joy at recovery from wounds or disease, they forget about the blessing of health at other times. Hence it is that Epicurus insists upon the necessity of being able to reason in this way. Moreover, this reasoning must be confirmed by habituation. The same rule applies here as in the case of "[Death is nothing to us.](#)" It is not enough to master the reasons for so believing; it is also necessary to

habituate one's self to so believe.<sup>37</sup> This is pragmatism.

There is also another catch to this line of reasoning. The conclusion clashes with the teaching of Aristippus and Plato and it also violates the accepted usage of language. It was not usual to call the possession of health a pleasure and still less usual to call freedom from pain a pleasure. It was this objection that Cicero had in mind when he wrote: "You Epicureans round up people from all the crossroads, decent men, I allow, but certainly of no great education. Do such as they, then, comprehend what Epicurus means, while I, Cicero, do not?" <sup>38</sup> The common people of the ancient world, however, for whom Platonism had nothing attractive, seem to have accepted Epicurean pragmatism with gladness. Cicero, being partial to the aristocratic philosophy and having no zeal to promote the happiness of the multitude, chose to sneer.

The irritation which Cicero simulates in the above passage was beyond doubt genuine with those from whom the argument was inherited. They had been nettled by the phraseology of Epicurus, who was mocking Plato. The words "those who are capable of figuring the problem out" are a parody of Plato's *Timaeus* 40d, where the text reads "those who are incapable of making the calculations" and the reference is to mathematical calculations of the movements of the celestial bodies, which "bring fears and portents of future events" to the ignorant. Baiting the adversary was a favorite sport of Epicurus.

Epicureans at a later time were in their turn subjected to incessant baiting by Stoic opponents, and it may have been these who tried the reduction to the absurd by means of a ridiculous example. If those who are not in a state of pain are in a state of pleasure, "then the host who, though not being thirsty himself, mixes a cocktail for a guest is in the same state of pleasure as the guest who is thirsty and drinks the said cocktail." <sup>39</sup>

Cicero, however, had his tongue in his cheek and knew that this was mere dialectical sparring, intended rather to disconcert the opponent than to refute him. He was partial to the New Academy and to Stoicism, both of which tended to turn argumentation into a game and thus make it an end in itself. They could not fail to be intolerant of the procedures of pragmatism, of which action is the primary object and not logomachy.

This extension of the name of pleasure to freedom from fear and pain was not the sole achievement of the new analysis. In popular thought, the correctness of which Plato assumed, pleasures were classified according to the parts of the body affected, eating, drinking, sexual indulgence, philosophical thinking. In respect also of this conventional classification Epicurus exhibited finer discrimination. He not only discerned that the pleasure associated with one organ is brief and intense while that associated with other parts is moderate and extended but also observed that certain pleasures, like that of escaping a violent death, affect the whole organism.

The next step in this new analysis was to declare that this fact of extension or intension was of no fundamental importance. The high value assigned to this principle is indicated by its promulgation as Authorized Doctrine 9: "If every pleasure were alike condensed in duration and

associated with the whole organism or the dominant parts of it, pleasures would never differ from one another." Positively stated, the meaning would be that pleasure is always pleasure; it is of no consequence that some pleasures are associated with the mind, others with the stomach, and others with other parts, or that some affect the whole organism and others only a part, or that some are brief and intense, others moderate and extended. In other words, it makes no difference that some pleasures are static and others kinetic. Pleasure is a unit. This unity could be expressed in ancient terminology by saying that all pleasure was a kind of motion, kinesis or motio, the ancient equivalent of reaction.

To put the colophon upon this topic it should be added that three Authorized Doctrines, Nos. 8, 9, and 10, deal with pleasure and all three imply the quality of unity. The eighth stresses the fact that the evil attaches solely to the consequences; all pleasures are alike in being good: "No pleasure is evil in itself but the practices productive of certain pleasures bring troubles in their train that by many times outweigh the pleasures themselves."

The ninth Doctrine has been quoted above. In it the item about "condensed pleasure" was pounced upon by Damoxenus of the New Comedy as a good cue for merrymaking; quite aptly he allowed a cook to dilate upon it.<sup>40</sup> Some five centuries afterward the frivolous Alciphron testified to the longevity of the theme by assuming it to be still good for a laugh.<sup>41</sup>

The tenth Doctrine, last of the three, serves to shift all ethical condemnation from pleasures themselves to the consequences: "If the practices productive of the pleasures of profligates dispelled the fears of the mind about celestial things and death and pains and also taught the limit of the desires, we should never have fault to find with profligates, enjoying pleasures to the full from all quarters, and suffering neither pain nor distress from any quarter, wherein the evil lies." Such declarations afforded to enemies of Epicurus a means of besmirching his name, but he was absolutely honest; he did not evade the logical implications of his principles; he flaunted them. By disposition he was a teaser; he drew enjoyment from the squirming of the piously orthodox.

A variation of the same teaching appears in an isolated saying. "I enjoy the fullness of pleasure living on bread and water and I spit upon the pleasures of a luxurious diet, not on account of any evil in these pleasures themselves but because of the discomforts that follow upon them."<sup>42</sup> The net effect of these pronouncements is to put all pleasures in a single class, all being good, irrespective of extension or condensation or of the organ affected or of approval or disapproval, which attach only to consequences. This is an instance where Epicurus exhibited deeper insight than Plato in the latter's own field, discerning the one in the many.

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**Post by "Don" of August 13, 2022 at 5:44 AM**

Thanks for posting those excerpts.

I think I'm in agreement with Dewitt in these, but, honestly, it's sometimes hard to tell with his convoluted, almost-Victorian prose style along with his superfluous Christian non sequiturs.

I sometimes have an easier time parsing Ancient Greek than I do Dewitt!

---

## Post by “Cassius” of August 13, 2022 at 7:25 AM

Yes I do think you and Godfrey both are largely in agreement with DeWitt here.

In this case I think his Christian allusions are maybe better placed than in some other areas.

For example he seems almost theological with

Quote

Only the possibility of having enjoyed all pleasures to the full in this life can counterbalance the relinquishment of the hope of enjoying eternal pleasures in the afterlife

I do think that Epicurus was aiming for something like that - an explanation that is not only logical but rises to an emotional level of satisfaction necessary to combat the emotional lure of false religion.

Even Dewitts cite of

Quote

He liveth long who liveth well

And

Quote

It is not growing like a tree, in bulk,

Doth make man better be

Seem pretty good to me.

In virtually all of what we are doing we are looking to lock in confidence in the conclusion, and if we don't phrase the argument in an understandable and even gripping way it's hard to accomplish that goal.

Epicurus' example of picking not just the bulkiest but the most tasteful food at a banquet is really good for that, I think. It's real world and we can immediately grasp its attractiveness in combatting the maybe more immediate thought of looking for the "longest" rather than the "most pleasant.". There may not be a universal ranking of pleasures in terms of desirability, but I think we have to clearly identify in our minds that duration or time is only one aspect of our perception of pleasures, and not the most important aspect of our ranking. If we internalize even that simple observation I think that carries us a long way to the understanding we need.

Even - especially - the analogy of the Alpine climber working to gain the summit is a good analogy. We want very badly to get there and the achievement is tremendously emotional and satisfying, but we don't have to - or want to - stay there very long.

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### **Post by “Don” of August 13, 2022 at 7:39 AM**

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

In this case I think his Christian allusions are maybe better placed than in some other areas.

Well, a broken clock is right twice a day.

Okay, that was harsh, I'll admit that... But you already know I'm triggered by his Christian allusion hobby horse. Those take me right out of his argument with an eye-rolling "By Zeus, another @\$%& Epicurean-inspired Bible verse!?? At this point, it wouldn't surprise me if Dewitt wrote "John 11:35 clearly shows that Jesus was an Epicurean because..."

---

### **Post by “Don” of August 13, 2022 at 8:09 AM**

#### Quote

He liveth long who liveth well

See, that's my issue. The "Christian hymnology" citation is superfluous and wrong.

Here's the source of that line that Dewitt is citing:

<https://allpoetry.com/He-Liveth-Long-Who-Liveth-Well>

That hymn seems to me to be the opposite of what Epicurus stood for. Bonar is saying "living well" is keeping your eye on heavenly rewards not the here and now in THIS life, the only one we have.

#### Quote

He liveth long who liveth well;  
All other life is short and vain;  
He liveth longest who can tell  
Of living most for heavenly gain.  
He liveth long who liveth well;  
All else is being flung away;  
He liveth longest who can tell  
Of true things truly done each day.  
Be what thou seemest; live thy creed;  
Hold up to earth the torch divine:  
Be what thou prayest to be made;  
Let the great Master's steps be thine.  
Fill up each hour with what will last;  
Buy up the moments as they go;  
The life above, when this is past,  
Is the ripe fruit of life below.  
Sow love, and taste its fruitage pure;  
Sow peace, and reap its harvest bright;

Sow sunbeams on the rock and moor,

And find a harvest-home of light.

Display More

Yuck!! "The life above, when this is past, Is the ripe fruit of life below"?! 🤢 😡 That's certainly not the Epicurean fruit to be plucked.

I find Dewitt doing this too often: taking a line or phrase out of context and imbuing it with meaning it doesn't necessarily have.

Maybe this is another hymn that needs an Epicurean do-over.

*PS. I'll stop there. I don't want to derail this thread with a polemic against Dewitt. I think he's a top-shelf scholar and I like his academic papers, but, by Zeus, "Epicurus and His Philosophy" (not to mention his "St Paul..") suffers from some flaws in presentation that, for me, make it hard to fully embrace it.*

---

## Post by “Kalosyni” of August 13, 2022 at 9:29 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

I find Dewitt doing this too often: taking a line or phrase out of context and imbuing it with meaning it doesn't necessarily have.

Oh wow! Yikes on DeWitt! -- I've been saving the reading of that book till we have a future book study Zoom. It seems that the excerpt in post number twenty-four above (especially the first few paragraphs) is very helpful.

In this thread on [PD19](#) (which is really be about [PD18-22](#)) - I think I get it as I read it, yet if I had to explain it to someone, not sure if I could put it into my own words (which would be the true test of understanding).

---

## Post by “Kalosyni” of August 13, 2022 at 9:45 AM

It could be (and from self-observation of my internal feelings), that dopamine levels are actually highest during the first minute of starting to eat, and especially highest when starting to eat after being very hungry. So the intensity of pleasure is highest at that point, and though it is still pleasurable, it feels less intense after -- so this is why it is a "peak moment of pleasure".

As for [PD19](#): "Finite time and infinite time contain the same amount of joy, if its limits are measured out through reasoning."

You've all done a thorough explanation. But I wonder how to say it in the most simple way --

Joy that lasts a finite time is the same kind of joy that lasts an infinite time. So we don't need to be immortal to experience a complete life.

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### **Post by "Don" of August 13, 2022 at 10:13 AM**

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

Oh wow! Yikes on DeWitt! -- I've been saving the reading of that book till we have a future book study Zoom. It seems that the excerpt in post number twenty-four above (especially the first few paragraphs) is very helpful

Yes, i don't want to imply that there's not value in reading Dewitt 's magnum opus. Dewitt does provide some insightful, helpful, and refreshing insights. It's just his use of references devoid of context, Epicurean-inspired Christianity notions, and similar dross that irks me. Someone needs to do a "Jefferson Bible" job on "Epicurus and his Philosophy."

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### **Post by "reneliza" of August 13, 2022 at 10:34 AM**

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

Do we agree that variation of the contents is desirable, if not absolutely necessary?

There's a lot more to get here, but I want to clip this just as an easy answer: no.

Variety is a preference, like anything else. Some people have an absolute need for consistency and do not desire variety at all. Variation is not generally preferable, it comes down to the individual. And the individual may desire consistency in some things and variety in others as well. Neither is a universal good.

Just one other thing right now, which I don't see as much happen on this forum as in discussions of Epicurean philosophy elsewhere is the logical mistake of reading "There is no greater pleasure than X" and interpreting that as "X is a greater pleasure than all else" (I know this is about finite/infinite time which is a slightly different thing) which breaks my mathematical heart. The former only implies that X is greater than *or equal to* any other pleasures. It does not imply that other pleasures are all less than X or that we're making an ordered list of all pleasures in the universe. Again, that's not meant to correct anyone here, but may be helpful for communicating outside this forum - at least if someone has a less scary-math way of talking about it haha

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### Post by “Cassius” of August 13, 2022 at 10:37 AM

#### [Quote from reneliza](#)

The former only implies that X is greater than or equal to any other pleasures. It does not imply that other pleasures are all less than X or that we're making an ordered list of all pleasures in the universe.

Great point, and one I have not seen made here, as we may not have too many "mathematical hearts"! I am going to have to ask [Martin](#) why he hasn't hammered us with this point before! 😊 Martin I presume you agree with Reneliza?

#### [Quote from reneliza](#)

Variation is not generally preferable, it comes down to the individual.

As to this point I generally agree with it (the only word that I think we can rely on as always preferable in itself is "pleasure." But I wonder if "variety" is not something of such general significance that it merits mention in a sort of "natural and necessary" kind of way. Is not boredom a pretty general human problem?

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### Post by “Don” of August 13, 2022 at 10:50 AM

I'm glad [Cassius](#) can 😊 at my screeds against Dewitt above. He is well acquainted with my perspective at this point over these last few years on the forum. I do tend to soapbox sometimes.

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## Post by “Cassius” of August 13, 2022 at 10:51 AM

### [Quote from Don](#)

Yes, i don't want to imply that there's not value in reading Dewitt 's magnum opus. Dewitt does provide some insightful, helpful, and refreshing insights. It's just his use of references devoid of context, Epicurean-inspired Christianity notions, and similar dross that irks me. Someone needs to do a "Jefferson Bible" job on "Epicurus and his Philosophy."

Don has done a good job of placing his criticisms of DeWitt in context so the only thing I really want to say is to remind everyone that Don has been here a long time; he reads Greek very well; he's read tons of specialized academic articles, and he's far ahead of the curve in understanding the subtleties. He's an expert reader and researcher and he's far from being a novice.

On the other hand, if you are a "normal person" and come to the subject with only a general understanding of philosophy and where Epicurus stands in it, DeWitt's book is the single most valuable place you can start to get a quick and thorough overview of the subject. We can talk about other good books, and there are many, but I would contend that there are none anywhere in DeWitt's league for a through and sympathetic presentation of the whole of the philosophy.

I've seen it time and again and it will continue to happen. If you don't ground yourself in a thorough overview of DeWitt early in your reading, you'll spend a LOT of needless time nursing your former Buddhist or Stoic or Humanist or other positions that you will ultimately conclude (if you stay with the subject long enough) are ultimately incompatible with Epicurus.

Save yourself a lot of time and effort and even heartache and read DeWitt early in your reading process. Then you'll see the forest and you can play with the trees at your leisure for the rest of your life. I have yet to meet the person who, like Don, isn't able to see when DeWitt is going over the line drawing analogies to Christianity, and you can safely ignore those if you don't find them interesting or helpful. (And I do think that there are many people who are immersed in Christian families and friendships for whom is commentary, especially in [St Paul and Epicurus](#), is helpful.)

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**Post by “Don” of August 13, 2022 at 11:04 AM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Don has done a good job of placing his criticisms of DeWitt in context so the only thing I really want to say is to remind everyone that Don has been here a long time; he reads Greek very well; he's read tons of specialized academic articles, and he's far ahead of the curve in understanding the subtleties. He's an expert reader and researcher and he's far from being a novice.

I sincerely appreciate the kind words, even if I don't necessarily see myself in that way all the time. Thank you!

[Quote from Cassius](#)

On the other hand, if you are a "normal person"

Hey! Who're you calling "abnormal"! 😊

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**Post by “Cassius” of August 13, 2022 at 11:58 AM**

In Dons case abnormal is good! 😊

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**Post by “Don” of August 13, 2022 at 12:26 PM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Is not boredom a pretty general human problem?

I'll have to push back on that statement. Boredom comes from dissatisfaction not lack of variety. Sometimes people looking for variety are running from something - possibly even an emotional trauma. They try to fill a void with novelty. I have a real problem if we start using

boredom as a reason for varying pleasures.

(Note: I'm posting this from my previous post so people can respond to this topic without Cassius' and my DeWittean banter)

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### Post by “DavidN” of August 13, 2022 at 12:31 PM

Two points to start with one to poke at Don, Wouldn't the Jefferson Bible count as an epicurean "job".

And to Cassius:

"The only horrible thing in the world is **ennui**, Dorian. That is the one sin for which there is no forgiveness." Oscar Wilde

“**Boredom** is therefore a vital problem for the moralist, since at least half the sins of mankind are caused by the fear of it.” — Bertrand Russell

Otherwise I agree with the conclusions reached pertaining to PD's.

---

### Post by “Don” of August 13, 2022 at 12:36 PM

[Quote from DavidN](#)

one to poke at Don, Wouldn't the Jefferson Bible count as an epicurean "job".

Oh, exactly.

Somebody now needs to purge the "irrelevant" material out of DeWitt's book on Epicurus. 😄

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### Post by “reneliza” of August 13, 2022 at 8:33 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Is not boredom a pretty general human problem?

I'll have to push back on that statement. Boredom comes from dissatisfaction not lack of variety. Sometimes people looking for variety are running from something - possibly even an emotional trauma. They try to fill a void with novelty. I have a real problem if we start using boredom as a reason for varying pleasures.

### [Quote from DavidN](#)

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"**Boredom** is therefore a vital problem for the moralist, since at least half the sins of mankind are caused by the fear of it." — Bertrand Russell

Otherwise I agree with the conclusions reached pertaining to PD's.

As a long time sufferer of ennui, I can assure you that variety doesn't solve it! (in other words - agreeing with Don's comment that boredom comes from dissatisfaction)

I do agree with Cassius's assertion that boredom is a general problem for humans, just not the conclusion that therefore variation is preferable/necessary. My best friend would eat nothing but chicken fingers and fries for the rest of her life (with a protein shake to round out her nutrition) and that would be peak pleasure for her. She'd always know exactly what was coming, no surprises, no meal planning or researching recipes.

In fact, there's been a lot of research recently about decision fatigue and how making many little decisions throughout the day like what to eat, what to wear, etc... can impact your ability to make good (read: leading to greatest overall pleasure) decisions by the end of the day. Greater variety is directly correlated to more decisions. Unless you just roll a d20 to pick which shirt to wear, but that's still more mental effort than just grabbing one of the 10 identical black turtlenecks from your closet.

Of course, this doesn't mean that the ideal is to reduce your choices to zero, but just that you get the best overall outcomes by putting the majority of that effort toward things with the greatest payoff. For some people, that really is having a varied diet or wardrobe because those things bring you immense pleasure.

---

## Post by “Kalosyni” of August 13, 2022 at 8:42 PM

Regarding [PD19](#) - the contrast between finite and infinite -- I just stumbled upon this in another thread. (Which may muddy the water here on this).

### Quote

“Moreover there is the supremely potent **principle of infinity**, which claims the closest and most careful study; we must understand that it has in the sum of things everything has its exact match and counterpart. This property is termed by Epicurus **isonomia, or the principle of uniform distribution**. From this principle it follows that if the whole number of mortals be so many, there must exist no less a number of immortals, and if the causes of destruction are beyond count, the causes of conservation also are bound to be infinite.”

From: Velleius from Cicero's "On the Nature of the Gods"

Then I went online and search for isonomia and found this article: "Theories Concerning Epicurean Theology and Metaphysics"

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/694107>

Here is an excerpt from the preview page:

### Quote

...a wider application of the doctrine not merely as a Balance of opposing Forces but as a pairing of opposite things, one of which implies the other.

So this isonomia could be another thing to look into. Anybody have any ideas on this?

---

## Post by “Godfrey” of August 13, 2022 at 9:03 PM

Isonomia is a really juicy topic, and yet another one that baffles me. It would make a great thread on its own; in fact I think we were discussing it not too long ago.

My take is that PS18-22 are discussing a finite human life in contrast to infinite time. Infinite time, space, quantities &c seem to me to be a different topic from this. Isonomia seems to be something implied by infinity, but I'm not even sure about that as I think the usage attributed to Epicurus is different from the common Greek usage.

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## Post by “reneliza” of August 13, 2022 at 9:22 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Godfrey you are saying that he is saying that because human lifespans are by nature finite then it is useless to talk about infinite time(?)

I think that is true and possibly a part of the issue, but for a man who prodes himself on clarity I think Epicurus could have said exactly that had that been the main point he wanted to make. If that was intended to be his main point, that strikes me as a "too cute" way of stating a subject on which he would likely have been deadly earnest.

Rather than me be the heavy here and always sound like I am disagreeing maybe the best way to eventually approach this is to round up some volunteer 20 to 30 year olds and run our proposals by them for reaction.

We are far from being finished with our proposals so we need more first, but my personal litmus test is whether those intelligent 20-30 year olds will say that they (1) find the proposed point understandable AND (2) find it convincing given what they know themselves regardless of what they think of Epicurean philosophy.

I am hoping we can draft [Charles](#) and [reneliza](#) and @smoothiekiwi and @Root304 and [DavidN](#) as a start. Who am I missing who is generally in that "youthful" category? If you think of others please tag them here in this thread too. I apologize if I missed someone but I am not sure of all the ages we have here.

No offense to those of us who are "aging out" but I think this is one of those real litmus test questions where people tend to gloss over taking a position by fitting it into the black box of "limit of pleasure is absence of pain", and I think it would help to get a more youthful "vigorous" perspective.

We know that Epicurus has clearly said (to Menoeceus) that we do not pick the largest quantity at a banquet, but the "most pleasant." Do we not therefore think that there is something at work here in [PD19](#) other than a reference to our limited lifespan?

To call up another memory, I suspect that Reneliza's pink circles are relevant here. I wonder if she thinks they are?

[Display More](#)

So... I somewhat doubt that Epicurus meant this exactly as it reads to me - I'm still in the process of reading DeWitt and consolidating a lot of different aspects of the philosophy. And full disclosure, I really don't know what "if its limits are measured out through reasoning" means - I can see it having about a half dozen different and highly varied meanings.

But yes it did have me thinking about the pink circles too. The pink circles are just another version of the vessel analogy but in a way that I could see a) pleasure b) pain and c) variation, while also noting the lack of a neutral state (because there is no neutral - only pleasure and pain).

The limit of pinkness is when the circle is fully pink (pleasure) - no black (pain) or white (because there is no neutral), but pale pink, dark pink, or a swirl of both doesn't make any difference. That's as pink as the circle can get. 100% pink

This is why I don't think that variation is good (I also don't think it's bad - I think it's a neutral preference which can have positive or negative effects depending on the circumstances). If variation was preferable, then the swirly pink circle would be "more pink" than the solid pink circles, which doesn't make any sense. Pleasure isn't increased, only varied. But again! Variation isn't bad just because there's the word "only" in there. And variation doesn't *decrease* pleasure. It just also doesn't increase it. I need to stop here before I try to bring in the desires discussion again.....

Anyway, [PD19](#) also reads as a matter of percentages to me (not that I think it was meant that literally, but again my math brain wants to math things up). 100 years of life that is spent almost entirely in excruciating pain, deep depression, and all-around poor spirits, compared to 30 years of nonstop contentment and bliss is an interesting but kind of straightforward comparison for an Epicurean, but what about 100 years of consistent 80% pleasure compared to 30 years of 80% pleasure? It seems like rather than look at that as 80 years of pleasure vs. 24 years of pleasure, we look at it as 80% compared to 80% - ie, they're the same.

[Quote from Don](#)

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Personally I think it is absolutely inadequate - and not what Epicurus meant - to try to say something like "The limit of pleasure is met when pain is absent and so therefore once you obtain painlessness for a moment if does you no good to live a longer time."

Your comment "for a moment" is off the mark. It's not experiencing "the limit of pleasure" "for a moment" then going about your day. It's experiencing the limit of pleasure as part of your whole life, you experience life with this pleasure filling your mind and body. That's why ataraxia and aponia are important components of an Epicurean life. Once you are experiencing full pleasure without mental troubles or bodily pain, it doesn't matter if it lasts a moment and you die or you live 100 years then die or live an infinite number of years and die. He says, in this state at the limit of pleasure, "the mind does not flee from joy." There are innumerable ways to vary the pleasure, but you can't increase it once the limit has been reached. That's why - "reasoning it out" - a moment or infinity can conceivably contain the same amount of pleasure. Now, is this achievable for any being other than a god? Epicurus seems to think so because we are told that if we do, we live as gods among mortals.

...

Well, it seems to me Epicurus is saying that once we have filled every nook and cranny of our minds with peace and pleasure and rid it of fears and anxieties and troubled thoughts and have a sure confidence of not losing that, you're filled up. You can vary your pleasure, but at that point your perspective on life is unassailable, filled with joy, in fact your mind never flees from joy, that is your default mode of being and interacting with the world. Living in that way is what can make one equal to the gods.

But - this is where I would very much defer to people with greater grasp of the philosophy - it seems like you don't necessarily need to average over an entire lifespan either, and that's where the points Don was making way back in posts #3 and #5 come into play. Once you've "filled every nook and cranny of your mind with peace and pleasure" and are going about your days in a state of constant pleasure (varied to whatever degree), then what difference does it make how many years you lived before that state? If you compare the 100 year old person living a good life of 80% pleasure, day to day with a 30 year old who lived in near constant mental anguish for 29 years and 11 months, but then found a way to peace and pleasure and who recognizes his hard years, but doesn't suffer for the past, and is now living a life of 100% pleasure - then who has experienced greater joy? The person living with 20% pain or the person who has rid themselves of fear and pain and who experiences constant pleasure (again, varied to any degree) in the here and now, despite earlier years of agony?

Sorry I didn't actually answer the question, but just asked more questions.

Final point: I appreciate being lumped in with the youngish/20-30 crowd and will make no further comment about that lol

## Post by “Cassius” of August 14, 2022 at 7:08 AM

Reneliza I think your math brain is very very useful in this discussion because I think that these doctrines are intended to be highly logically sound.

I also think that in addition to that perspective we have to be sure that we aren't hobbled by other perspectives that we have inherited from Christianity and other viewpoints.

For example Dewitt comments that Epicurus is pointing to a way to console us for loss of immortality (presumably as alleged by religious viewpoints). I am not so sure about that, and in fact I wonder if we fail to grasp some of what Epicurus is saying because we are trying to fit his perspective into a mold in which life can be viewed as fair to everyone. It could be that Epicureans were flatly so convinced of the universe's total lack of overall plan that they weren't at all thinking about any "perfection" and that they were constantly thinking only on practical terms about how best to spend "the present" whatever that happens to be. This is only a half-formed thought but it comes in part from the discussion of how to view the percentage issues ReneLiza mentioned. Given that there is no absolute judge of which choices to make, it really doesn't make much sense to try to develop a science of judging any particular life against hypothetical standards that dont exist except in our mental gymnastics.

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## Post by “Don” of August 14, 2022 at 8:49 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Dewitt comments that Epicurus is pointing to a way to console us for loss of immortality (presumably as alleged by religious viewpoints). I am not so sure about that, and in fact I wonder if we fail to grasp some of what Epicurus is saying because we are trying to fit his perspective into a mold in which life can be viewed as fair to everyone. .

Oh my! I'm about to defend DeWitt everybody! Mark your calendars.

It's true that the [Principal Doctrines](#) literally laid out the "basic doctrines" of the philosophy for Epicureans to study and memorize. But Epicurus was providing practical solutions and philosophical medicine to real people. I think he had to provide "a way to console us for loss of immortality (presumably as alleged by religious viewpoints)." I'm not sure of the word "console" but he had to provide an alternative. This went hand in hand with removing the fear of divine punishment or reward. Even without Eternal Hell/Heaven, there was also the prevalent ancient Greek of existing eternally as a shade as Homer describes Odysseus' trip to Hades. Even as a

shade, you still get to "live" forever. And most people, I believe, would answer in the affirmative if asked "If you were given the ability to be immortal, would you?" before, of course, thinking about the details. So, yes, Epicurus had to provide consolation or at least a reasonable alternative to the desire for immortality.

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

It could be that Epicureans were flatly so convinced of the universe's total lack of overall plan that they weren't at all thinking about any "perfection" and that they were constantly thinking only on practical terms about how best to spend "the present" whatever that happens to be.

I think that's the \*Epicurean\* perspective, but the [Principal Doctrines](#) no doubt circulated as a "recruitment tool" as well. As you've said, [Cassius](#), they should make sense to "normal" people



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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of August 19, 2022 at 8:39 PM**

This last Wednesday Zoom (on August 17th) we were still talking about [PD19](#) - and I remember trying out this "word game":

Infinite time contains no greater **satisfaction** than finite time, if one measures, by reason, the limits of **satisfaction**.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of August 19, 2022 at 8:54 PM**

Another option:

Infinite time contains no greater *quantity of dark chocolate eaten* than finite time, if one measures, by reason, the limits of *quantity of dark chocolate eaten*. Or, perhaps pet puppies could be used.

I mean this to be serious, not snarky. If you reason that what Epicurus is referring to is that life is finite, then just about anything that an individual experiences could be substituted for *pleasure* and would make the same point.

But since Epicurus used the word pleasure, is he using the word because it is the goal that he is concerned with or is he making a different point than what I'm understanding?

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### Post by “Kalosyni” of August 19, 2022 at 8:58 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Infinite time contains no greater quantity of dark chocolate eaten than finite time, if one measures, by reason, the limits of quantity of dark chocolate eaten.

Now you're talking! 😊

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### Post by “Kalosyni” of August 19, 2022 at 8:59 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

But since Epicurus used the word pleasure, is he using the word because it is the goal that he is concerned with or is he making a different point than what I'm understanding?

This is a good question, and I think it also depends on how we interpret the word "pleasure".

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### Post by “Godfrey” of August 20, 2022 at 1:29 AM

To me, pleasure has been defined in [PD18](#) and a variety of previous PDs beginning with [PD03](#). I think [PD19](#) is referencing those, and pivoting to the subject of craving infinite time for infinite pleasure. [PD20](#) then mentions "fears about a life after death" and "departure from life", which seems to indicate that this is the subject of these two PDs, not pleasure. The two are describing the temporal limits of a person and how to think about it. [Parentheses are my additions.]

[PD19](#). *Infinite time contains no greater pleasure [the body's goal] than does finite time, if one determines the limits of pleasure rationally.*

[PD20](#). *The body takes the limits of pleasure to be infinite, and infinite time would provide such pleasure. But the mind has provided us with the complete life by a rational examination of the body's goal and limitations and by dispelling our fears about a life after death [as described in previous PDs] ; and so we no longer need unlimited time. On the other hand, it does not avoid pleasure [which is the body's goal, after all], nor, when conditions occasion our departure from life, does it come to the end in a manner that would suggest that it had fallen short in any way of the best possible existence.*

Imagine that you are experiencing a bliss that's so great that you want it to last forever. At some point you'll bring yourself pain if you start to crave the experience. These are saying that you need to understand that your life is finite, so enjoy your bliss. Don't crave it, but don't reject bliss because it's going to end: relish it for what it is, and relish your finite life for what it is.

So I think that if you try to understand [PD19](#) as saying something about pleasure specifically it becomes confusing and mysterious. At least for me, it becomes much clearer and simpler as I'm trying to describe it. "Now that you have a reasoned understanding of pleasure and of the material universe, think about what it means to have a finite life in an infinite universe." This, by itself, is a lot to think about.

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## **Post by "Cassius" of August 20, 2022 at 4:55 AM**

Reading these last several posts I agree that substituting other forms of pleasure, or simply other things besides pleasure, is helpful.

But on the more basic point I would still ask this:

Is not the fundamental point as this is being translated in English amount to a plain meaning of:

"IF YOU COULD LIVE FOREVER...you would still be able to gather together no more XXXX than if you only live 60 years???"

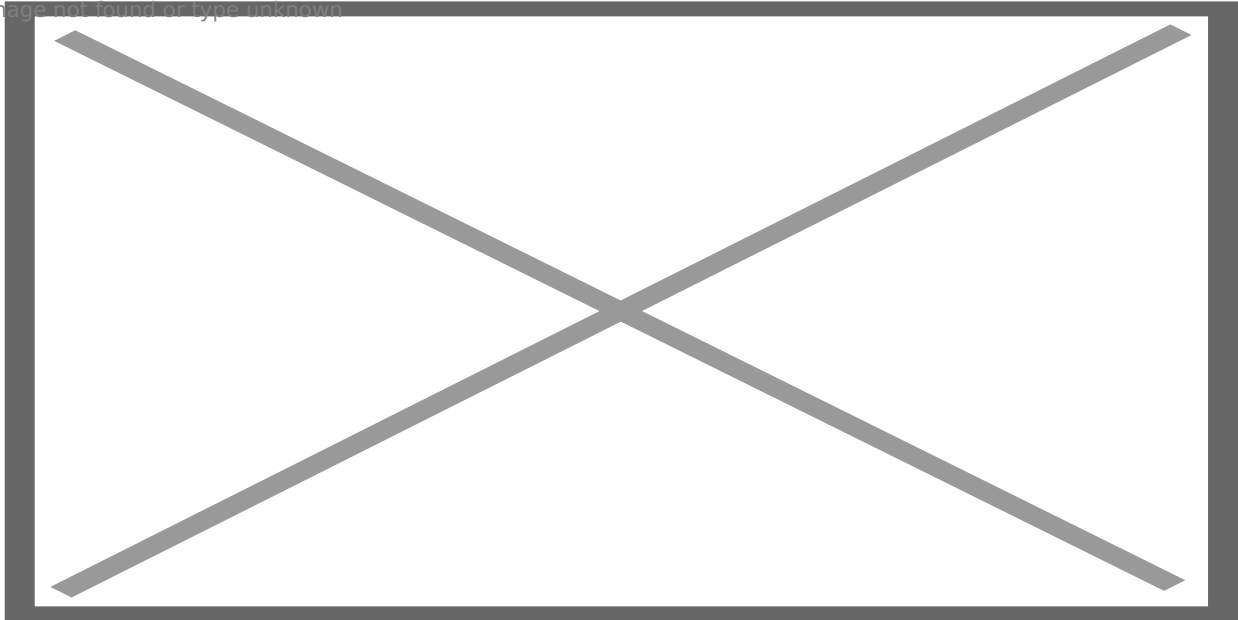
That's why I still lean toward an explanation that focuses on the multiple meanings of "greater" than I do toward explanations that would seem to be playing fast and loose with the time component.

Because when I read Godfrey's example of "dark chocolate eaten" I have to say heck yes if I live forever I could eat a lot more quantity of dark chocolate than if I live only 60 years.

Seems to me a punch line of "but you can't live forever" is unlikely to have been the ultimate point, if the point has something to do with reconciling you with your mortality. If drumming home "Remember you are a mortal" (like a Roman General in a triumph) is the point, then why not simply say: "You can't and won't live forever, Bozo, so stop dreaming otherwise."

Is Epicurus really just playing the role of the slave in the chariot whispering in the ear of the General?

Image not found or type unknown



[In Ancient Rome, a slave would continuously whisper 'Remember you are mortal' in the ears of victorious generals as they were paraded through the streets after coming home, triumphant, from battle](#)

After every major military victory in ancient Rome, a "triumph," as it was called, was celebrated in Rome. It was a ceremonial procession granted to  
[www.thevintagenews.com](http://www.thevintagenews.com)

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## Post by "Don" of August 20, 2022 at 7:01 AM

In reading this thread, I'm reminded of the TV show *The Good Place*.

**\*\*\*BIG SPOILER ALERT for anyone who hasn't seen the show and wants to experience it\*\*\***

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**You have been warned...**

**The basic premise is that, after you die, there is a Good Place and a Bad Place. First few seasons, the bar has been raised so high, most everyone goes to the Bad Place. Then we find later that those in the Good Place are bored out of their minds and miserable. The main characters are given the opportunity to remake The Good Place and let more people in. Which they do.**

**But, even given infinite time and given the opportunity to experience literally everything they could ever conceive of or imagine, they still eventually run out of things to experience. They come to a point where there's literally nothing new to experience! After countless eons of existence, they are then given the choice of dissolving back into their constituent "atoms" let's say, or dissolving back into the universe, or however you want to phrase it. The show is ambiguous. There's a place in the woods where you can walk through a gate and it just happens. It's not portrayed as suicide because they're by definition already dead. But some of the other characters see it that way when another character realizes they're "ready to go."**

**Anyway, it's hard to explain, but this whole idea that we need infinite time to experience infinite pleasure brought this to mind.**

**If anyone else has watched The Good Place, I'd be interested to get your take on any applicability to our current discussion that you see.**

btw: it seems I brought up this same point in January with a response from [Joshua](#) in a discussion about Buddhism and the [Epicurean gods](#) :

Post

**[RE: 2022 Epicurus vs Buddhism Compare and Contrast Thread](#)**

That seems to be a solid epitome to me! Well done!

[...]

This always intrigued me about the Buddhist gods on the wheel of samsara: They're so blissed out and pleasure-filled, they can't conceive of not being reborn as a god (to greatly simplify the situation).

Which got me thinking: How does this apply to the [Epicurean gods](#) ? They are supposedly experiencing pleasure all the time. Is that correct? Isn't this just another form of "harps in heaven"? Would a blissful, pleasure-filled eternity get...



Don

January 30, 2022 at 2:57 PM

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 20, 2022 at 8:11 AM**

That's a great question Don. Seems we often come back to boredom and or the issue of "nothing new under the sun" in these discussions.

And yet does it not seem that this was not an issue for the Epicureans discussing their view of deathless divinity?

I haven't watch the show so I can't validate your precise statement of what it is saying, but I bet your description is correct, and I have a dep suspicion that there is something wrong with the people who think that infinite duration of pleasure would be boring.

I am not sure it is exactly the same question but it sure is related.

I also seem to think that this same issue (boredom with pleasure) is involved in Wagner's Tannhauser (in which the lead player apparently gets bored of Venus and returns to the "real world" in frustration).

I am tempted to think that boredom with pleasure is an artifact of a "religious" perspective.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 20, 2022 at 8:17 AM**

Before I go further down that road however an extra hour sleep causes me to want to restate this issue this way:

If we measure pleasure in terms of discrete numbers of experiences of pleasure (say x number of candy bars) then an infinite time surely gives the opportunity for more discrete instances (candy bars).

But if we rather realize through the mind that pleasure is not best measured as discrete instances (candy bars), but in terms of "purity" (the pink circle analogy or any other analogy of 'fulness'), then the number of discrete instances is seen as secondary, and length of time is no longer important because length of time does not improve it.

Which is pretty much exactly what is said in the letter to Menoecus about not wanting the longest, but the most pleasant.

This framing leaves the issue stated in a fairly abstract way, and doesn't tell us individually how to spend our time day to day. But considering it "abstractly" like that is what we should expect: that perspective is necessary to defeat the anti-pleasure-abstractions of virtue and supernaturalism. Further, viewing it abstractly is probably pretty much what is generally meant by referring to "the mind" and "through reason."

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### **Post by “reneliza” of August 20, 2022 at 11:43 AM**

The "infinite pleasure is boring" stories (which can sometimes lead to the "pleasure only feels good because pain exists" angle) tend to miss that - yes, while the greatest pleasure sometimes comes from a bit of exertion, that we humans create our own effort. Consider the new retiree who spends a month bored out of their mind and then takes up woodworking. Or the stay at home parent who is also a writer.

I think this is a part of a societal narrative where we desperately don't want the masses to believe that they can be happy without the jobs provided to them from on high. In truth, we can and will easily create our own challenges, designed personally for us to give maximum pleasure, when we're granted the resources (time, space, energy, material, etc...) to do so.

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### **Post by “reneliza” of August 20, 2022 at 11:46 AM**

In other words, I think that for an Epicurean, the greatest pleasure can be found in either limited OR infinite time.

Playing around with substitutions in [PD19](#) makes for really useful analogies, but I think putting in "quantity" of anything fundamentally breaks it, because it seems clear that the original is referring to quality. I mean, otherwise you might as well just sub in "quantity of hours" which

would be by definition impossible

Quantity is the only thing we have more of when time is unlimited

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 20, 2022 at 12:17 PM**

#### [Quote from reneliza](#)

In other words, I think that for an Epicurean, the greatest pleasure can be found in either limited OR infinite time.

i think I agree with that. And I think no matter how much time we have, the "greatest pleasure" can be \*missed\* in that degree of time as well, since pleasures may have duration, but their value to us is not a direct function of how long they last.

Of course saying it that way too leads us back into the discussion of what is meant by "the greatest pleasure." Is that a particular type of activity or feeling of pleasure, or is it a description of the observation that whatever that person is experiencing as pleasure, that experience cannot be increased? (the latter is correct, i think.)

So long as the term "greatest pleasure" is read to imply some **particular** activity or feeling (including those mysterious words "ataraxia" or "aponia" - which I think is incorrect), the discussion goes round and round and round.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 20, 2022 at 12:27 PM**

And that last thought leads me back to this:

Why are we ever even talking about "the greatest pleasure" in the first place?

It's not because we are connoisseurs of pleasure like we are looking for the finest wine.

I think virtually the entire reason we are having this discussion is because it is necessary in order to debate philosophically with Plato and the gang that Pleasure can qualify as the highest good. Outside of that abstract discussion the whole issue of "the greatest pleasure" is really nothing more than personal circumstance and preference.

But if we conflate the entire discussion into a wine-tasting test, we end up totally confused, and worse -- concluding that the best wine is the one with the least taste!

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### **Post by “reneliza” of August 20, 2022 at 3:47 PM**

During our 20th meetup, I loved Martin’s temperature analogy, and thinking of pleasure as an intensive property so much! Temperature is such a familiar concept that I think it should work well for explaining some of these concepts generally

"Infinite time contains an equal amount of temperature as limited time."

I’m still curious about the second part though: “if one measures, by reason, the limits of pleasure.”

What does it mean to use reason to measure the limits of pleasure? (Or is that wording not representative of what Epicurus meant)

If we can have the same amount of pleasure in our short lives as we could over infinite time, but only if we use reason to measure the limits of pleasure, it seems pretty crucial to be able to do that!

Does it mean that we’re using reason to generally determine what the limits of pleasure are (ie his response to the Platonic claim that there is no limit to pleasure) as a general principle? Or does it mean to measure the limits of pleasure in a more day-to-day or moment-by-moment sense, using our reason at the time? Or something entirely different??

I will say, I think the whole thing makes sense together to say:

Once you realize that pleasure doesn’t increase beyond removal of all pain, you can see that as much pleasure can exist in a limited life as an unlimited one.

But I’m not certain if that’s how it was intended.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of August 20, 2022 at 6:47 PM**

[Quote from reneliza](#)

I'm still curious about the second part though: "if one measures, by reason, the limits of pleasure."

What if we allow for multiple explanations, as in the letter to Pythocles? Reasoning might lead one to:

- A person's pleasure is limited by their finite life: their life is still finite, regardless of the infinity of time.
- If you're in a state of pleasure, the length of time of that state is immaterial and can't be quantified, so finite or infinite time are irrelevant (correct me if I'm wrong; that's how I understand Martin's point).
- Using the idea of homeostasis (at least as I understand it) as a teeter-totter, pleasure can be thought of as a state of balance. Too much pleasure brings pain, which seeks a return to the state of balance and could be considered as a limit to pleasure. In the absence of pleasure, we'll do anything to obtain it, to return to the state of balance.

These are three valid (I think) ideas of the limits of pleasure and there are certainly more. The previous PDs provide guidelines to understand pleasure, to use while reasoning this out. I think there are multiple ways to interpret this, as long as you use reasoning to rule out interpretations such as "God will fill my life with pleasure, whether in this life or the next, so I don't need to worry about time" or "I can do whatever I want to find pleasure, regardless of the consequences".

The more you grapple with reasoning out the issue, the more ramifications and nuances you might find.

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## Post by "Kalosyni" of August 20, 2022 at 9:16 PM

[PD19](#) - "Infinite time contains no greater pleasure than limited time, if one measures by reason the limits of pleasure."

Another twist:

If we are to strive to live like the gods who are immortal, we who are mortal can live equally well because there is no difference in our experience of pleasure vs the god's experience of pleasure -- because "pleasure" functions the same way regardless of time.

Was the word used in this PD "hedone" or "eudaimonia" ?

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## Post by “Don” of August 20, 2022 at 9:58 PM

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Was the word used in this PD "hedone" or "eudaimonia" ?

hedone "pleasure" τὴν ἡδονὴν (ten hedonen - accusative case)

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## Post by “Don” of August 20, 2022 at 10:01 PM

I don't know if this will clarify or obfuscate matters, but I was inclined to parse the second phrase in [PD19](#).

ἐάν τις αὐτῆς τὰ πέρατα καταμετρήσῃ τῷ λογισμῷ.

ἐάν = if

Both τις and αὐτῆς are feminine singular which, to me, seems to refer back to τὴν ἡδονὴν (pleasure) from the previous phrase which is also feminine.

τὰ πέρατα we've mentioned are "the limits" but, more precisely, defined as "end, limit, boundary"

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

In philosophy, a πέρας (singular) can refer to "the perfection" of something. LSJ gives cites including one to P.Herc 831.8 <https://papyri.info/dclp/59491>

which brings us to a dative construction in the last three words:

καταμετρήσῃ τῷ λογισμῷ

I find the idea of the "boundary" interesting in light of καταμετρήσῃ (noun singular feminine dative) "measuring out" from the verb καταμετρέω

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

...which could just mean "measure out" but could also refer to laying out a camp ("castrametation" a word I never read before), i.e., measuring out the area of an encampment

or "assigning land held by military tenure." [Joshua](#) may find this interesting from a surveying perspective.

Finally, we come to τῷ λογισμῷ "to logismoi"

The basic definition of λογισμός "logismos" is "counting, calculation" or simply "calculation or reasoning" if not associated with numbers.

This is related to λόγος "logos" which is notoriously tricky to parse (and is even used to refer to Jesus as part of the Trinity "Ho Logos" "The Word"). Check out the LSJ definition:

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

So, at its most basic, "to logismoi" could be parsed "by using one's logos" which puts us right back into the "notoriously tricky" parsing of what logos means. Reasoning is acceptable, but it carried a lot more connotations in ancient Greek. Hence my hobby horse/soap box about translators feeling they have to reduce complex connotations to one simple English word with its own linguistic baggage.

So, an alternative translation of the second phrase of [PD19](#), \*could\* be:

"if pleasure (is) being measured out through the logos."

Take that for what its worth. LOL. You were expected clarity?

PS. I found that the prefix κατα- kata- in a word like καταμετρήση katametrēsēi (kata + metrēsēi) can convey "fully, completely". metrēsēi is related to English meter, measure, etc. So we're getting a phrase that conveys something like measuring out or laying out the boundaries or limits fully and completely through the use of our reasoning powers, to fully understanding how pleasure impacts our life and not accepting a popular notion of the hoi polloi that pleasure is insatiable and expands infinitely, we must understand and internalize that pleasure has limits and boundaries that can be understood.

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## **Post by "Joshua" of August 20, 2022 at 10:45 PM**

I apologize if the point has already been made, but it occurs to me to approach the question in these terms;

Epicurus said that "gods there are", and that those gods dwell incorruptibly in a perpetual state of eudaimonia--of pleasure, unmixed with any pain or disturbance.

He did *not* say that "*gods there once were*"--that they *were* living in incorruptible pleasure and peace, but they are no more because they've all killed themselves out of *ennui* and desperation ages ago.

If the gods still find pleasure in living through all the ages of the this world, we may surmise that eternity would also do good service to an Epicurean. But we shall not have it.

Quote

You must live in the present, launch yourself on every wave, find your eternity in each moment. Fools stand on their island of opportunities and look toward another land. There is no other land; there is no other life but this.

-Thoreau

Something to think on--remembering while we think that *Hamlet* is a tragedy only because he couldn't make up his mind!

Quote

[...] The draught swallowed by all of us at birth is a draught of death.

Vatican Saying 30

There's a Greek anti-baptism for a Greek 'anti-Christ'!

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## Post by “Don” of August 20, 2022 at 11:45 PM

It occurs to me that I've misinterpreted or mischaracterized the characters' motivation in *The Good Place* with respect to that way out of existence. [Joshua](#) , please feel free to weigh in

The people in the Good Place still experienced desires for novel experiences, still feared "death" (even though they were already dead), etc. However, those who expressed their readiness to, let's say, dissolve into the cosmos, expressed it as being at peace. The others couldn't understand the person! But there was acceptance, peace of mind, nothing holding them back, from just letting go. It was NOT boredom that led them to realize it was "time to go." They were fulfilled, at peace, etc. The ones being "left behind" were still afraid of "death", craving new experiences, or just wanting to relive the same experiences over and over.

There are a number of interpretations of this scenario, but an eternal, indestructible peace of mind a la an Epicurean god is not out of the question. Even so, we are NOT immortal nor can we

be. So... The challenge to interpret [pd19](#) continues.

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### Post by “Don” of August 21, 2022 at 8:36 AM

#### [Quote from reneliza](#)

I will say, I think the whole thing makes sense together to say:

Once you realize that pleasure doesn't increase beyond removal of all pain, you can see that as much pleasure can exist in a limited life as an unlimited one.

But I'm not certain if that's how it was intended

Yes, [reneliza](#) , I think the way you've worded it is exactly how it was intended.

Basically, once the glass is full, it's full. Whether the glass stays full a day or an infinite time, it's the same volume. That's the "limit" of pleasure: the full glass.

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### Post by “Cassius” of August 21, 2022 at 8:56 AM

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

Basically, once the glass is full, it's full. Whether the glass stays full a day or an infinite time, it's the same volume. That's the "limit" of pleasure: the full glass.

... Which is a far superior and more clear way to state the proposition rather than saying "Once the glass is totally empty, it's totally empty. Whether the glass stays empty for a day or for an infinite time, it's the same volume."

The latter formula may also be true, but it conveys a totally different attitude. Those "absence of" descriptions work ONLY if you vigorously keep in the front of your mind that since there are only two feelings, then when you are not feeling pains you are feeling pleasures. If you don't have that Epicurean premise front and center, then it looks like you are investing mystical qualities in "emptiness" or even "nothingness". It seems that was possible for the ancient Epicureans, but very hard for us to day, given our lack of full explanations from the texts and

our overall more negative attitude toward pleasure.

Those latter formulas (emptiness and nothingness) are of great appeal to Buddhists and Nihilists and others who are unhappy with what they think they see in life, but not at all representative of what a philosophy of pleasure would look like.

It is impossible for me to believe that the Romans who enthusiastically adopted Epicurus interpreted him through the "emptiness" / "nothingness" metaphor.

The Romans - who had the texts and the teachers - understood it as Cicero described it from the positive perspective: "A life of tranquility crammed full of pleasures."

and

XII. The truth of the position that pleasure is the ultimate good will most readily appear from the following illustration. Let us imagine a man living in the continuous enjoyment of numerous and vivid pleasures alike of body and of mind, undisturbed either by the presence or by the prospect of pain: what possible state of existence could we describe as being more excellent or more desirable? One so situated must possess in the first place a strength of mind that is proof against all fear of death or of pain; he will know that death means complete unconsciousness, and that pain is generally light if long and short if strong, so that its intensity is compensated by brief duration and its continuance by diminishing severity. Let such a man moreover have no dread of any supernatural power; let him never suffer the pleasures of the past to fade away, but constantly renew their enjoyment in recollection, and his lot will be one which will not admit of further improvement.

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### **Post by "Don" of August 21, 2022 at 9:28 AM**

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

"Once the glass is totally empty, it's totally empty. Whether the glass stays empty for a day or for an infinite time, it's the same volume."

Emptiness is pain, dissatisfaction, anxiety, trouble.

Fullness is pleasure, joy, happiness, well-being.

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### **Post by "Joshua" of August 21, 2022 at 12:37 PM**

[Martin](#) was wondering whether I had missed the mark on Hamlet in what I said above. He might be right; the stage having been set with the murder of Hamlet's father, a crime which Hamlet could not prove, was there really any way to avoid a tragic ending? I don't know.

That Hamlet's tragic flaw is indecision, procrastination, or vacillation is also disputed by critics. The main argument in support of that conclusion comes from a well known public lecture by the Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge;

#### Quote

Man is distinguished from the brute animals in proportion as thought prevails over sense: but in the healthy processes of the mind, a balance is constantly maintained between the impressions from outward objects and the inward operations of the intellect;—for if there be an overbalance in the contemplative faculty, man thereby becomes the creature of mere meditation, and loses his natural power of action. Now one of Shakespeare's modes of creating characters is to conceive any one intellectual or moral faculty in morbid excess, and then to place himself, Shakespeare, thus mutilated or diseased, under given circumstances. In Hamlet he seems to have wished to exemplify the moral necessity of a due balance between our attention to the objects of our senses, and our meditation on the workings of our minds,—an equilibrium between the real and the imaginary worlds. In Hamlet this balance is disturbed: his thoughts, and the images of his fancy, are far more vivid than his actual perceptions, and his very perceptions, instantly passing through the medium of his contemplations, acquire, as they pass, a form and a colour not naturally their own. Hence we see a great, an almost enormous, intellectual activity, and a proportionate aversion to real action consequent upon it, with all its symptoms and accompanying qualities. This character Shakespeare places in circumstances, under which it is obliged to act on the spur of the moment:—Hamlet is brave and careless of death; but he vacillates from sensibility, and procrastinates from thought, and loses the power of action in the energy of resolve. Thus it is that this tragedy presents a direct contrast to that of Macbeth; the one proceeds with the utmost slowness, the other with a crowded and breathless rapidity.

The effect of this overbalance of the imaginative power is beautifully illustrated in the everlasting broodings and superfluous activities of Hamlet's mind, which, unseated from its healthy relation, is constantly occupied with the world within, and abstracted from the world without,—giving substance to shadows, and throwing a mist over all common-place actualities.

It is possible to accept Coleridge's presupposition that there *is* a tragic flaw, but find that flaw in something else: an Oedipal complex, pride or hubris, etc.

It is also possible to approach the text without reference to any tragic flaw, as such. But I think Coleridge's view has become predominant.

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## Post by “Don” of August 21, 2022 at 1:21 PM

### [Quote from Don](#)

once the glass is full, it's full. Whether the glass stays full a day or an infinite time, it's the same volume.

In rethinking my comment there, I want to emphasize that the goal is to keep the glass full all the time by having banished fear, anxiety, etc. until you die. I don't want it to be understood as [Cassius](#) 's being full "for a moment" comment. Because of the glass is full and you die tomorrow or you die 100 years from now, it's the same limit of pleasure.

PS: That's why I think ataraxia and aponia are necessary components in an Epicurean worldview / perspective / paradigm (take your pick). To me, that's what keeps the glass full while, at the same time, allowing one to experience the "limit of pleasure" while going about your daily routine of laughing, loving wisdom/philosophizing and tending to one's home life and using one's other goods. Having that glass full is what saturates ones life with pleasure and also allows one to enjoy the other pleasure of life unalloyed with anxiety or pain. There's no room for ascetism or self-mortification within that worldview.

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## Post by “Cassius” of August 21, 2022 at 2:55 PM

Staying with that full glass analogy for the moment, I would think that the glass "spilling" some because it is overfilled would have to be interpreted carefully.

If the glass is spilling because more is being poured into it, and the liquid simply overflows because new liquid is being added, I would see that as "variation" and not a bad thing (just not something that increases the total experience of pleasure.

On the other hand if the glass spills because it is jostled, and the liquid spills over the edge and thus the total liquid declines, that would be a bad thing from just about every perspective, I would think.

(I realize that my very old graphic with the various stages of filling might need to be more precise on that point. Simply adding more and causing it to overflow would not be the best example of disturbance.)

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 21, 2022 at 2:58 PM**

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

Because of the glass is full and you die tomorrow or you die 100 years from now, it's the same limit of pleasure.

Making clear the context and perspective makes all the difference. The life of one year or a hundred years is the same in respect to "limit of pleasure." But on the other hand those two lives are not at all the same in many other respects.

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### **Post by “Don” of August 21, 2022 at 4:49 PM**

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

But on the other hand those two lives are not at all the same in many other respects

Expand on that. In what ways? (I'm not necessarily saying I disagree but for the sake of discussion, I can't just let that statement stand on it's own)

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### **Post by “Don” of August 21, 2022 at 7:10 PM**

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

Staying with that full glass analogy for the moment, I would think that the glass "spilling" some because it is overfilled would have to be interpreted carefully.

If the glass is spilling because more is being poured into it, and the liquid simply overflows because new liquid is being added, I would see that as "variation" and not a bad thing (just not something that increases the total experience of pleasure.

On the other hand if the glass spills because it is jostled, and the liquid spills over the edge and thus the total liquid declines, that would be a bad thing from just about every perspective, I would think.

We may be taking the "full glass" metaphor further than is useful 🤔

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 21, 2022 at 7:32 PM**

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

We may be taking the "full glass" metaphor further than is useful 🤔

I dunno, I think a good metaphor is going to be extensible to cover the closely related issue of "What about variation?" And if not, then that may reveal a flaw in the metaphor. (But in this case I don't think there's a problem that prevents its extension.)

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### **Post by "Don" of August 21, 2022 at 8:01 PM**

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

I dunno, I think a good metaphor is going to be extensible to cover the closely related issue of "What about variation?"

Okay, I'll give you that, but I don't like the idea of the spilling over as variation. It seems... messy.

I could see if the glass is tipped or jostled and there's spillage, that makes sense that the mind is still troubled and anxious. It's not steady.

But a variation analogy? I'm going to have to ponder that.

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## Post by “Don” of August 21, 2022 at 8:17 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I dunno, I think a good metaphor is going to be extensible to cover the closely related issue of "What about variation?"

Okay, I'll give you that, but I don't like the idea of the spilling over as variation. It seems... messy.

I could see if the glass is tipped or jostled and there's spillage, that makes sense that the mind is still troubled and anxious. It's not steady.

But a variation analogy? I'm going to have to ponder that.

What about a change in state of what's in the glass? It could be liquid, it could be frozen, it could turn to wine, it could turn to orange juice.

I'm trying to get away from adding to it, because it's at it's natural limit but there can still be variation within the glass.

Still gonna have to ponder...

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## Post by “Don” of August 21, 2022 at 9:19 PM

I'm trying to think of ways to get away from the vessel metaphor.

To me, the boundaries of pleasure are reached, if using our reasoning, when the mind is free from trouble and the body is free from pain and there's a confidence that state will continue. That is the natural limit of \*pleasure.\*

Choosing natural but unnecessary \*desires\*, as [Godfrey](#) has conjectured elsewhere, vary our pleasure and this is where the work happens. But what does that mean? It, to me, changes neither the quality nor quantity of \*pleasure\*. The latter is self-evident because the natural "limit of pleasure" has been reached. But can it change the quality of pleasure since again the natural boundaries have been reached? What does it really mean to "vary" one's pleasure if the

limit has been reached? Pleasure comes from choosing to act on desires. Again, as [Godfrey](#) stressed before, desire does NOT equal pleasure. The natural/necessary etc. descriptors modify \*desire\* not \*pleasure\* because all pleasure is good but just not choiceworthy.

How do we create a metaphor that gets at that connection between desires and pleasure??

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### Post by “Kalosyni” of August 21, 2022 at 9:42 PM

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

I'm trying to think of ways to get away from the vessel metaphor.

Also I am wondering about getting entirely away from metaphors and just thinking about real life. When I first started studying Epicureanism and bringing some of the ideas into my life (back when I was living on the west coast and during all the earlier Covid uncertainties). I was setting an intention to bring in more enjoyment into my life -- and I would wake up in the morning and ask myself "How can I bring more pleasure into my life?" And it was often very simple things. I think it will also matter how one thinks of pleasure -- is it fun? is it sweetness? is it love? is it satisfaction? is it comfort? is it good health? is it a little food treat? or smelling roses or adding cinnamon to breakfast? (We might want to limit certain food treats/sweets to once a week so that they feel more special). And everyone will come up with different desires. And it is so much easier to seek out things by using a gut-level sense of what is needed for a happy life.

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### Post by “Don” of August 21, 2022 at 10:30 PM

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

Also I am wondering about getting entirely away from metaphors and just thinking about real life

I like that. 😊 Make it practical!

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

I would wake up in the morning and ask myself "How can I bring more pleasure into my life?"

That's a good way to set your motivation and mindset.

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

how one thinks of pleasure -- is it fun? is it sweetness? is it love? is it satisfaction? is it comfort? is it good health? is it a little food treat? or smelling roses or adding cinnamon to breakfast?

I would say it's all of those. All those describe pleasure.

As I think some more, I still am becoming enamored of the idea that a pleasurable life's foundation is a mind and body free from trouble, pain, and anxiety. Ataraxia and aponia. That's where it starts! That's the foundation upon we can build experiences of pleasure arising from natural desires, both necessary and unnecessary. Without that foundation, we are anxious that we won't be able to fulfill desires we want to choose; we're troubled that our desire won't completely fulfill our expectations; we fear the pleasure coming from our chosen desire won't last long enough. The fears, anxieties, and troubles can spiral out of control. If we have a sound mind in a healthy body, we can pluck the desires we find appealing with no mental anguish, large or small. If your mind is already at peace, sink your teeth into the ripe peach, experience the juice dripping down chin, close your eyes and taste the sensuous sweetness on your tongue. Experience the pleasure undimmed by some mental baggage because you're already at the limit of pleasure and the peach is varying that feeling.

I admit I'm still working through this, but, Thank you [Kalosyni](#) for bringing us back to a practical real world perspective!

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## Post by "Don" of August 22, 2022 at 8:54 AM

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

Choosing natural but unnecessary \*desires\*

No doubt some of you will notice I didn't include those desires neither natural nor necessary. That was deliberate on my part.

Those are characterized by the scholia to [PD29](#) as:

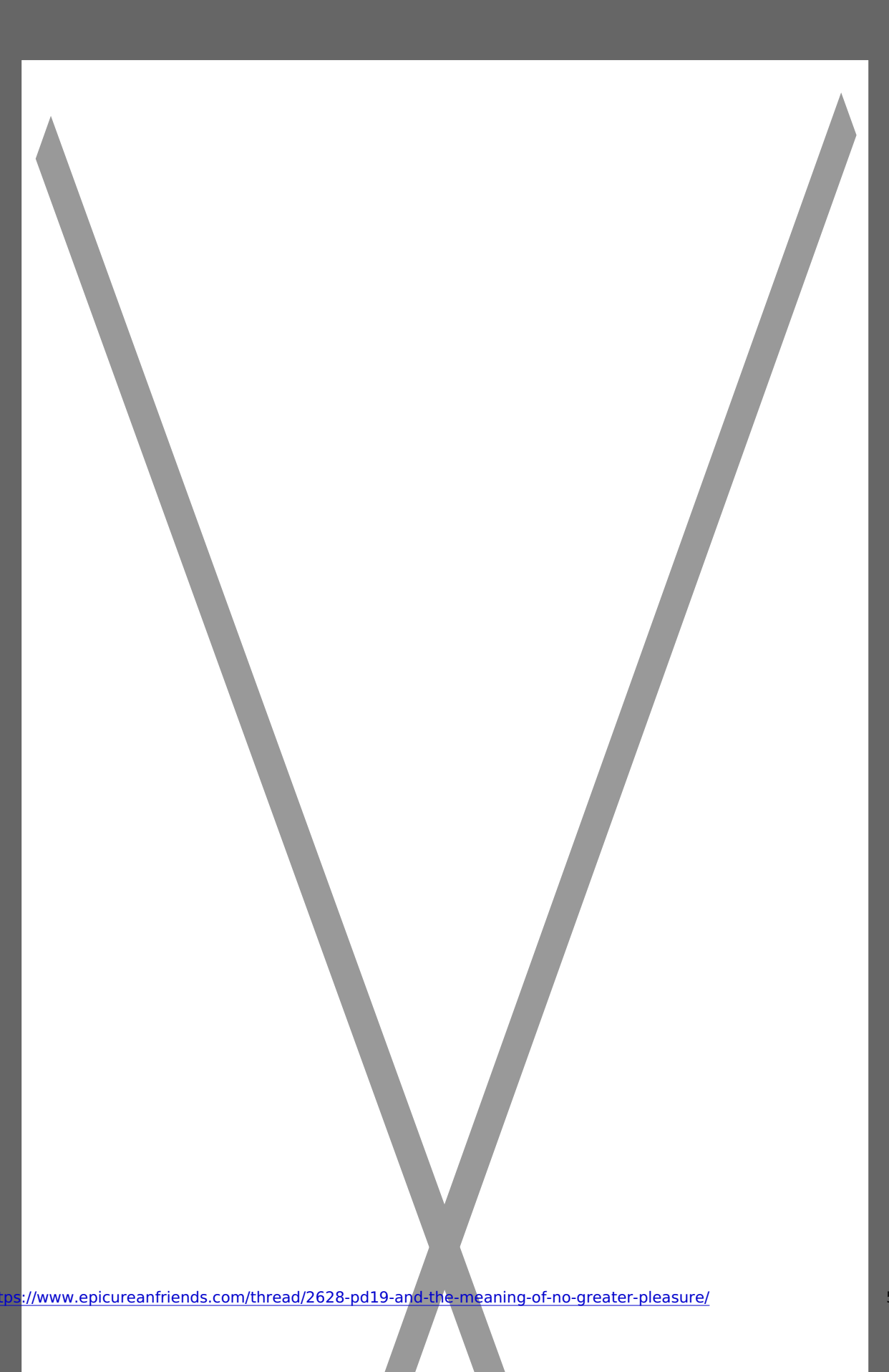
Quote

by the neither natural nor necessary he means desires for crowns and the erection of statues in one's honour

It has been conjectured that Epicureans like Cassius Longinus et al were pursuing desires that were deemed "neither natural nor necessary" in their pursuit of politics or role in the Roman Civil War. I would posit this is not necessarily the case. My take is that the situation was disturbing to him in many respects. He wasn't (necessarily) looking for "crowns and the erection of statues in one's honour." I think there are parallels with Torquatus's Epicurean justifications for his ancestor's actions.

For those unfamiliar, as I was, with Cassius Longinus:

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## Post by “Cassius” of August 22, 2022 at 9:30 AM

### [Quote from Don](#)

My take is that the situation was disturbing to him in many respects. He wasn't (necessarily) looking for "crowns and the erection of statues in one's honour." I think there are parallels with Torquatus's Epicurean justifications for his ancestor's actions.

I think you are right. I have never personally been able to unpack the situation at the time of the Roman civil war to get a good picture of what was really going on. What does seem clear is that it was a time of great change within the Roman social structure, and those who wished the older structure to continue considered themselves so personally threatened by the changes that they were willing to go to war. I think you're absolutely right to separate "crowns and statues" from more real-world issues. It's hard to think of things that are more unnecessary to a happy life than "crowns and statues." I presume to a large degree those represent recognition "by the crowd" which Epicurus was notably on record as not holding in high regard.

And while Cassius is best known for his part in the assassination, this part is equally interesting:

### Quote

Cicero associates Cassius's new Epicureanism with a willingness to seek peace in the aftermath of the [civil war between Caesar and Pompeius](#).<sup>[26]</sup> [Miriam Griffin](#) dates his conversion to as early as 48 BC, after he had fought on the side of Pompeius at the [Battle of Pharsalus](#) but decided to come home instead of joining the last holdouts of the [civil war](#) in [Africa](#).<sup>[27]</sup> Momigliano placed it in 46 BC, based on a letter by Cicero to Cassius dated January 45.<sup>[28]</sup> Shackleton Bailey points to a date of two or three years earlier.<sup>[29]</sup>

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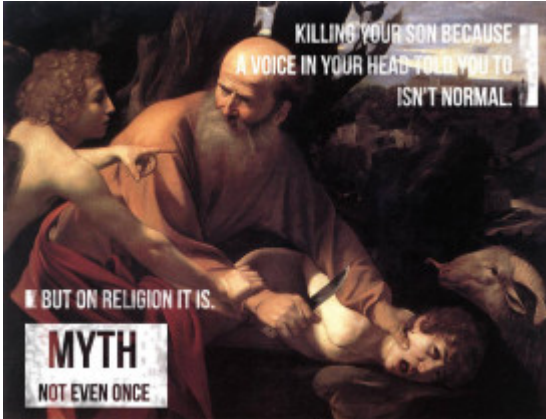
## Post by “Eikadistes” of August 22, 2022 at 10:27 AM

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

### [Quote from Don](#)

I'm trying to think of ways to get away from the vessel metaphor.

Also I am wondering about getting entirely away from metaphors and just thinking about real life.



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## Post by “Kalosyni” of August 22, 2022 at 12:50 PM

### [Quote from Don](#)

As I think some more, I still am becoming enamored of the idea that a pleasurable life's foundation is a mind and body free from trouble, pain, and anxiety. Ataraxia and aponia. That's where it starts! That's the foundation upon we can build experiences of pleasure arising from natural desires, both necessary and unnecessary. Without that foundation, we are anxious that we won't be able to fulfill desires we want to choose; we're troubled that our desire won't completely fulfill our expectations; we fear the pleasure coming from our chosen desire won't last long enough. The fears, anxieties, and troubles can spiral out of control. If we have a sound mind in a healthy body, we can pluck the desires we find appealing with no mental anguish, large or small. If your mind is already at peace, sink your teeth into the ripe peach, experience the juice dripping down chin, close your eyes and taste the sensuous sweetness on your tongue. Experience the pleasure undimmed by some mental baggage because you're already at the limit of pleasure and the peach is varying that feeling.

I think that ataraxia and aponia are important, however I view them differently -- because modern life is really at odds with being "pain free or untroubled".

We certainly wouldn't want to wait to be completely untroubled in order to enjoy life. In a given day we might have moments of feeling untroubled, but an active modern life will bring us into "stressful" moments. Also things can be a mix of pleasure and stress -- for example going to a coffeehouse can sometimes be too noisy (or unpleasing music is playing), but as long as there is over-all more pleasure than stress we will choose this activity. Also over time what might originally feel stressful can be adapted to.

Also, it came to me early this morning, that life requires a certain amount of "striving" or work. Most people until they are retired work at a job to make money for the purpose of survival (there are stay-at-home moms which is a big job in itself). Striving brings with it a certain amount of stress, but hopefully we can find ways to adapt which isn't too stressful (or jobs which aren't too stressful). Then beyond this for people who are retired, life still needs some form of striving, or else the will to live diminishes. And the striving could be any type of interest or goal (big or small) which requires some effort but also feels engaging and important in some way. And striving will always bring with it a small amount of mental stress. I would say that it is very important to make sure the level of stress does not become overwhelming.

So then for me "ataraxia and aponia" are focused toward creating more ease and comfort while still engaging in life -- and the amount of ease and comfort needed can vary from person to person, or from week to week.

Quote

we're troubled that our desire won't completely fulfill our expectations

This is where I believe that certain "natural goods" are important -- such as the need for friendship/companionship (and all the enjoyments that come with it) which can make life situations feel better or less stressful or less disappointing.

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## Post by "Cassius" of August 22, 2022 at 2:29 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

because modern life is really at odds with being "pain free or untroubled".

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Also, it came to me early this morning, that life requires a certain amount of "striving" or work.

I think both of those observations are true now and to a large extent have always been true - even in Epicurus' time - and we have to understand him on the presumption that he understood that too, and he was not putting forth something that is unrealistic.

Meaning NOT that we can attain those goals by ruthlessly diminishing desires and living in a cave on bread and water, but that Epicurus too understood the necessary stress and striving of life, and that he incorporated that into his advice. Epicurus himself never reached full absence of pain in body, and I bet he didn't in mind either. But he formulated a **goal** which helped him and us by providing something to shoot for, and that helps us calculate each step along the way.

That's why in addition to word structures for the goal, we need music and art and even poetry to help get emotionally attached to and focused on the goal to see that it is worthwhile.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of August 22, 2022 at 2:38 PM**

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

This is where I believe that certain "natural goods" are important -- such as the need for friendship/companionship (and all the enjoyments that come with it) which can make life situations feel better or less stressful or less disappointing.

The interpretation that I'm currently working with is that natural and necessary desires, such as friendship, are a priority. Fulfilling them is the bottom limit of the sweet spot. Once those are met, there's great pleasure to be had in pursuing a variety of desires, as long as we stay in the sweet spot and below the upper limit that is the vain desires. If the natural and necessary desires haven't been fulfilled, then it's a priority to work with them, although this will most likely be done concurrent with pursuing natural and unnecessary desires. In the process of sorting out all of these desires we determine what, for us as individuals, is natural and necessary and what is the icing on the cake. At least for me, it's a constant work in progress!

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### **Post by “Don” of August 22, 2022 at 11:15 PM**

I debated whether to respond to [Kalosyni](#)'s post above, but, the more I thought about it today, the more I wanted to share my perspective on some of her thoughts. I am not saying either of us is "right" or "wrong," but I'm sharing my perspective. Please, [Kalosyni](#), do not take any of this personally or as an ad hominem attack. It is sincerely not meant in that way! You bring a thoughtful, curious, personal perspective to this forum which I greatly appreciate. I hope I do the same and that my response below is in an Epicurean spirit of open, frank discussion.

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

I think that ataraxia and aponia are important, however I view them differently -- because modern life is really at odds with being "pain free or untroubled".

My first thought on reading this was: If modern life - in fact, life in any time - is at odds with being "pain free or untroubled," why do we find this acceptable? I don't want to think that "that's just the way things are." I don't want to accept that.

I want to envision a way of living in the modern world in which my mind \*can\* be untroubled, in which I can face any issue that comes up with composure and clear thinking. I want to think it's possible to assess every choice before me without mental anxiety or worry or distress. That's what ataraxia is about for me. It is an achievable way of experiencing the world here and now. It's not some ideal, Platonic, unattainable state. I may not have it all the time, but I can see it as a goal to work toward and catch glimpses of it so I know it's real.

Same with aponia. Epicurus obviously couldn't have meant it as a literally "pain-free existence" because he tells us he was in excruciating pain at the time of his death. The only way to not feel pain is without sensation, and if one is without sensation, you're already dead. But he did say it was possible to experience something. He describes it in PD3 as "Where that which gives pleasure exists, during the time it is present, there is neither pain nor that which causes pain in body or mind nor either of these together." The word for pain is actually *άλγος* "pain (of either mind or body)", but also sorrow, trouble, grief, distress, woe. And aponia is actually from *ἄπονος* (aponos) which has connotations of "freedom from toil or trouble." So, (as DeWitt says it) it's the whole "sound mind in a sound body" idea. We can also work toward a healthy body that doesn't give us trouble. We're going to have some aches and pains as we grow old, but maintaining health will alleviate some of that trouble.

I think Epicurus is also suggesting we toil too much and trouble ourselves too much. I need to go back and re-read the full *Property Management* by Philodemus, but I seem to remember there are pertinent sections in there on that topic.

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

We certainly wouldn't want to wait to be completely untroubled in order to enjoy life.

I agree completely, and I think Epicurus calls us to not wait to experience pleasure and to enjoy life. But I don't think we have to be "completely untroubled" to get a taste of what it might be like to live untroubled.

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

an active modern life will bring us into "stressful" moments.

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

things can be a mix of pleasure and stress -- for example going to a coffeehouse can sometimes be too noisy (or unpleasing music is playing), but as long as there is over-all more pleasure than stress we will choose this activity. Also over time what might originally feel stressful can be adapted to.

I couldn't put my finger on what bothered me with these, but I think it's the emphasis on "stress" and "stressful" here. I suggest replacing "stress" with "pain" to see how that feels. I can certainly see how "things can be a mix of pleasure and pain"; but, to me, the word "stress" adds an emotional dimension - "stress" is a way of adding our emotional reaction to the immediate feeling of pain. I'm not sure that's necessary if we're aiming at the (eventual) goal of well-being or ataraxia and aponia or happiness or completely pleasurable life. If sitting in the coffeehouse is too painful, move to a different coffeehouse. If the music can be ignored or one puts earbuds in to block the noise, do that.

So, I agree with the second part of that excerpt but again, I would advocate for not adding the emotional baggage of "stress". If one thinks of it as "stress" or anxiety or annoyance or something else, I think that feeds on itself. Pain is simply negative feeling without further judgement. If the pain is to be experienced to experience a greater pleasure, then sit with it. If the pain is simply painful, do everything to rid yourself of it. There is no virtue to "grin and bear it" for the sake of grinning and bearing it.

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

life requires a certain amount of "striving" or work. Most people until they are retired work at a job to make money for the purpose of survival (there are stay-at-home moms which is a big job in itself). Striving brings with it a certain amount of stress, but hopefully we can find ways to adapt which isn't too stressful (or jobs which aren't too stressful). Then beyond this for people who are retired, life still needs some form of striving, or else the will to live diminishes. And the striving could be any type of interest or goal (big or small) which requires some effort but also feels engaging and important in some way. And striving will always bring with it a small amount of mental stress. I would say that it is very important to make sure the level of stress does not become

overwhelming.

"Striving" struck the same chord in me as "stress/stressful." It will be a little less than a decade until I can consider retirement. I try to not constantly associate my job with stress, striving, and survival, although I admit there are days and situations that cause me pain, mostly mental. However, that again to me is an argument for working toward a mind that can think clearly and a body that isn't in pain. That word "striving" to me conjures Protestant work ethic, "idle hands are the devil's plaything," and similar themes. We can work toward goals, personal and professional, that aren't characterized by mental stress and striving. To me, the last sentence sums up the issue: "it is very important to make sure the level of stress does not become overwhelming." The way to make sure the "level of stress does not become overwhelming" is to cultivate the very freedom from trouble in the mind for which Epicurus appears to advocate.

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### **Post by "Kalosyni" of August 23, 2022 at 9:16 AM**

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

My first thought on reading this was: If modern life - in fact, life in any time - is at odds with being "pain free or untroubled," why do we find this acceptable? I don't want to think that "that's just the way things are." I don't want to accept that.

I want to envision a way of living in the modern world in which my mind \*can\* be untroubled, in which I can face any issue that comes up with composure and clear thinking.

That's great and I also think it is highly dependent upon life circumstances. So perhaps your circumstances are supportive of living untroubled -- once one is settled down in life and lives in a happy and safe community/city, is secure with one's living situation (owns one's own home), feels fully confident in financial security (with enough savings to last till the end of one's life) has a safety net of good family and friends, and has no doubts about future well-being. Anyone who doesn't have any of these will have to use the very painful attempt of a "mind over matter" approach and try to repress their worries if they want to feel at peace -- perhaps this is why we have religion (and stoicism) as one way to try to deal with a troubled mind.

And as such it may appear that that Epicureanism is for the "well-to-do" person, but I don't agree. I see pleasure as an antidote -- one pursues "pleasure as medicine" -- and then in this way the philosophy can be applied regardless of one's level of wealth.

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

I suggest replacing "stress" with "pain" to see how that feels. I can certainly see how "things can be a mix of pleasure and pain"; but, to me, the word "stress" adds an emotional dimension - "stress" is a way of adding our emotional reaction to the immediate feeling of pain.

Good point here, and yes it would be better to be more specific with words for emotions and feelings. Anxiety, fear, worry, feeling tense, anxious, frustrated -- immediate reactions followed by further reactions -- and then further reactions might be worry that one can't change one's circumstances.

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of August 23, 2022 at 10:01 AM**

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

it may appear that that Epicureanism is for the "well-to-do" person, but I don't agree. I see pleasure as an antidote -- one pursues "pleasure as medicine" -- and then in this way the philosophy can be applied regardless of one's level of wealth.

For example, it may appear that there is no way to change or improve one's situation -- but if 10 years later things CAN change -- what do you do while you are waiting to get there? You enjoy life the best you can!

I realize my own life reflects a situation in which I was not happy (living in an unpleasant house) and it took me 8 years to figure out what to do differently, to start moving in a different direction.

[Don](#), I still stand by my word choice of "striving" -- because some of us need to choose to strive toward happiness, and strive to move toward pleasure. I suppose another choice of words would be "put in some effort" -- because we need to put in some effort into creating a good life.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 23, 2022 at 11:18 AM**

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

perhaps your circumstances are supportive of living untroubled -- once one is settled down in life and lives in a happy and safe community/city, is secure with one's living situation (owns one's own home), feels fully confident in financial security (with enough savings to last till the end of one's life) has a safety net of good family and friends, and has no doubts about future well-being. Anyone who doesn't have any of these will have to use the very painful attempt of a "mind over matter" approach and try to repress their worries if they want to feel at peace -- perhaps this is why we have religion (and stoicism) as one way to try to deal with a troubled mind.

To me I see no conflict between striving and being at peace. In fact it is ONLY if you have striven as hard as you can to attain your goals that you can really be at peace with yourself, especially as you near the end of your life.

I see nothing in the life histories of any historically known Epicurean that they had any approach other than to work as earnestly and as hard as they could to attain the kind of lives that they wanted to live.

So I see no necessary contradiction between "striving" and "pleasure." The issue always come back to whether you are making the right choices and avoidances to produce the result that you want. "The right choices" certainly can involve "striving" and working and even voluntarily enduring stress.

I think Jefferson had it right in the letter to William Short:

#### Quote

I take the liberty of observing that you are not a true disciple of our master Epicurus in indulging the indolence to which you say you are yielding. One of his canons, you know, was that "that indulgence which prevents a greater pleasure, or produces a greater pain, is to be avoided." Your love of repose will lead, in its progress, to a suspension of healthy exercise, a relaxation of mind, an indifference to everything around you, and finally to a debility of body, and hebetude of mind, the farthest of all things from the happiness which the well-regulated indulgences of Epicurus ensure; fortitude, you know is one of his four cardinal virtues. That teaches us to meet and surmount difficulties; not to fly from them, like cowards; and to fly, too, in vain, for they will meet and arrest us at every turn of our road.

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**Post by "Don" of August 23, 2022 at 11:38 PM**

Thank you for the thought-provoking responses!

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

That's great and I also think it is highly dependent upon life circumstances. So perhaps your circumstances are supportive of living untroubled --.

I think being "untroubled" or having peace of mind *regardless of circumstances* is the goal of "philosophy" or seeking wisdom. But let me expand on that idea...

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

once one is settled down in life and lives in a happy and safe community/city, is secure with one's living situation (owns one's own home), feels fully confident in financial security (with enough savings to last till the end of one's life) has a safety net of good family and friends, and has no doubts about future well-being. Anyone who doesn't have any of these will have to use the very painful attempt of a "mind over matter" approach and try to repress their worries if they want to feel at peace

I'm not sure my circumstances are all as rosy as you might assume from the list you've provided about your assessment of my circumstances, but that's all I'll say about those. If we wait to have peace of mind until our lives are somehow subjectively perfect to an outside observer (or to ourselves), it will never happen. We humans will always find some goal unattainable, some aspect unsatisfactory, and we can think "If I can resolve that, then I can live "untroubled" or to have "peace of mind."" My position is that "peace of mind" or ataraxia is achievable *regardless of circumstances*. To me, *that* is the goal of a practical philosophy which one lives. It's not "mind over matter" or ignoring problems or wearing rose-colored glasses. It's assessing each situation - each choice and avoidance - with a clear mind, with practical wisdom, and with a clear goal in mind...which, in the case of Epicurus' philosophy, is to lead a more pleasurable life tomorrow than I did today. I often - always! - fall short of that goal, but it's a goal nonetheless that I continually try to keep in mind even though I am a novice at best this Epicurean gig.

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

And as such it may appear that that Epicureanism is for the "well-to-do" person, but I don't agree. I see pleasure as an antidote -- one pursues "pleasure as medicine" -- and then in this way the philosophy can be applied regardless of one's level of wealth.

I agree that Epicureanism is not a philosophy for the "well-to-do" only. His philosophy attracted the most down-trodden members of ancient Greek society but also kings and wealthy Romans. So, I also fully agree with you that "the philosophy can be applied regardless of one's level of

wealth." That is my point in the previous paragraph. I would simply substitute "level of wealth" for "circumstances" and say ""the philosophy can be applied regardless of one's circumstances." Do we end up agreeing on that?

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

For example, it may appear that there is no way to change or improve one's situation -- but if 10 years later things CAN change -- what do you do while you are waiting to get there? You enjoy life the best you can!

Absolutely! You carpe the diem while the sun shines to mix metaphors. But I wouldn't encourage people to think of their lives as "waiting to get" something. The idea is to enjoy the little things as well as the big things every day.

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

I realize my own life reflects a situation in which I was not happy (living in an unpleasant house) and it took me 8 years to figure out what to do differently, to start moving in a different direction.

I'm sincerely glad that you were able to get out of an unhappy situation! Inertia, habit, and complacency are powerful forces (speaking from personal experiences both large and small).

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

I still stand by my word choice of "striving" -- because some of us need to choose to strive toward happiness, and strive to move toward pleasure. I suppose another choice of words would be "put in some effort" -- because we need to put in some effort into creating a good life.

I respect your decision to stand by your word. I personally have negative feelings toward that word for various reasons, so I may be inferring connotations that you're not intending. I like "put in some effort".

That said, Epicurus, to me, calls us to consider carefully what we are striving or struggling for. Is the goal worth the effort? Will the goal actually bring us happiness and well-being and pleasure, or is it a goal imposed on us by indoctrination of culture or empty desires?

I appreciate your willingness to engage on these topics. Your responses help me sharpen my mind and ask myself what it is I believe. These are some fundamental questions!

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**Post by “reneliza” of August 24, 2022 at 1:13 PM**

### [Quote from Don](#)

I debated whether to respond to [Kalosyni](#)'s post above, but, the more I thought about it today, the more I wanted to share my perspective on some of her thoughts. I am not saying either of us is "right" or "wrong," but I'm sharing my perspective. Please, [Kalosyni](#), do not take any of this personally or as an ad hominem attack. It is sincerely not meant in that way! You bring a thoughtful, curious, personal perspective to this forum which I greatly appreciate. I hope I do the same and that my response below is in an Epicurean spirit of open, frank discussion.

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

I think that ataraxia and aponia are important, however I view them differently -- because modern life is really at odds with being "pain free or untroubled".

My first thought on reading this was: If modern life - in fact, life in any time - is at odds with being "pain free or untroubled," why do we find this acceptable? I don't want to think that "that's just the way things are." I don't want to accept that.

I want to envision a way of living in the modern world in which my mind \*can\* be untroubled, in which I can face any issue that comes up with composure and clear thinking. I want to think it's possible to assess every choice before me without mental anxiety or worry or distress. That's what ataraxia is about for me. It is an achievable way of experiencing the world here and now. It's not some ideal, Platonic, unattainable state. I may not have it all the time, but I can see it as a goal to work toward and catch glimpses of it so I know it's real.

Same with aponia. Epicurus obviously couldn't have meant it as a literally "pain-free existence" because he tells us he was in excruciating pain at the time of his death. The only way to not feel pain is without sensation, and if one is without sensation, you're already dead. But he did say it was possible to experience something. He describes it in PD3 as "Where that which gives pleasure exists, during the time it is present, there is neither pain nor that which causes pain in body or mind nor either of these together." The word for pain is actually άλγος "pain (of either mind or body)", but also sorrow, trouble, grief, distress, woe. And aponia is actually from ἄπονος (aponos) which has connotations of "freedom from toil or trouble." So, (as DeWitt says it) it's the whole "sound mind in a sound body" idea. We can also work toward a healthy body that doesn't give us trouble. We're going to have some aches and pains as we grow old, but maintaining health will alleviate some of that trouble.

I think Epicurus is also suggesting we toil too much and trouble ourselves too much. I need to go back and re-read the full *Property Management* by Philodemus, but I seem to remember there are pertinent sections in there on that topic.

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

We certainly wouldn't want to wait to be completely untroubled in order to enjoy life.

I agree completely, and I think Epicurus calls us to not wait to experience pleasure and to enjoy life. But I don't think we have to be "completely untroubled" to get a taste of what it might be like to live untroubled.

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

an active modern life will bring us into "stressful" moments.

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

things can be a mix of pleasure and stress -- for example going to a coffeehouse can sometimes be too noisy (or unpleasing music is playing), but as long as there is over-all more pleasure than stress we will choose this activity. Also over time what might originally feel stressful can be adapted to.

I couldn't put my finger on what bothered me with these, but I think it's the emphasis on "stress" and "stressful" here. I suggest replacing "stress" with "pain" to see how that feels. I can certainly see how "things can be a mix of pleasure and pain"; but, to me, the word "stress" adds an emotional dimension - "stress" is a way of adding our emotional reaction to the immediate feeling of pain. I'm not sure that's necessary if we're aiming at the (eventual) goal of well-being or ataraxia and aponia or happiness or completely pleasurable life. If sitting in the coffeehouse is too painful, move to a different coffeehouse. If the music can be ignored or one puts earbuds in to block the noise, do that.

So, I agree with the second part of that excerpt but again, I would advocate for not adding the emotional baggage of "stress". If one thinks of it as "stress" or anxiety or annoyance or something else, I think that feeds on itself. Pain is simply negative feeling without further judgement. If the pain is to be experienced to experience a greater pleasure, then sit with it. If the pain is simply painful, do everything to rid yourself of it. There is no virtue to "grin and bear it" for the sake of grinning and bearing it.

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

life requires a certain amount of "striving" or work. Most people until they are retired work at a job to make money for the purpose of survival (there are stay-at-home moms which is a big job in itself). Striving brings with it a certain amount of stress, but hopefully we can find ways to adapt which isn't too stressful (or jobs which aren't too stressful). Then beyond this for people who are retired, life still needs some form of striving, or else the will to live diminishes. And the striving could be any type of interest or goal (big or small) which requires some effort but also feels engaging and important in some way. And striving will always bring with it a small amount of mental stress. I would say that it is very important to make sure the level of stress does not become overwhelming.

"Striving" struck the same chord in me as "stress/stressful." It will be a little less than a decade until I can consider retirement. I try to not constantly associate my job with stress, striving, and survival, although I admit there are days and situations that cause me pain, mostly mental. However, that again to me is an argument for working toward a mind that can think clearly and a body that isn't in pain. That word "striving" to me conjures Protestant work ethic, "idle hands are the devil's plaything," and similar themes. We can work toward goals, personal and professional, that aren't characterized by mental stress and striving. To me, the last sentence sums up the issue: "it is very important to make sure the level of stress does not become overwhelming." The way to make sure the "level of stress does not become overwhelming" is to cultivate the very freedom from trouble in the mind for which Epicurus appears to advocate.

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There's so much good in here, but I want to just specifically pull out this one quote "Pain is simply negative feeling without further judgement."

I think that's great, and the kind of practical thing that I could actually take and put into action in my life immediately. It's reminiscent of the quote "pain is unavoidable, suffering is optional" which I have always really liked. The epicurean goal is to eliminate all pain but... sometimes things happen, and also I'm super clumsy so sometimes I run into a door frame or kick a wall and stub my toe while walking down the hall. There's so much to be said for just accepting and feeling that pain (when it is unavoidable) and not ADDING to it with judgments or resistance to feeling it, which is when it goes beyond just pain, and becomes suffering, or stress, or anxiety, or any of these other things that are generally viewed as being problems to be solved beyond the pain itself.

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**Post by "reneliza" of August 24, 2022 at 1:40 PM**

This conversation is also bringing to mind another common saying that I was going to post on the forum anyway, because I see some problems with it.

“Nothing in life worth having comes easy”

My thought is that Epicurus tells us literally the opposite. There are sometimes we will chose pain to find a greater pleasure (or avoid a greater pain) but in general the things we need come easy. I suspect this kind of saying representing the Protestant work ethic is actually problematic because it makes it seem like the good life is out of your grasp (for now at least - you just need to work harder!!) where for most of us it is within reach. We don't need to work harder, we just have to pluck it. I don't remember now where the “plucking” language came from but I do really like it.

(This isn't to downplay the difficulties of dealing with things like poverty or abuse, but increasing effort is rarely going to improve those situations anyway)

I'd love to hear other thoughts.

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## Post by “reneliza” of August 24, 2022 at 2:12 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

perhaps your circumstances are supportive of living untroubled -- once one is settled down in life and lives in a happy and safe community/city, is secure with one's living situation (owns one's own home), feels fully confident in financial security (with enough savings to last till the end of one's life) has a safety net of good family and friends, and has no doubts about future well-being. Anyone who doesn't have any of these will have to use the very painful attempt of a "mind over matter" approach and try to repress their worries if they want to feel at peace -- perhaps this is why we have religion (and stoicism) as one way to try to deal with a troubled mind.

To me I see no conflict between striving and being at peace. In fact it is ONLY if you have striven as hard as you can to attain your goals that you can really be at peace with yourself, especially as you near the end of your life.

I see nothing in the life histories of any historically known Epicurean that they had any approach other than to work as earnestly and as hard as they could to attain the kind of lives that they wanted to live.

So I see no necessary contradiction between "striving" and "pleasure." The issue always come back to whether you are making the right choices and avoidances to produce the result that you want. "The right choices" certainly can involve "striving" and working and even voluntarily enduring stress.

I think Jefferson had it right in the letter to William Short:

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Although anyone may of course use the words they want, I have to side with Don when it comes to the word striving. It has a relatively positive connotation these days (in a world where it is believed that anything worth having is difficult to obtain), but it is etymologically related to strife and I just FEEL that element of discord and contention in the word. It feels unnatural as though anything that would require me to strive would be something that is at odds with my nature and I'm trying to work through that to force it to fit anyway. (Noting of course that sometime people have to do exactly this in order to provide for themselves - I still don't see it as a positive but as unfortunately unavoidable in certain situations)

Having looked into the dictionary definitions a bit, I think I really like the verb "endeavor" which yes, also implies exertion, but in a way that feels less unpleasant from the start, and even adventurous and exciting. It's the exertion that allows me to feel pleasure and accomplishment even while it's hard work and sometimes painful.

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**Post by "Godfrey" of August 24, 2022 at 2:46 PM**

It may have been mentioned earlier in this thread, but Empedocles (I think) saw the universe as being made up of Love and Strife. That, as I recall, was one of the pre-Socratic notions that eventually led to atomism.

Maybe a more directly pertinent thought is the contrast between "pleasure ethics" and "duty ethics". For most of my life I was living by duty ethics, although I wasn't consciously aware of it. Duty ethics is a great way to grow the economy and keep the worker bees buzzing, and it takes the stance that pleasure will be the downfall of everything. Pleasure ethics, on the other hand, is a great way to live life in a manner that is connected to physical reality. No vengeful gods needed. This is one more way that Epicurus endeavored (as it were) to counteract the destructive influence of Plato.