

# Did Epicurus Commit Suicide Due To His Disease? (Merger of Two Threads On When Voluntary Death Makes Sense)

Post by “Don” of December 7, 2022 at 7:14 AM

## [Quote from Cassius](#)

here is also the slightly less agreeable (but still true) implication that we are "able to leave when the play has ceased to please us" -- meaning that under truly horrible circumstances there is always the possibility of taking our "final exit."

I know you bring this up on occasion, but I can never remember the textual reference. Where is that?

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Post by “Cassius” of December 7, 2022 at 8:28 AM

Torquatus:

XV. The same account will be found to hold good of Courage. The performance of labors, the undergoing of pains, are not in themselves attractive, nor are endurance, industry, watchfulness, nor yet that much lauded virtue, perseverance, nor even courage; but we aim at these virtues in order to live without anxiety and fear and so far as possible to be free from pain of mind and body. The fear of death plays havoc with the calm and even tenor of life, and to bow the head to pain and bear it abjectly and feebly is a pitiable thing; such weakness has caused many men to betray their parents or their friends, some their country, and very many utterly to ruin themselves. So on the other hand a strong and lofty spirit is entirely free from anxiety and sorrow.

It makes light of death, for the dead are only as they were before they were born. It is schooled to encounter pain by recollecting that pains of great severity are ended by death, and slight ones have frequent intervals of respite; while those of medium intensity lie within our own control: we can bear them if they are endurable, or if they are not, we may serenely quit life's theater, when the play has ceased to please us. These considerations prove that timidity and cowardice are not blamed, nor courage and endurance praised, on their own account; the former are rejected because they beget pain, the latter coveted because they beget pleasure.

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## Post by “Cassius” of December 7, 2022 at 8:40 AM

Your question (and something Joshua brought up in a recent podcast discussion) reminds me that for some reason I am seeing the first four doctrines in a little different light lately:

- 1 - is the antidote to "Fear of the gods"
- 2 - is the antidote to "Fear of death"
- 3 - is the antidote to "Fear of missing out", and
- 4 - is the antidote to "Fear of unmanageable pain."

All of which might be better thought of as an "innoculation" (does that get me past the current politics of the word "vaccination"?) 😊 But joking aside it's not only or even primarily a matter of calming an anxious mind (though that is desirable and applicable at times too) as it is a matter of preparation to weather the storms that come so that you will be prepared for them and conquer them in turn. That's what I take from the description of Epicurus as a conquering hero in the opening of Lucretius Book One, or the words of Vatican saying 47:

“I have anticipated thee, Fortune, and entrenched myself against all thy secret attacks. And I will not give myself up as captive to thee or to any other circumstance; but when it is time for me to go, spitting contempt on life and on those who vainly cling to it, I will leave life crying aloud a glorious triumph-song that I have lived well.”

While it has it's use for both circumstances this isn't as much a philosophy of anesthesia but a war chant in preparation for battle - a "glorious triumph-song" for those of a "strong and lofty spirit."

And knowing that no matter how bad things get there is a way out of unmanageable pain (if it does truly become unmanageable) is an important part of that.

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## Post by “Don” of December 7, 2022 at 11:37 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

It is schooled to encounter pain by recollecting that pains of great severity are ended by death, and slight ones have frequent intervals of respite; while those of medium

intensity lie within our own control: we can bear them if they are endurable, or if they are not, we may serenely quit life's theater, when the play has ceased to please us.

Hmm... I've seen other translations and the Latin and I'm not sure I agree with your interpretation as that text endorsing suicide as a solution albeit in the extreme. I'll create another thread possibly so this thread isn't hijacked.

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### Post by “Cassius” of December 7, 2022 at 12:05 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

as a solution albeit in the extreme

Sometimes I wonder what "albeit" means. 😊 So to be clear especially for others reading this thread I do want to be as clear as possible that I believe that they were reserving suicide only for the most extreme of conditions. Just to construct some hypothetical I am thinking in terms of being King Leonidas about to be captured by the Persians and being sure that he would be tortured to death after he was caught. (Not that Leonidas did commit suicide - I gather he died fighting.) In other words some extremely painful torture and death was awaiting you with certainty and with absolutely no possible way to escape. However, in a way I do think that it is hard to draw a bright line on the definition of "unmanageable." I can easily imagine being bedridden with some extremely painful form of clearly terminal cancer fitting the bill. Yes we want to make sure that there is no possibility of escape or ability to endure the pain for the sake of whatever pleasure is still possible. But where to draw that line is going to be a subjective individual question rather than objective.

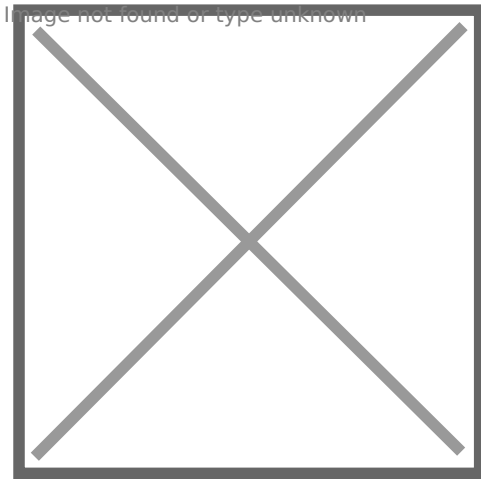
Or maybe - to be even closer to home - I would cite the example of Cassius Longinus, who committed suicide after thinking that all was lost at the battle of Phillipi, doubtless thinking that he would himself suffer the same fate as Cicero, or worse, after being caught by Mark Antony.

(It's also pretty depressing when you google versions of that name and come up with lots of references to salsa singers rather than Roman History.)

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### Post by “Don” of December 7, 2022 at 12:15 PM

LOL! 😊 Just to check myself:



[Definition of ALBEIT](#)

even though : although... See the full definition  
[www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com)

Yeah, I'm still not sure I agree, but this'll have to wait until later. I have thoughts.

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**Post by “ccarruth42” of December 7, 2022 at 6:46 PM**

Does VS38 apply to this EOL question? Reading through the PD and VS and saw it.

"He is of very small account for whom there are many good reasons for ending his life."

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**Post by “Cassius” of December 7, 2022 at 7:08 PM**

Oh yes I definitely think that applies. Like most questions it is important to point out both sides, and you are Not going to die voluntarily if there is any reasonable way around it. But sometimes you choose to die for a friend is clearly stated, and everyone should be a friend to themselves, so I definitely think that applies.

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**Post by “Don” of December 7, 2022 at 7:50 PM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2773-did-epicurus-commit-suicide-due-to-his-disease-merger-of-two-threads-on-when-vol/>

Cassius: Would you want to move posts #6 to the end to a new thread so we don't hijack the original intent of this thread?

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### **Post by "Cassius" of December 7, 2022 at 7:55 PM**

Yes let me do that now

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### **Post by "Cassius" of December 7, 2022 at 7:58 PM**

How is that for a new title? Once we get settled down we can remove the administrative posts

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### **Post by "Joshua" of December 7, 2022 at 8:30 PM**

I think we should preface this with some background on how the moral opinions on suicide are shaped by culture. Broadly speaking two major categories have been defined.

#### Quote

Various sociologists and anthropologists have contrasted cultures of honour with cultures of law. A culture of law has a body of laws which all members of society must obey, with punishments for transgressors. This requires a society with the structures required to enact and enforce laws. A culture of law incorporates a social contract: members of society give up some aspects of their freedom to defend themselves and retaliate for injuries, on the understanding that society will apprehend and punish transgressors.

^Wikipedia page "honour"

Honor cultures would include Japan under the Shogunate, Rome under the republic, the American frontier West, etc. In all of these cases it is customary to hold one's honor dearer than one's life. Dueling, honor killing, and ritual suicide all have some portion in these societies. More anon...

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## Post by “Don” of December 7, 2022 at 11:03 PM

Cicero, De Finibus 1.15.49

ut enim mortis metu omnis quietae vitae status perturbatur, et ut succumbere doloribus eosque humili animo inbecilloque ferre miserum est, ob eamque debilitatem animi multi parentes, multi amicos, non nulli patriam, plerique autem se ipsos penitus perdidierunt, sic robustus animus et excelsus omni est liber cura et angore, cum et mortem contemnit, qua qui affecti sunt in eadem causa sunt, qua ante quam nati, et ad dolores ita paratus est, ut meminerit maximos morte finiri, parvos multa habere intervalla requietis, mediocrium nos esse dominos, ut, si tolerabiles sint, feramus, si minus, animo aequo e vita, cum ea non placeat, tamquam e theatro exeamus.

Specifically:

si tolerabiles sint, feramus, si minus, animo aequo e vita, cum ea non placeat, tamquam e theatro exeamus.

Rackham's translation (that [Cassius](#) gives above) reads:

It is schooled to encounter pain by recollecting that pains of great severity are ended by death, and slight ones have frequent intervals of respite; while those of medium intensity lie within our own control: we can bear them if they are endurable, or if they are not, we may serenely quit life's theater, when the play has ceased to please us.

Yonge ([from Project Gutenberg](#) ) reads:

For as the whole condition of tranquil life is thrown into confusion by the fear of death, and as it is a miserable thing to yield to pain and to bear it with a humble and imbecile mind; and as on account of that weakness of mind many men have ruined their parents, many men their friends, some their country, and very many indeed have utterly undone themselves; so a vigorous and lofty mind is free from all care and pain, since it despises death, which only places those who encounter it in [pg 116]the same condition as that in which they were before they were born; and it is so prepared for pain that it recollects that the very greatest are terminated by death, and that slight pains have many intervals of rest, and that we can master moderate ones, so as to bear them if they are tolerable, \*\*and if not, we can depart with equanimity out of life, just as out of a theatre, when it no longer pleases us.\*\*

Okay, so here are those initial thoughts I foreshadowed previously...

I read this text in relation to PD4

"Pain does not last continuously in the flesh; instead, the sharpest pain lasts the shortest time, a pain that exceeds bodily pleasure lasts only a few days, and diseases that last a long time involve delights that exceed their pains." (Saint-Andre)

The reason that "the sharpest pain lasts the shortest time" is because, in Epicurus's time at least, that meant it would kill you.

However, according to this PD again, "diseases that last a long time involve delights that exceed their pains."

Both sections of this PD are exactly the situations that Epicurus found himself in, but he wrote on his deathbed: "My continual sufferings from strangury and dysentery are so great that nothing could augment them." If there was a time to advocate suicide, this would surely have been a place to do it. And yet, Epicurus's conduct at the end of life even gets lauded by Stoics like Marcus Aurelius and Seneca.

I've admitted my Latin is rudimentary, at best, but it seems to be that the way the punctuation in the Latin goes seems to set up the following phrases:

si tolerabiles sint "if it (pain) is tolerable"

feramus "we bear (it)"

si minus "if not"

animo aequo "with a calm mind"

e vita "from life"

cum ea non placeat "when it (life) no longer pleases"

tamquam e theatro exeamus "as if we are exiting from a theater"

Read in the context of PD4, this Ciceronian text says to me: When pain is no longer tolerable, it is going to kill you. but you should be able to face that situation, with a calm mind, as if you're simply exiting a theater presenting a play that you are no longer enjoying.

To my reading, this text is not advocating suicide even in the most extreme cases, because Epicurus was experiencing pains so bad that "nothing could augment them." But, even then, he set his "gladness of mind" against that pain to recall happy memories.

If you break down the Yonge translation:

1. the very greatest [pains] are terminated by death
2. slight pains have many intervals of rest

3. we can master moderate ones, so as to bear them if they are tolerable

4. if not, we can depart with equanimity out of life, just as out of a theatre, when it no longer pleases us.

To my reading of the text, it is saying that if you have intolerable pain, it'll be over soon. Keep your calm mind in anticipation of leaving life as you would walking out of a theater when the play no longer pleases you.

I don't think I'm doing any tricky or complex exegesis here. I'm trying to read the text as literally as possible, and I'm not seeing an advocacy of suicide in any sense.

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### Post by “Don” of December 7, 2022 at 11:15 PM

[Quote from ccarruth42](#)

Does VS38 apply to this EOL question? Reading through the PD and VS and saw it.

"He is of very small account for whom there are many good reasons for ending his life."

Exactly, [ccarruth42](#) !

There's also VS75:

This saying is utterly ungrateful for the good things one has achieved: provide for the end of a long life.

εἰς τὰ παρωχηκότα ἀγαθὰ ἀχάριστος φωνῆ ἢ λέγουσα· τέλος ὄρα μακροῦ βίου.

Saint-Andre has a note to this translation: *The force of ὄρα here might be "provide for" (as I have translated it), "beware", or even just "look to"; the overall sense is that preparing for a supposed afterlife shows a lack of appreciation for the good things of life on earth.*

[Vatican Sayings, by Epicurus](#)

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### Post by “Cassius” of December 7, 2022 at 11:20 PM

Ok I see what you are saying, but I see that as coming very close to a "mind over reality" situation. If what you are facing is intolerable but you are still alive, why not do for yourself what you would do for your dog or a cat and put yourself out of your misery? I would say that if you are judging your net pleasure during pain to be worth the pain then what you are facing is indeed the first situation, where the pain is endurable, but that does not foreclose circumstances wherein the pain is indeed so intense that you rationally wish to relieve yourself from it even through death.

Do you not think that such situations exist? Or do you think that .even in such extreme circumstances we have the mental power to suppress our pain? The quotes about even the wise man crying out under torture might be relevant here.

It also might be interesting to seek out some commentaries on this to see if there are perhaps (as often) well known positions by earlier philosophers on this point.

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### **Post by "Don" of December 7, 2022 at 11:22 PM**

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

you are Not going to die voluntarily if there is any reasonable way around it.

Again, I bring up the example of Epicurus's death. He \*knew\* he was going to die, and yet he still didn't choose to die voluntarily, even though there was no way around it.

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

sometimes you choose to die for a friend is clearly stated, and everyone should be a friend to themselves, so I definitely think that applies.

Hmm... not sure if I agree here either. That seems a little convoluted in being a friend to yourself so you'll die for you? I think this is an apple and oranges situation here.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of December 7, 2022 at 11:24 PM**

We might have crossposted, but just so i am clear, you are taking the position that suicide is never warranted for an Epicurean?

So that while you might choose to die 'for a friend" you would never choose to die "for yourself"?

As Camotero posted I can see that quote about the man of being of little account who has many reasons for ending his life going in that direction, but i am still not inclined to read it that far as applying in all and every situation.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of December 7, 2022 at 11:31 PM**

This is certainly an interesting question, especially in regard to Epicurus' own death. It has never been clear to me from the texts whether Epicurus knew that his condition was irreversible and terminal, or whether he had hope of recovery, which I think would make all the difference in a situation like his.

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### **Post by “Don” of December 7, 2022 at 11:32 PM**

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

very close to a "mind over reality" situation

Oh, I don't think that at all. Even the sage will cry out on the rack. But leaving life "[animo aequo](#)" just means:

*aequo (aequiore, aequissimo) animo, with even mind, with equanimity, patiently, calmly, quietly, with forbearance*

If you're experiencing that much intolerable pain, you know what's coming. Scream, wail, cry out in pain, but don't rail against. Don't curse the gods. Don't complain about regrets in your life. If you \*know\* you're dying (which is what that kind of pain meant in Epicurus's day) and there's no escape, face it "animo aequo".

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

Do you not think that such situations exist? Or do you think that .even in such extreme circumstances we have the mental power to suppress our pain?

Again, I'm not saying the pain is repressed like a Stoic. I'm saying the pain is real, intolerable, and lethal. An Epicurean isn't "suppressing" anything. They're feeling and acknowledging their pain. If it's that bad, they understand the end is near. All this comes out of the medical assistance that was available in Epicurus's day.

Where we're at now with medical treatment is a different story entirely.

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### **Post by “Don” of December 7, 2022 at 11:33 PM**

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

This is certainly an interesting question, especially in regard to Epicurus' own death. It has never been clear to me from the texts whether Epicurus knew that his condition was irreversible and terminal, or whether he had hope of recovery, which I think would make all the difference in a situation like his.

Well, he says ""On this blissful day, which is also the last of my life" That sounds pretty irreversible and terminal to me.

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### **Post by “Don” of December 7, 2022 at 11:47 PM**

There's also the section on death in the Letter to Menoikeus (emphasis added):

#### Quote from Epicurus's Letter to Menoikeus

Furthermore, accustom yourself in believing that, for us, death is nothing since all pleasure and pain are in perception of the senses and the mind, and death is the absolute negation of perception. So, correct understanding is that death is nothing for us, and this is what makes the mortality of life enjoyable: not gaining an endless lifetime for oneself but taking away the yearning for not dying or immortality. [125] For

there is nothing terrible in living for the one who truly comprehends that there is nothing terrible in not living. So, the one who says death is to be feared is foolish, not that there will be pain and distress when it is present but that there is pain in anticipation; because that which is present does not trouble, disquiet, or annoy, and anticipation itself pains and distresses one fruitlessly. Death, that which causes utter horror, which causes one to shudder, that "most utterly horrifying of pains" as it is understood by the hoi polloi, then is nothing to us. On the one hand, at the time when we are (that is while we are living), death is not present; on the other hand, whenever death is present, then we are not (i.e., we don't exist). Death is neither a concern for those who are living nor for those whose lives are ended.

But the hoi polloi, on the one hand, flee from death as if it is the greatest evil, then, on the other hand, on the other hand, they desire for themselves an ending of the evil (pain) in living. [126] So then, the wise one neither begs nor craves for living nor fears not living: Neither to set oneself against living, nor to imagine that it is evil to not live. Just as the most food is not chosen but that which brings the greatest pleasure; choose as well not the longest time but that in which one enjoys the fruits of that which bring the greatest pleasure.

So, the one who exhorts, on the one hand, for the one who is young to live nobly; and, on the other hand, the one who is old to come to an end nobly is a good-hearted simpleton not only because life is to be welcomed but also because the practice of living well, nobly, and beautifully and the practice of dying well, nobly, and beautifully are the same. But far worse is the one who says, on the one hand, it is well not to be born; or, on the other hand,

"failing this, to pass through the gates of Hades as soon as possible."

[127] On the one hand, if what they say is persuasive, how does one not depart from life? For this is readily at hand, if indeed one was to resolve oneself steadfastly to this. If, on the other hand, this is in jest, one is foolish for making fun of things which do not admit of this.

To me, all those underlined parts are saying the same thing as leaving life "animo aequo."

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**Post by "Don" of December 7, 2022 at 11:52 PM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

you are taking the position that suicide is never warranted for an Epicurean?

I'm not sure I'm saying that, especially in light of modern medical intervention that can continue physical existence but not provide quality of life. Right now, I'm neither saying nor not saying suicide is never an option for an Epicurean. I (think) I am saying I'm not seeing any advocacy for suicide as a viable option in any of the texts.

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

So that while you might choose to die "for a friend" you would never choose to die "for yourself"?

I think that's an apple and orange argument. To me, the reason you would "die for a friend" is that if the friend dies and you \*could\* have saved them, you have to live with that pain for the remainder of your life. I don't think that's applicable to the discussion of whether suicide is an option as an end of life decision.

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### **Post by “Don” of December 8, 2022 at 12:11 AM**

I want to state here that this discussion of suicide is not meant to be casual or flippant. It is an exploration of the ancient texts.

I am sure all of us would encourage anyone dealing with thoughts of suicide to reach out for help to a friend or to a medical professional or to the national 988 number.

Today in the US, “**988**” is the three-digit, nationwide phone number to connect directly to the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline as established by the FCC.

#### [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#)

Today, “988” is the three-digit, nationwide phone number to connect directly to the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. By calling or texting 988, you’ll connect...

[www.fcc.gov](http://www.fcc.gov)

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### **Post by “Cassius” of December 8, 2022 at 6:19 AM**

Looks like there's an article here but I can't get to it:  
<https://www.suicideinfo.ca/resource/siecno-20030345/>

As usual I don't think we are far apart. Suicide (or acts leading to your own death in any circumstances) is a final option that would never be chosen except in extreme circumstances. However I am still persuaded that extreme circumstances do exist that would warrant it, and in fact Epicurus knew that that day would be his last, and he thought his pain was outweighable by the pleasure available to him, I would still put that in the first category of endurable pain. It is when you face the possibility of lengthy pain you deem to be unendurable, such as having failed to save the life of a friend, or perhaps facing a lengthy torture, rather than instant death, that I would see "exiting the play when it has ceased to please us" as a viable option.

And in support of that spirit I would enlist "spitting contempt on life and on those who cling to it" as the same spirit of taking charge of your death just as you take charge of your life:

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

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## Post by "Cassius" of December 8, 2022 at 6:22 AM

I see the Epicurus wiki says this, with which i agree:

## Suicide

[Epicurus](#) saw very few cases in which **suicide** might be justified.

Unlike the [Stoics](#), who famously advocated suicide in a great number of cases, where "the wise man could no longer live according to his principles", Epicurus and his followers took a more humanly acceptable view of the matter: recognizing that humans are normally inclined to want to go on living because of the pleasures of life, and correlating this with the axiomatic value of [pleasure](#), Epicurus insisted that suicide is foolhardy, or at the very least: that it be considered as a measure of very last resort.

The fourth tenet of the [Four-Part Cure](#) alludes precisely to this: what is painful, is easy to endure. In illness, we hope to regain our [health](#); even when the illness is chronic and painful, the [pain](#) grows dull with habituation, and we learn to cherish the pleasures left us, despite the

pain; finally, when pain reaches an unbearable maximum, [death](#) cannot be far behind it -- and death means the cessation of the senses, and thus of both pleasure and pain.

Epicurus' view on suicide is both humane and practical: it does not entirely disallow suicide (as does [Christianity](#), and other religious faiths), nor does it offer it too readily, either as escapism or as an article in some code of honor (as have done several militarist cultures).

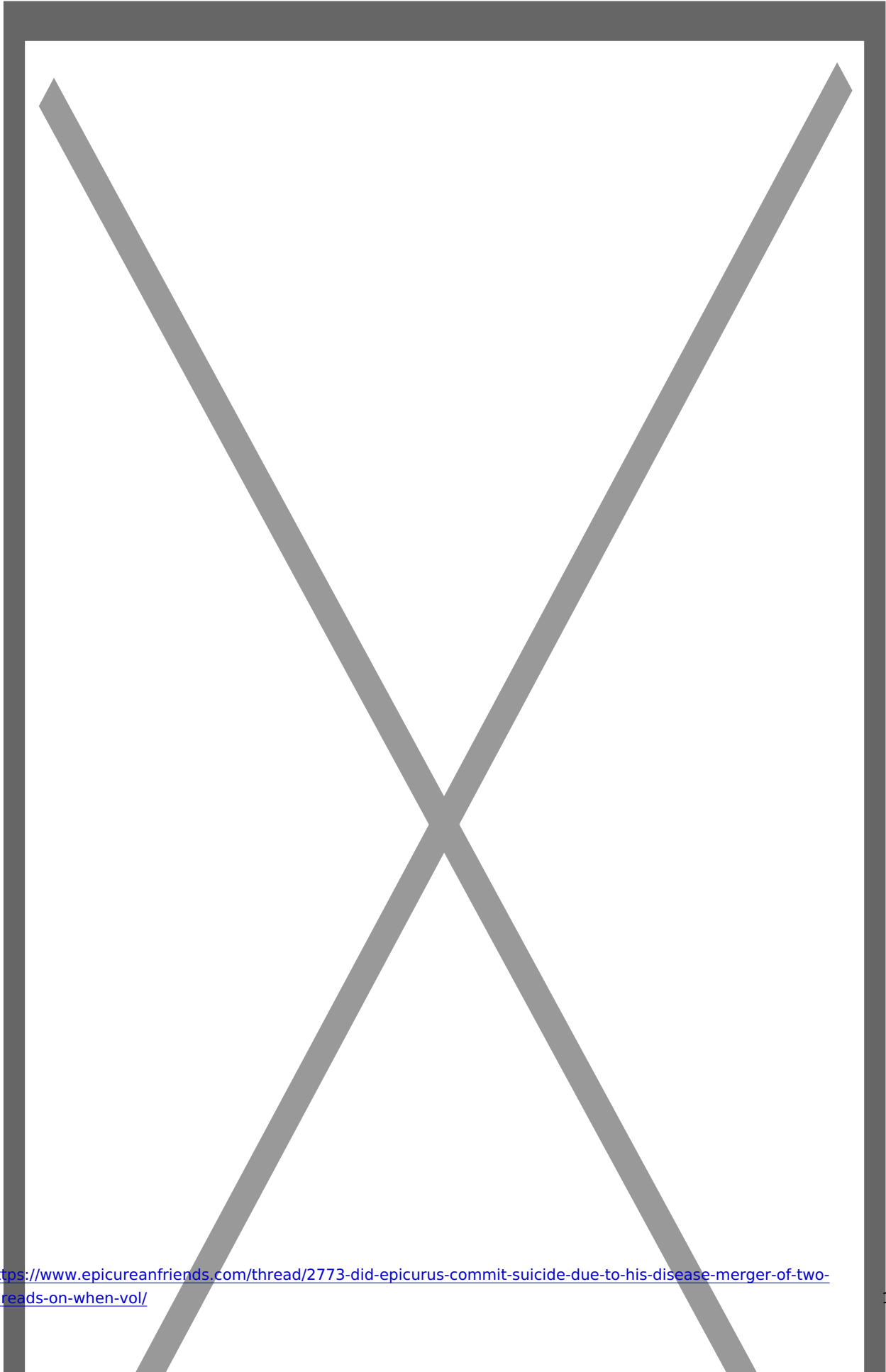
[Suicide - Epicurus Wiki](#)

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**Post by “Cassius” of December 8, 2022 at 6:41 AM**

More cites: (Which I will now list here in one post and add to if i find more):

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<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2773-did-epicurus-commit-suicide-due-to-his-disease-merger-of-two-threads-on-when-vol/>

### [Epicurus' death - PubMed](#)

The aim is to present how an eminent philosopher perceived, reported and faced his progressing and ultimately fatal uropathy, 23 centuries ago. All available...

pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov

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### **Post by “Don” of December 8, 2022 at 8:06 AM**

Here is a paper that cites the one you referenced (that one behind the paywall)

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/f6a6/8bb87913d6481817873845afa32fd0385936.pdf>

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### **Post by “Don” of December 8, 2022 at 8:26 AM**

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

I would see "exiting the play when it has ceased to please us" as a viable option.

As I mentioned, I don't see that line as saying what you're interpreting it as. I see it as having no more concern for the approach of imminent death as one would in "exiting the play when it has ceased to please us." The emphasis is not on an active walking out or actively killing oneself that's the metaphor. It's accepting one's imminent death "animo aequo" with no more concern than walking out of a play that has no pleasure anymore. "Torquatus" acknowledges that there is no pleasure in the pain, but death is imminent so it's time to not regret or complain to the gods and so on. It's time to hold on to the only thing you have left in your final moments,

"animo aequo".

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

And in support of that spirit I would enlist "spitting contempt on life and on those who cling to it" as the same spirit of taking charge of your death just as you take charge of your life:

VS47. I have anticipated thee, Fortune, and I have closed off every one of your devious

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2773-did-epicurus-commit-suicide-due-to-his-disease-merger-of-two-threads-on-when-vol/>

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

Same here for Metrodorus's Vatican Saying. You seem to imply that he encourages us to kill ourselves while "singing aloud a glorious triumph-song on how nicely we lived." I don't get that at all. He's a little hyperbolic but he's encouraging the same things as I've mentioned above. When the end comes and you know what's coming, sing "a glorious triumph-song on how nicely we lived." Don't cling needlessly to life if you're dying. Don't try to bargain with the gods. If you've lived well, be happy for that! Life is done. Take the example of Epicurus's death and look back on a life well-lived with pleasant memories as death is imminent.

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

[Quote from Cassius via Epicurus Wiki](#)

The fourth tenet of the Four-Part Cure alludes precisely to this: what is painful, is easy to endure. In illness, we hope to regain our health; even when the illness is chronic and painful, the pain grows dull with habituation, and we learn to cherish the pleasures left us, despite the pain; finally, when pain reaches an unbearable maximum, death cannot be far behind it -- and death means the cessation of the senses, and thus of both pleasure and pain.

Epicurus' view on suicide is both humane and practical: it does not entirely disallow suicide (as does Christianity, and other religious faiths), nor does it offer it too readily, either as escapism or as an article in some code of honor (as have done several militarist cultures).

In principle, I think I agree with that last paragraph, but, for me, it would be an extrapolation from the existing texts and not based on any I've read (in this thread or outside of it). Especially in the letter to Menoikeus, Epicurus seems to come down hard on those who talk about exiting life as quickly as possible. He doesn't appear to add any qualifiers. The end of life situations I read are about living life in a manner that will allow you to accept imminent death at the end, even if accompanied by "pains that cannot be augmented," with no regrets, no cursing the gods, no fear of an afterlife, etc.

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## **Post by “Cassius” of December 8, 2022 at 9:44 AM**

Ok I think perhaps our difference in perspective comes down to some of the same issues we have discussed in the past about hypotheticals --- I am willing to entertain them as thought exercises, and some people are less willing to engage in that.

It is easy for me to imagine hypothetical circumstances in which continuing to live would result in overwhelming pain with virtually no offsetting pleasure whatsoever. (The situation of Cassius and Brutus after Philippi being one example. So I would ask - "Do you think Epicurus would say that Cassius made a poor decision in committing suicide rather than handing himself over to Antony's men?")

That's only one example and maybe not even the best. The main issue is that I don't see a bright line saying "hang in there to the very last moment" that would apply to everyone in all situations. I see a theme in Epicurean philosophy of taking charge of things and managing every aspect of your life - and death - as aggressively as possible. How we do that would I think be a personal decision totally context-dependent, and not reducible to a formal test other than where we seem to be ending up, which is something like "never consider suicide lightly and always consider it to be a last resort but know that death is available to you as a relief from pain if in fact you judge the situation makes it the best choice."

Also to close this post it looks to me like much of the reason for the debate at the time was that the Stoics (and others?) seem to have taken a cavalier attitude toward suicide. And of course why not, if you think death is the doorway to paradise? Clearly Epicurus opposed that view, and I would follow Epicurus' original and fundamental position is that death is unconsciousness for eternity, and something that we generally want to postpone as long as possible. However just as in the letter to Menoeceus we don't choose the longest life but the most pleasant, we consider the management of our final moments to be part of the calculus to consider in living the "most pleasant" life.

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## **Post by “ccarruth42” of December 8, 2022 at 10:06 AM**

Don, are you pointing to an experience similar to what's reported when someone is on their deathbed and a loved one tells them that it's ok to go if they need to. Basically, the loved one tells the sick person they have permission to let go when they're ready. So instead of clinging to life, they now have permission to "exit the play"?

To me, this scenario seems to match the sentiment behind your quote

## Quote

It's accepting one's imminent death "animo aequo" with no more concern than walking out of a play that has no pleasure anymore. "Torquatus" acknowledges that there is no pleasure in the pain, but death is imminent so it's time to not regret or complain to the gods and so on. It's time to hold on to the only thing you have left in your final moments,

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## Post by "Don" of December 8, 2022 at 12:42 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

It is easy for me to imagine hypothetical circumstances in which continuing to live would result in overwhelming pain with virtually no offsetting pleasure whatsoever.

Oh, it's easy for me, too. If I ever encounter that situation in my life, what will I do? I don't know, but I'm not discounting the option out of hand. Consider a diagnosis of Alzheimer's or a degenerative physical disease where everything, one's mind and one's control over one's body are slowly, inexorably taken from you accompanied by constant pain. Would you - would I - choose to end our suffering? This also brings up the difference between "suffering" and "pain." They're not the same. Is suicide - or physician-assisted suicide - an option?

I have no problem coming up with hypothetical situations around this topic.

But you also say "*virtually* no offsetting pleasure whatsoever," which implies that there's *some* "offsetting pleasure" which almost looks to me like a description of Epicurus's end of life.

Like I said above, I might agree with in principle that suicide - or physician-assisted suicide - is a viable end of life option *in extremis*, but I'm wrestling with whether or not that's *necessarily an Epicurean response* to that situation. I'm just not seeing justification for that *in the extant texts*. I *fully* agree with you as you've said elsewhere about Epicurus insisting that we take charge for our lives and choices. But, *as far as I can see in the texts*, Epicurus and Metrodorus and "Torquatus" never advocated for suicide in response to "intolerable" pain. You've mentioned that Epicurus was able to tolerate his pain and so he wasn't experiencing "intolerable" pain, but to my mind that's splitting hairs. If someone tells me that can't image any greater pain than they were already experiencing and that they feel they're dying within the day, that sounds pretty "intolerable" to me. (Now, whether Epicurus's letter has been embellished over the centuries? Maybe, but we have the text that we have.)

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

"Do you think Epicurus would say that Cassius made a poor decision in committing suicide rather than handing himself over to Antony's men?"

I'm hesitant to put words in dead people's mouth, so I won't speak for Epicurus. I will say that it seems to be that G. Cassius Longinus committed suicide because he was a *Roman, first and foremost*, not because he was an Epicurean. His Roman culture and upbringing and conditioning led him to that - probably to him - inescapable decision to take his life.

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

The main issue is that I don't see a bright line saying "hang in there to the very last moment" that would apply to everyone in all situations.

It's not a "hang in there until the last moment." That kind of "grit your teeth and bear it" is a Stoic response. That's not what the texts say. If you're in pain, you can scream, yell, bite down on a wooden stick, writhe. An Epicurean is not going to "grin and bear it."

BUT, I'm seeing the texts within the time period they were written, which is why it's so hard translating specific ancient situations into modern "hypothetical" scenarios. The intolerable pain, the pain with no pleasure left, the mind-numbing all-encompassing pain - when those texts were written - is going to lead to death imminently. You have wounds or a disease like that, it's going to kill you - most likely in short order. And, even if you are in pain, try to remember to face it "animo aequo" - no regrets, no fear, no superstition.

On the other hand, modern science can work medical miracles in situations that would have been lethal in ancient times! That's where the difficulty comes in. Is it better to allow someone to die rather than provide "life-saving" (usually "life-prolonging-at-what-expense") treatment? That's where the modern "death positive" community is so intriguing and important in providing information on palliative care, hospice care, etc. If pain can be managed and suffering relieved, death can be faced "animo aequo".

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

"never consider suicide lightly and always consider it to be a last resort but know that death is available to you as a relief from pain if in fact you judge the situation makes it the best choice."

Fully agree with that first statement! And that's where the "death positive" movement says that there are ways to mitigate suffering as death approaches. If it is "the best choice," it has to be after every other option has been weighed because of its finality. Too many people see it as just another choice. Here are some statistics about suicide in the US:

## [Suicide Data and Statistics | Suicide | CDC](#)

This is why the letter to Menoikeus section is so important in my view. Epicurus is specifically addressing people who talk flippantly about suicide and "leaving life as quickly as possible." It couldn't have been the Stoics either, because they were not the powerhouse they would become at the time Epicurus was writing. This seems to be a general cultural attitude in ancient Greece.

And I know you're not talking flippantly. I know that and want to acknowledge that. But when we talk about suicide being a "choice" or even the "best choice" it seems the old slippery slope argument to making it just another choice if there's pain in one's life. And Epicurus and the Epicurean school did not endorse that in any way.

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

death is *unconsciousness* for eternity

I know you didn't mean it this way, but I'll note it anyway. I would caution against using a word like "unconsciousness for eternity" in that context. Unconsciousness is still a state of being and implies a being that is unconscious. Death is the complete absence of sensation and feeling because there's no thing to sense or feel. There is no being - no person, no thing - after one dies. It is the complete cessation of life. Nada. Zilch. No thing. Like I said, I know you didn't mean anything like that by using that word, but it stuck out to me when I read it like "Oops! Better nip this one in the bud before someone else latches onto it!"

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## Post by "Don" of December 8, 2022 at 12:44 PM

### [Quote from ccarruth42](#)

Don, are you pointing to an experience similar to what's reported when someone is on their deathbed and a loved one tells them that it's ok to go if they need to. Basically, the loved one tells the sick person they have permission to let go when they're ready. So instead of clinging to life, they now have permission to "exit the play"?

To me, this scenario seems to match the sentiment behind your quote

Quote from Don

It's accepting one's imminent death "animo aequo" with no more concern than walking out of a play that has no pleasure anymore. "Torquatus" acknowledges that there is no pleasure in the pain, but death is imminent so it's time to not regret or complain to the gods and so on. It's time to hold on to the only thing you have left in your final moments,

Exactly! Well put. That's one of the exact scenarios I was thinking of!

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### **Post by "Cassius" of December 8, 2022 at 1:29 PM**

I never thought we were far apart on this and after further discussion I feel sure of it. If someone thinks there is a major difference in approach or that we have left something unresolved they should ask about it. Every situation is different, and for example Cassius Longinus had different considerations than we have today. I think we all agree there is no one size fits all rule, and I think we have covered the basic principles pretty well.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of December 8, 2022 at 6:33 PM**

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

I will say that it seems to be that G. Cassius Longinus committed suicide because he was a Roman, first and foremost, not because he was an Epicurean.

I just realized an appropriate comment to this given our recent discussions:. There are not really any Ideal forms or essences of "Epicureans," only individual people who claim to more or less apply Epicurean views in their lives - and no matter how many doctrines we add or subtract from a person there is no essence or ideal form of an Epicurean for us to justify our labelling, or any moment when an Epicurean ceases to be an Epicurean due to a loss of sufficient Epicurean elements.

We have to always keep this in mind - our definitions and our calculations do not create reality or reflect knowledge from another "true world", our words just help us to describe our particular circumstances.

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## Post by "Don" of December 8, 2022 at 6:53 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I never thought we were far apart on this and after further discussion I feel sure of it

On the actual topic of suicide, I would agree. I think we both understand someone's (maybe even my own) decision to take that step in the extreme of pain and suffering. I think that's a humane and humble position to have.

That said, I don't necessarily think that's a position that Epicurus or the Epicurean school would take. I don't see textual evidence of that position. We can rationalize that they might have taken it, but I'm not seeing textual evidence of it.

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

There are not really any Ideal forms or essences of "Epicureans," only individual people who claim to more or less apply Epicurean views in their lives - and no matter how many doctrines we add or subtract from a person there is no essence or ideal form of an Epicurean for us to justify our labelling, or any moment when an Epicurean ceases to be an Epicurean due to a loss of sufficient Epicurean elements.

Hmmm... Well, under that definition of "Epicurean," it seems to me that I could call myself a "Christian" if I want to. There have to be some Epicurean criteria or some "essential" (I don't like the word but I'll use it) doctrines by which one lives their life to be considered an Epicurean. Otherwise the word has no meaning.

I wasn't saying that Cassius Longinus wasn't an Epicurean. In fact, I said he was an Epicurean. I'm saying his decision to kill himself was in keeping with his heritage and upbringing as to what it meant to be a Roman citizen in a military setting. He could be both things. I would even go so far as to posit that him laying down his life in a manner befitting a Roman may even have given him pleasure in the end. He determined he would die \*as a Roman\* and not as some kind of captured criminal or slave.

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## Post by "Pacatus" of December 8, 2022 at 7:43 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

There are not really any Ideal forms or essences of "Epicureans," only individual people who claim to more or less apply Epicurean views in their lives - and no matter how many doctrines we add or subtract from a person there is no essence or ideal form of an Epicurean for us to justify our labelling, or any moment when an Epicurean ceases to be an Epicurean due to a loss of sufficient Epicurean elements.

Thank you! 😊

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### Post by "Pacatus" of December 8, 2022 at 7:57 PM

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

There have to be some Epicurean criteria or some "essential" (I don't like the word but I'll use it) doctrines by which one lives their life to be considered an Epicurean. Otherwise the word has no meaning.

The problem here, Don, is that there is no "one" - no generalized person. There is me, and you, as we try to apply Epicurean teachings to better our lives - not in adherence to some exogenous "truth" (no matter wherefrom derived) whether it is personally helpful or not.

So, yes, it's possible (maybe probable) that I don't measure up to some criteria required to be a "True Epicurean™" in someone's eyes, or some "authoritative" version. Okay. Not a problem for me.

I really don't think we can get beyond that, much as it might be tempting to try. 😊❤️

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### Post by "Don" of December 8, 2022 at 8:40 PM

#### [Quote from Pacatus](#)

we try to apply Epicurean teachings to better our lives

And...Right there. 😊 I'd ask what "Epicurean teachings" are you trying to apply to better your life. If you're trying to apply Epicurus's teachings to better your life, that makes you an

Epicurean as opposed to a Christian or Stoic or something else.

I'll be the first to say unequivocally that there is no "apostolic" Epicurean lineage, there is no Epicurean scholar determining Orthodox practices. But, if someone wants to think of themselves as an Epicurean and part of a larger Garden community, there has to be some shared principles and practices. I also grant it's a wide net but the net cannot be so huge that it means nothing to say "I'm an Epicurean." Otherwise, it means nothing and Epicurus at least taught that words have to have a commonly understood meaning otherwise communication is impossible.

There is also a difference between implementing a smorgasbord or cafeteria of practices into one's life and picking a single path. Both can need done. There are Jewish Buddhists out there. But, from my perspective, if someone wants to think of themselves as an Epicurean, they have to share some principles and practices with other "Epicureans" for that word to have meaning.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of December 8, 2022 at 9:20 PM**

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

would even go so far as to posit that him laying down his life in a manner befitting a Roman may even have given him pleasure in the end.

That's exactly what I think, and that is an example how different people take pleasure in different things and the "subjectivity" of things - at least within rather wide limits.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of December 8, 2022 at 9:28 PM**

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

I don't see textual evidence of that position.

for the time being we can just note our disagreement on that, because at least for me I do see that implication in the texts I cited. It's always difficult to know the subtleties but I see those phrases, and even the tone of "[death is nothing to us](#)" as implying an "in your face" attitude toward the view that we should be scared of things associated with death - sort of the

aggressive attitude of "trampling religion underfoot" that a lot of commentators seem to think that Lucretius displays. And I am especially firm in thinking that Epicurean Philosophy points toward managing our circumstances of dying as much as managing our living.

That reminds me that there may be another useful example in the ancient bio of Atticus.

(And no I will never accept that the Roman Epicureans were not orthodox Epicureans. :-). )

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### **Post by "Cassius" of December 8, 2022 at 9:29 PM**

Let's see if anything is here:.

[Epicurus.info : E-Texts : The Life of Atticus](https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2773-did-epicurus-commit-suicide-due-to-his-disease-merger-of-two-threads-on-when-vol/)

Yes, he starved himself to death after a long illness.


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### **Post by "Cassius" of December 8, 2022 at 9:31 PM**

He had completed seventy-seven years in such a manner, and into extreme old age had advanced no less in dignity than in influence and fortune - for he obtained many inheritances exclusively by his own goodness - and had enjoyed such good health that he had not needed medicine for thirty years, then he fell ill. At the beginning neither he nor his physicians took it seriously, for they thought it was a gripping of the bowel [i.e. dysentery] for which swift and simple remedies were proposed. When he had suffered for three months in this condition without any pain except for those he experienced from the treatment, the disease burst so violently into his lower intestine that at the end ulcers full of pus burst through his loins.

And before this befell him, after he felt the pains increase daily and the fever grow, he gave orders for his son-in-law Agrippa to be summoned, and Lucius Cornelius Balbus and Sextus Peducaeus along with him. When he saw they had come, he leaned on one elbow and said: "How much care and attention I have devoted to restoring my health recently I do not need to tell at length, since I have you as witnesses. Since I have, I hope, satisfied you that I have left nothing undone that might serve to cure me, all that is left is that I now look after my own well-being. I did not wish you to be ignorant of my purpose: for I am resolved no longer to nourish the disease. For however much food I have taken in these last days, I have so prolonged my life as to increase the pain without hope of recovery. Thus I beg of you both to approve of my

resolution and not to try to shake me by pointless dissuasion"

 After giving this speech with such resolve in his voice and expression that he seemed not to be quitting life but moving from one house to another, Agrippa in particular embraced him in tears and begged him not to hasten his death over and above nature's compulsion, and, since even then he might survive the crisis, to preserve himself for his own sake and for the sake of those dearest to him, but Atticus quelled his pleas with silent obstinacy. So when he had abstained from food for two days, the fever suddenly abated and the disease began to be more bearable. Nevertheless he carried through his resolution undeviatingly and so died on the fifth day after he made his decision, on the last day of March when Gnaeus Domitius and Gaius Sosius were consuls [March 31<sup>st</sup>, 22 BCE]. He was carried to his burial on a modest bier as he had himself directed, without any funeral procession, but escorted by all men of substance and by very large crowds of the common people. He was buried by the Appian Way at the fifth milestone, in the tomb of his maternal uncle Quintus Caecilius.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of December 8, 2022 at 9:44 PM**

Unless Diogenes Laetius made any short comments I am not sure we know anything much about the death of other ancient Epicureans besides Epicurus and Atticus and Cassius Longinus? Anyone recall any other anecdotes?

For these purposes I suppose we can exclude Julius Caesar as -even if of Epicurean leanings - he did not choose his exit.

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### **Post by “Little Rocker” of December 8, 2022 at 9:44 PM**

Textual note: apologies if this has already been mentioned, but my impression is that Lucretius suggests that Democritus was (or would be) justified in suicide (he 'voluntarily went to meet death') because he was suffering the onset of dementia (DRN 3: 1040). My rough read on this is that the best strategy for coping with the end of life is to recollect memories, so dementia undermines the best way of coping with dying.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of December 8, 2022 at 9:50 PM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2773-did-epicurus-commit-suicide-due-to-his-disease-merger-of-two-threads-on-when-vol/>

Thanks for that cite! It's hard not to smile when reading the almost snarkiness of lines like "you snore when awake...". 😊. (I am not sure why I say "almost". - you "drunken wretch!")

#### Quote

Democritus, warned by ripe old age that the motions of his mind's 1040 memory were failing, voluntarily went to meet death and offered him his life.<sup>88</sup> Epicurus himself died, when the light of his life had accomplished its course—he who outshone the human race in genius and obscured the luster of all as the rising of the ethereal sun extinguishes the stars.<sup>89</sup> Will you, then, be hesitant and indignant, when death calls? You, even while you still have life and light, are as good as dead: you squander the greater part of your time in sleep; you snore when awake; you never stop daydreaming; you are burdened with a mind disturbed by groundless fear; and often you cannot discover what is wrong with you, when, like 1050 some drunken wretch, you are buffeted with countless cares on every side and drift along aimlessly in utter bewilderment of mind

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### Post by “Cassius” of December 8, 2022 at 10:12 PM

I see James Warren says ("Facing Death - Epicurus And His Critics):

Of course, the Epicureans do agree that suicide would be the end of these people's cares, but it is certainly not the preferred course of action. If only these poor souls would instead find out from the Epicureans that death is nothing to fear, then they would be able to manage their lives properly and find true pleasure in it. Suicide, therefore, is generally a sign of having seriously misguided opinions about the world. However, there are clearly occasions and circumstances when an Epicurean too would be justified in ending his own life. While extolling the virtue of courage, Torquatus allows that in the face of certain pains suicide might be acceptable:

sic robustus animus...ad dolores ita paratus est ut meminerit maximos morte finiri, parvos multa habere intervallarequietis, mediocrium nos esse dominos ut si tolerabiles sint feramus, si minus, animo aequo e vita, cum ea nonplaceat, tamquam e theatro exeamus.

A strong soul is so readied against pains that it remembers that the greatest are curtailed by death, the small ones are punctuated by long intervals of peace, and we are in control of those of a medium strength so that if they can be endured we endure them and if not we may leave life calmly if it does not please us, just as we may leave the theatre. Cic. Fin. 1.49

The message here is that someone properly schooled can endure even quite severe pains, but if even this ability is challenged by ongoing and unendurable distress then it is open to us to leave life. Importantly, this is done calmly and rationally (aequo animo);<sup>344</sup>

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### **Post by “Cassius” of December 8, 2022 at 10:14 PM**

More from James Warren (same source):

it is the result of a calculation that the alternative would be a continued life of pain. Provided life has pleasure left in it, we will continue to live. And the Epicurean sage will be sufficiently schooled to continue to find pleasure in life under conditions which others would find unbearable—Epicurus' own example of composure in the face of terminal illness demonstrates this. <sup>345</sup> Seneca reports the suicide of an Epicurean named Diodorus. On this occasion it is not so clear whether or not he is acting in strict accordance with Epicurean teaching.

Diodorum, Epicureum philosophum, qui intra paucos dies finem vitae suae manu sua imposuit, negant ex decreto Epicuri fecisse, quod sibi gulam praesequit. alii dementia videri volunt factum hoc eius, alii temeritatem; ille interim beatus ac plenus bona conscientia reddidit sibi testimonium vita excedens laudavitque aetatis in portu et ad ancoram actae quietem et dixit, quod vos inviti audistis, quasi vobis quoque faciendum sit, 'vixi et quem dederat cursum fortuna peregi' (=Verg. Aen. 4.653).

They say that the Epicurean philosopher Diodorus, who just recently ended his own life by his own hand, did not act according to Epicurus' doctrine because he cut his own throat. Some want this deed to be seen as madness, others as rashness. But he, happy and full of good understanding, bore witness to himself as he left life, praised the tranquility of a life spent in port at anchor, <sup>346</sup> and said something which you did not like to hear, as if you too ought to follow its advice: 'I have lived, and finished the course which fortune dealt me'. Sen. De Vita Beata 19.1

Again, the accusation of un-Epicurean behaviour seems to be on the basis of Diodorus acting not out of a sound and rational consideration of the situation but out of either madness or temperance. Seneca, however, is keen to emphasize Diodorus' calm at the end, based not only on the appreciation of a tranquil life lived but also on the acceptance that that life had come to the end of its course. What is not clear from this description is just why Diodorus had decided to quit a pleasant life, and this is presumably the reason why some were suspicious of his motives

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### **Post by “Don” of December 8, 2022 at 10:49 PM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2773-did-epicurus-commit-suicide-due-to-his-disease-merger-of-two-threads-on-when-vol/>

VS74 In a scholarly dispute, he who loses gains more because he has learned something.

έν φιλολόγω συζητήσει πλεῖον ἤνυσεν ὁ ἡττηθεὶς καθ' ὃ προσέμαθεν.

I'm not saying I "lost" 😊 but those references are great! I was unaware of them. I'm still not entirely convinced by the Torquatus text, but I'm willing to entertain the possibility now. And the others are excellent.

Thanks!!!

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### Post by “Joshua” of December 8, 2022 at 11:20 PM

One thing we have not yet accounted for is the *possibility* that Eusebius' account of Lucretius' death, as reported later by Jerome, has a grain of historical truth to it. We simply know too little about Lucretius to have any certainty about how he died.

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### Post by “Pacatus” of December 8, 2022 at 11:44 PM

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

If you're trying to apply Epicurus's teachings to better your life, that makes you an Epicurean as opposed to a Christian or Stoic or something else.

And if we could stop there, we'd be in perfect agreement. But - ☐☐

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

I'd ask what "Epicurean teachings" are you trying to apply to better your life.

Do you have an “acceptable” list? (Otherwise, why would you ask?) And why should I accept (in toto) whatever list you (or anyone else) might have?

That whole “TM” thing comes out of engagement with Christians (when I thought of myself as a Christian) who claimed that - because there were certain tenets of *theirs* that I did not accept - I really *could not be* a “True Christian™” (the “TM” was not, of course, theirs - but my own snarky reaction). Today, whether I was or wasn't a “True Christian™” is of no consequence to

me – except as a point of *sincerity*. And that is not a trivial point ...

I generally think of myself as a neo-Epicurean (though I don't fit any of Cassius' differentiating points in his chart – so maybe I'm not so "neo") just because I subscribe to updating the knowledge base that was available to Epicurus (and the Stoics and the Pyrrhonians) in light of advancements in things like logic, epistemology and science.

So, at bottom, I think that word "sincerity" might hold some gravitas in the matter. I'm sure (sincerely) that when you were a Buddhist you were very honest and sincere about that. You found a different path – does that mean you were never a "True Buddhist™"? ☐ Or that you were not honest and sincere? Of course not.

EDIT: If at some point I decide that I am not fundamentally Epicurean, for whatever reason, I will be honest enough to simply say so. And, just as honestly, wish all my Epicurean friends well -- and gratitude. I don't envision that, but a lot of things have happened in my life that I never envisioned ...

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## **Post by "Cassius" of December 9, 2022 at 2:49 AM**

1 - Don's point about the serene spirit is one I had not previously appreciated so well. I thought I remembered the Atticus illustration, but the Diodorus one was new to me (or it has been so long since I scanned the Warren book I had totally forgotten it).

2 - I appreciate too where Pacatus is coming from but I am trying to think why I hesitate. I think I hesitate because it's easy to go from one extreme to the other and lose appreciation for the usefulness of words at the same time that we acknowledge their limits. I think Don is right that we do have the ability to grasp that there is a generally identifiable meaning to the words Epicurean or Christian and that we need to identify those meanings (maybe that is akin to what Epicurus was saying about being able to assign an image to a word so we don't go on explaining forever) while at the same time we acknowledge that that image does not come from God or from a realm of forms or from an "essence" that exists independently of the examples. So that is similar to keeping in mind both that (1) suicide is a last resort only for extreme circumstances but also (2) that suicide can be a powerful tool and reassuring to know that it is in our toolbox if or when those circumstances do occur. It's not a matter of taking a middle ground or seeing some kind of compromise but of seeing that both are true at the same time. The atoms and the void do exist at the same time, and for another example at the same time (1) the bodies and qualities of our world do have a "real" existence to us even though (2) they themselves are ultimately composed of atoms and void. We don't fall into despair and nihilism just because both perspectives exist at the same time, nor should we label one

perspective or world as "true" and the other as "false."

Which reminds me of the Oinoanda comment that there is a flux but it is not so fast that we can't comprehend it. All this also causes me to associate Epicurus' views with the "this world vs the 'true world'" imagery that apparently Nietzsche was using if that video posted elsewhere recently is correct. There's no "true world" beyond this one, which is the only one we have. So many issues seem to resolve themselves if we recognize how many ways have been invented to try to use wishful thinking and word games to get around that reality and construct false alternatives.

In the same way, many of the otherwise obscure sayings of Epicurus make much more sense when seen as targeted at making very close to the same point. Epicurus seems to use "anxiety" and "pleasure vs. pain" terminology while Nietzsche and others may use words like "nihilism" vs "will" or "power," but the enemy of despair is pretty much the same, and it's Epicurus' formula for embracing life which really holds the best answer.

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### Post by "Pacatus" of December 9, 2022 at 12:00 PM

I confess that any *perceived hint* of defining a "party line" that I must, no matter what, affirm or adhere to in order to be a "True™" anything triggers a visceral unease in me - based on my own history. It's probably part of my reactive survival system, that I am unlikely to jettison any time soon (and not sure I should). [And that "TM" isn't really intended as snark - just a shorthand means of emphasis on the point; and I did not intend any offense by its use.]

That does not mean that the other person was actually hinting at any such thing at all. Communication is - for humans at least - more of an art than a science. If we could all send and receive with perfect clarity on the first pass, we'd need a lot fewer words. 😊

(I want to say something more about words, but I'll start another thread; and if it ends up being duplicative, Cassius can maybe roll it into a better place.)

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### Post by "Cassius" of December 9, 2022 at 12:07 PM

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

I confess that any perceived hint of defining a “party line” that I must, no matter what, affirm or adhere to in order to be a “True™” anything triggers a visceral unease in me

Yes this is a very interesting subject on which we once had a zoom discussion alluding to “flags.”. Allegiance to a flag or anything like that is troublesome. Yet there are times - if you slare in a war, for example, you are well advised generally to head for the lines of your countries flag rather than an enemy flag. So flags can be and are very useful, as long as their limitations are kept clear.

This is definitely a hard balance, but it seems to me that if we conclude that “flags are always bad” we are likely to be just as wrong as concluding that flags are always good. We have to always remember the basic situation that there are multiple levels of things going on and we have to be flexible enough to move nimbly between them.

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## Post by “Don” of December 9, 2022 at 2:48 PM

### [Quote from Pacatus](#)

Do you have an “acceptable” list? (Otherwise, why would you ask?) And why should I accept (in toto) whatever list you (or anyone else) might have?

[Pacatus](#) : Let me start this response by saying that I certainly did not mean to offend or disrespect or belittle anyone's self-designation as an "Epicurean." Honestly, when I said:

### Quote from @Don

I'd ask what "Epicurean teachings" are you trying to apply to better your life.

I sincerely meant to make that rhetorical as in "What Epicurean teachings are you putting into practice that make you feel like you would \*want\* to call yourself an 'Epicurean'?" I wasn't trying to impose \*my\* criteria, and if it came off that way, I apologize. \*I\* may have other practices or doctrines on which I place more emphasis than you.

BUT, from my perspective, if we all "lay our cards on the table," I would offer that there have to be some common "cards" in each of our hands to make us feel we want to be part of the same community, that would lead us to come together in the same Garden. Otherwise, the word "Epicurean" doesn't apply to anything.

And I get your...

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

I confess that any perceived hint of defining a “party line” that I must, no matter what, affirm or adhere to in order to be a “True™” anything triggers a visceral unease in me

I've seen examples of "party lines" and "orthodoxy" and in-fighting, etc. So I can understand your "visceral unease". There's also the idea of commitments, participation, etc., if you want to be seen as "serious" (which, honestly, is one reason I've kept my participation to online meetings primarily to the 20th. The idea of regular commitments makes \*me\* uneasy.) I think it is absolutely \*wonderful\* that Cassius and Kalosyni have made those opportunities a reality!!! I just can't make myself take on the "responsibility" (in my mind) to show up every time, and so I've decided I'll do my best to make the 20th's in keeping with what I see as part of \*my\* Epicurean identity 😊

P.S. In some sense, we are \*all\* neo-Epicureans. We're all doing the best we can with the texts that we have to try to follow (and, in some cases - like quantum physics - update) the 2,000+ year old teachings of Epicurus to make sense of our lives and to provide ourselves with a way to make sense of the world. Like I said previously, there is no apostolic succession from Epicurus to the present like the Popes (although their lineage is arguably tenuous). There is no Epicurean authority imposing dogma or creeds or orthodoxy. By Zeus, even online and internationally, there are several Epicurean groups, and none of them have authority over any other one. My only assertion was that those of us who like to think of ourselves as Epicureans most likely have some shared ideas that join us together.

---

**Post by “Cassius” of December 9, 2022 at 4:07 PM**

Pacatus I figured you would get a reaction from Don in that exchange! 😊

I agree with most everything that Don said, including this, but I will comment further:

[Quote from Don](#)

P.S. In some sense, we are \*all\* neo-Epicureans.

Because we do have a regular flow in and out of the forum it's good to cover this regularly. The main reason for the "Not-Neo" list and associated posting guidelines and other rules is that

while there are many places on the internet to discuss philosophy in general, and especially to promote Stoicism, there are not many devoted to Epicurus. The experience I and others had at Facebook is that the sheer numbers and loudness of the Stoics quickly drives out and even "intimidates" people who are honestly interested in Epicurean philosophy from pursuing it. As a result this forum is first and foremost a place where people interested in an environment supportive of Epicurus will have an opportunity to talk in a supportive atmosphere without have to deal with overbearing opponents of the philosophy.

Don also mentioned the difficulties of agreeing on anything, and he's surely right about that. Luckily no one here is trying to be a guru or go for world domination or anything like that, so as for our rules, all they are geared toward is maintaining a friendly pro-Epicurean environment for discussion. If you are interested in reading the details of a discussion we had several years ago on ideas to set up more of an umbrella organization, you might be interested in [this thread](#). Those discussions did more to illuminate the difficulties more than to come to any agreements, but I am sure that over time the "organizational" question will come up again and again. For now, I've limited myself to the still difficult but more attainable goal of "herding cats" in a discussion forum.

But you will be comforted to know that I take the subject of this thread to heart. I would like to meet my end like Epicurus surrounded by friends, but I am not sure I will attain that in real life. Unless I meet my end in a totally unexpected accident, I commit to taking steps before I follow Atticus and Cassius L. and Diodorus (many many years from now, hopefully) to be sure that there's a smooth organizational transition into the future for this forum. 😊

PS - [Pacatus](#) due to the length of that older thread most people don't take the time to wade through it. If you happen to find it interesting enough to do so, please feel free to comment.

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### Post by "Pacatus" of December 9, 2022 at 5:08 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Pacatus I figured you would get a reaction from Don in that exchange! 😊



Me too! And I'll check that thread out.

---

### Post by "Pacatus" of December 9, 2022 at 5:42 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2773-did-epicurus-commit-suicide-due-to-his-disease-merger-of-two-threads-on-when-vol/>

[Don](#) You and I seem so much alike. I took no personal offense, nor did I think you intended any. My “Do you have a list?” was also intended rhetorically.

The cold written word often has a hard time communicating such nuances. I suspect that if we were sitting together at a table (over pints of beer or a bottle – or two – of wine) it would be easier, and likely we’d have a lot of laughter to go with the arguments. ☐☐ And there’s no question that each time we would part friends (nor that we will do so here).

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

My only assertion was that those of us who like to think of ourselves as Epicureans most likely have some shared ideas that join us together.

Understood and wholeheartedly agreed. I will never have the Epicurean scholarship that many on here do, and so I will likely always end up mixing and matching a bit (what I learn from here and reading, with my own personal experience). Truth be told, I’ve always been that kind of thinker ... And so often it’s in the course of congenial argument that I am able to discover what I really think! 🤔 [When my elder son (more a Stoic) and I go at it, both our wives just laugh at us – and we end up laughing too!]

Be well, and thank you, my friend. ☐☐

---

### Post by “Don” of December 9, 2022 at 6:03 PM

#### [Quote from Pacatus](#)

I suspect that if we were sitting together at a table (over pints of beer or a bottle – or two – of wine) it



Name the time and place!!

#### [Quote from Pacatus](#)

Be well, and thank you, my friend. ☐☐

You as well! 👍

## **Post by “Pacatus” of December 9, 2022 at 7:33 PM**

[Cassius](#): I want to just note that, in that thread, I found Elayne's understanding of prolepsis as "pattern recognition" (as an innate human function) to really clarify that for me. When I get a chance, I will update my "Epicurean Outline" thingy to reflect that. 🙌

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## **Post by “Martin” of December 14, 2022 at 4:47 AM**

Just one detail to add to the list of ancient texts indicating suicide as an option for Epicureans under extreme circumstances:

On his last day, Epicurus drank undiluted wine. With the dysentery he was in, this might have been suicide at least in the sense of accelerating the upcoming death.

There was a presentation with more details on this speculation that Epicurus himself might have committed suicide at one of the Epicurean symposia in Greece a few years ago, but I could not find it in my collection of references now.

---

## **Post by “Cassius” of December 14, 2022 at 5:18 AM**

Very interesting. I will email Christos and ask him if he remembers and what he thinks about that. Would undiluted wine be a depressant to breathing or otherwise help lead to death?

---

## **Post by “Martin” of December 14, 2022 at 5:26 AM**

The alcohol would worsen the dehydration and may have multiple other effects under that condition.

---

## **Post by “Cassius” of December 14, 2022 at 5:30 AM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2773-did-epicurus-commit-suicide-due-to-his-disease-merger-of-two-threads-on-when-vol/>

Thanks again, Martin. Couple of things:

(1) The exercise reminds me that we have a link database that people are welcome to add to here: <https://www.epicureanfriends.com/wcf/index.php?link-overview/> I used that to find the Athens Greece Epicurean website: <https://www.epicuros.gr/pages/en.htm>

(2) I found the article, so I did not have to email Christos. Here is the presentation in full: [https://www.epicuros.gr/arthra/Euthana...poulos\\_2017.pdf](https://www.epicuros.gr/arthra/Euthana...poulos_2017.pdf)

Unfortunately the only real detail is:

#### Quote

Moreover, the evidence that his friends put Epicurus in a tub of hot water and gave him undiluted wine as he wished is an insightful piece of information i.e. he was preparing for his end, with the help of his friends. He acted upon this when he knew his end was approaching and he did this in a most relieving manner. Hot water alleviated his severe pains and relaxed his body. The undiluted wine created mental relaxation. The undiluted wine hastened his end as it reacted on an already weakened body. In other words, Epicurus perhaps did what we call today "euthanasia in the final stages of incurable disease." He acted this way just before approaching his natural end and not a moment sooner, despite his unbearable pains. He managed this due to his philosophy.'

But you have a very good memory, Martin.

---

## Post by “Don” of December 14, 2022 at 5:42 AM

So, Diogenes Laertius says:

#### Quote

Hermippus relates that he entered a bronze bath of lukewarm water and asked for unmixed wine, [16] which he swallowed, and then, having bidden his friends remember his doctrines, breathed his last.

Here is something of my own about him<sup>29</sup> :

Farewell, my friends ; the truths I taught hold fast :

Thus Epicurus spake, and breathed his last.

He sat in a warm bath and neat wine quaff'd,

And straightway found chill death in that same draught.

Such was the life of the sage and such his end.

29 Anth. Pal. vii. 106.

Display More

ὄτε καί φησιν Ἑρμιππος ἐμβάντα αὐτὸν εἰς πύελον χαλκῆν κεκραμένην ὕδατι θερμῷ καὶ αἰτήσαντα ἄκρατον ῥοφήσαι:

16 [16] τοῖς τε φίλοις παραγγείλαντα τῶν δογμάτων μεμνησθαι, οὕτω τελευτῆσαι.

Καὶ ἔστιν ἡμῶν εἰς αὐτὸν οὕτω:

χαίρετε, καὶ μέμνησθε τὰ δόγματα: τοῦτ' Ἐπίκουρος

ὑστατον εἶπε φίλοις τοῦπος ἀποφθίμενος:

θερμὴν ἐς πύελον γὰρ ἐληλύθειεν καὶ ἄκρατον ἔσπασεν, εἶτ' Αἴδην ψυχρὸν ἐπεσπάσατο.

οὗτος μὲν ὁ βίος τάνδρός, ἦδε <δὲ> ἡ τελευτή.

ἄκρατος pure, undiluted (strong) wine

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

I always saw this as more palliative for the pain than any hint of suicide. Ancient Greeks typically watered their wine down in a krater to drink. Drinking undiluted wine would have been noteworthy.

To me, this just points to the fact that one does everything to ease one's pain, but his drinking it and then dying seems to me that he was trying to eliminate pain from the disease/condition that was killing him and that he was on the verge of death already. I'd have to see evidence other than this text to convince me it was a suicide. And not Diogenes' poem. That was written hundreds of years after Epicurus's death.

---

**Post by “Cassius” of December 14, 2022 at 5:50 AM**

### [Quote from Don](#)

I always saw this as more palliative for the pain than any hint of suicide.

Yes I have always presumed that too, but I am no expert on the effects of wine or even warm baths. I am not sure what kind of pain that disease causes, or whether it would even make sense to think that warmth of a bath might be of any relief. I suppose today we use narcotics and other such drugs when we are really in pain, and I presume things like "a shot of whiskey" are used to dull pain, but it would be interesting to hear more from a medical side, or from someone more familiar with ancient Greek medicine. For example, why wine as opposed to something else? As Nate has been mentioning lately, didn't the ancient Greeks have access to perhaps even hallucinogenic drugs that might also have been used for pain? To what extent was the undiluted wine "enjoyable" (as was maybe the warm bath) rather than something to hasten death? The way DL writes it, it is almost as if getting in the bath and drinking the wine would naturally be expected to lead to death, but if so that's totally unintuitive to me.

---

### **Post by "Don" of December 14, 2022 at 5:52 AM**

#### Quote

Hot water alleviated his severe pains and relaxed his body. The undiluted wine created mental relaxation. The undiluted wine hastened his end as it reacted on an already weakened body. In other words, Epicurus perhaps did what we call today "euthanasia in the final stages of incurable disease."

Yeah, I'm fine with all that up until the euthanasia part. I have serious doubts that they knew the wine would "hasten his end." They knew it would relieve pain. The fact that his friends were around at the end to help him is the important aspect of that story to me.

---

### **Post by "Don" of December 14, 2022 at 5:58 AM**

It'd be interesting to get a hold of this paper:

Epicurus' death

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2773-did-epicurus-commit-suicide-due-to-his-disease-merger-of-two-threads-on-when-vol/>

Maria Bitsori & Emmanouil Galanakis

World Journal of Urology volume 22, pages466–469 (2004)

#### Abstract

The aim is to present how an eminent philosopher perceived, reported and faced his progressing and ultimately fatal uropathy, 23 centuries ago. All available ancient Greek sources about Epicurus' life and death were used and urinary tract-related medical knowledge in this era was reviewed. Epicurus died at the age of 71 from urinary calculus after having bravely suffered for a long time. Although he is often cited for his teachings against the fear of pain and death, his own way to death has been overlooked. His exceptional description of his own symptoms provides an unusual insight, given that our knowledge on diseases in older times is mainly based on surviving texts written by the then medical practitioners. Epicurus reported on his terminal symptoms, being entirely aware of the fatal outcome of a disease incurable at that time. Very soon after, Ammonius the Lithotomus in Alexandria was to improve the surgical procedures for urinary calculi. In an era when urinary tract surgery was considered to be an extraordinary means of treatment, Epicurus peacefully passed away, firm to his own teachings about tolerance to disease and pain, and leaving to us both an unusual medical record and a courageous attitude towards suffering and death.

---

#### **Post by “Joshua” of December 14, 2022 at 6:19 AM**

##### Quote

As Nate has been mentioning lately, didn't the ancient Greeks have access to perhaps even hallucinogenic drugs that might also have been used for pain?

Opium and Cannabis at the very least.

Martin mentioned dysentery, but I was under the impression that it was known to have been strangury caused by kidney stones--in which case a warm bath is very commonly recommended to relieve pain related to swelling. And alcohol being a diuretic, meaning that it increases water loss through urine, might slightly increase the chance of flushing the stone. So not a terrible approach given the barbarous state of medicine at the time!

---

#### **Post by “Joshua” of December 14, 2022 at 6:26 AM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2773-did-epicurus-commit-suicide-due-to-his-disease-merger-of-two-threads-on-when-vol/>

Quote

48. Strangury and dysuria are cured by drinking pure wine, and venesection; open the vein on the inside.

--Hippocrates; *Aphorisms, Section VII*; transl. Francis Adams

[The Internet Classics Archive | Aphorisms by Hippocrates](#)

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### Post by “Don” of December 14, 2022 at 6:58 AM

Quote

open the vein on the inside

OUCH! 😬

---

### Post by “Don” of December 14, 2022 at 7:16 AM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

Quote

48. Strangury and dysuria are cured by drinking pure wine, and venesection; open the vein on the inside.

--Hippocrates; *Aphorisms, Section VII*; transl. Francis Adams

<http://classics.mit.edu/Hippocrates/aphorisms.7.vii.html>

GREAT FIND, [Joshua](#) !!

Here's the Greek:

στραγγουρίην καὶ δυσουρίην θώρηξις καὶ φλεβοτομὴ λύει: τάμνειν δὲ τὰς ἔσω.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2773-did-epicurus-commit-suicide-due-to-his-disease-merger-of-two-threads-on-when-vol/>

Interestingly, Diogenes has, in his transcription of Epicurus's letter, στραγγουρία τε παρηκολουθήκει καὶ δυσεντερικᾶ

"Strangury followed closely also by dysentery"

But it would make more sense if it was supposed to be dysuria "painful urination" δυσουριην since Hippocrates treats those two conditions in the same aphorism.

Those two words look similar enough and I could see someone not paying attention and confusing the two when copying a manuscript: ΔΥΣΟΥΡΙΑΝ vs ΔΥΣΕΝΤΕΡΙΚΑ

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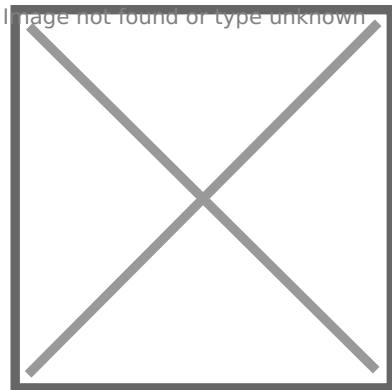
## Post by “Don” of December 14, 2022 at 10:22 PM

More on akratos...

[ACRATUS \(Akratos\) - Greek God or Spirit of Unmixed Wine](#)

Quote

Akratos was no doubt regarded as a deity of festive excess.



[Was ancient wine more alcoholic than modern wine?](#)

This article is taken from a contribution to the website &#39;Bad Ancient&#39;. It discusses the alcoholic content of ancient wines using ancient literature, ...  
[www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu)

Interesting article on ancient wine, ABV %ages, watering down, etc.

I'm continuing to see both the undiluted wine and the warm bath as ways to ease his pain not to hasten his death.

## Post by “Martin” of December 15, 2022 at 9:27 AM

If the body does no more release water by urine, about the only other way to get rid of significant amounts of water is to stop dehydrating the content of the large intestine. Therefore, dysentery makes sense as a consequential symptom. That method does not have the fine regulation of the kidneys and likely leads to dehydration. Dehydration can easily be fatal. Alcohol is likely to accelerate death then. The evidence with respect to Epicurus committing suicide may not be conclusive enough but it cannot be dismissed either.

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## Post by “Cassius” of December 15, 2022 at 9:36 AM

Very interesting Martin, and continues to be an interesting topic. D.L thought it was an interesting enough detail to include in his biography, it's just a shame that he didn't make more clear what was thought of the significance of it.

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## Post by “Bryan” of April 30, 2025 at 1:46 PM

### [Quote from Eikadistes](#)

drew [much] unmixed [wine]

Around 280 <sup>BC</sup> (when Epíkouros was about sixty-one), after the first failed Gallic invasion, we read the following about one of the Gaulish leaders:

*"There was still a hope of saving the life of Brennus, so far as his wounds were concerned; but, they say, partly because he feared his fellow-countrymen, and still more because he was conscience-stricken at the calamities he had brought on Greece, he took his own life by drinking neat wine."*

-- Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 10.23.12 (2nd century AD)

It is often said, "The Greeks thought drinking unmixed wine was fatal" -- but that idea could not have lasted beyond one planned "final party" unless there were some truth to it. Right? I know I'm missing something.

---

### Post by “Joshua” of April 30, 2025 at 2:04 PM

Methanol (as opposed to ethanol) is lethal in concentration. This is why moonshine is dangerous. Wine has methanol in very low concentrations, but wine-making is as much science as art, and I suppose it's possible there were genuine mishaps.

On the other hand, ethanol is a competitive enzyme inhibitor for methanol, so it ought to have reduced the risk...

I learned all of this from an episode of House M.D., so take it with a bezoar.

Edit; this is almost certainly not the answer.

---

### Post by “Don” of April 30, 2025 at 2:43 PM

I had to check the Greek:

*έκουσίως άφείναι τήν ψυχήν άκράτου πίνοντα τοῦ οίνου.*

Sure enough, it seems to be just wine unmixed with water. That's not fatal, last time I experimented myself... Just sayin'

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

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### Post by “Kalosyni” of April 30, 2025 at 3:05 PM

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

I had to check the Greek:

*έκουσίως άφείναι τήν ψυχήν άκράτου πίνοντα τοῦ οίνου.*

Sure enough, it seems to be just wine unmixed with water. That's not fatal, last time I experimented myself... Just sayin'

I found a Healthline article, with the following excerpt:

Quote

**Is there a lethal BAC?**

Generally, once your [blood alcohol concentration \(BAC\)](#) is 0.40 percent or over, it's dangerous territory. At this level, there's a risk of coma or death.

[Source](#)

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**Post by "Cassius" of April 30, 2025 at 3:51 PM**

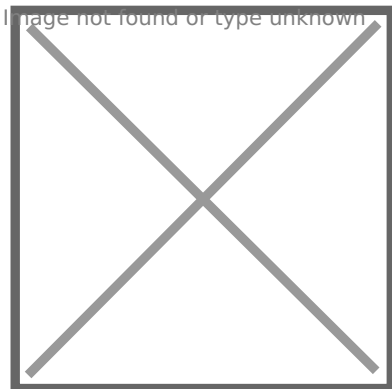
Very interesting! There must be something else going on, or else we need to revise our general view that Epicurus did not commit suicide!

This is a pretty important point, actually, so will be good to do our best to track it down.

---

**Post by "Cassius" of April 30, 2025 at 4:17 PM**

I don't know that we've previously discussed this article by Maria Bitsori:



[Epicurus' death](#)

The aim is to present how an eminent philosopher perceived, reported and faced his progressing and ultimately fatal uropathy, 23 centuries ago. All available...

[www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu)

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2773-did-epicurus-commit-suicide-due-to-his-disease-merger-of-two-threads-on-when-vol/>

It gets close to the issue but as I read through it doesn't really address the argument at length. I see that it does include a reference I've never seen before. The way it's written it sure sounds like it's referencing Epicurus, but the footnote refers to Marcus Aurelius (Marcus Aurelius (1930) Meditations: 9. 41. Edited and translated by Haines CR. The Loeb Classical Library. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, pp 254–257) Perhaps Aurelius is referring to Epicurus, or perhaps I'm just not reading it properly.

#### Quote

Epicurus obviously followed these palliative measures in his final-stage disease. Surgery could have been a more appropriate management. Surgical interventions in urinary tract diseases were not unknown at the time [7], but most probably they couldn't help in this specific case. On the other hand, the philosopher himself did not seem eager to accept any extraordinary medical intervention: "nor did I let the physicians ride the high horse as if they were doing grand things" [15]

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### Post by "TauPhi" of April 30, 2025 at 5:19 PM

This is an interesting question. We're in the realm of speculation and most likely we will never know for sure but I always found the beginning of the letter to Idomeneus quite peculiar: "On this blissful day, which is also the last of my life, I write this to you. [...]"

How could Epicurus know that it was the last day and why he called it blissful? To me, it sounds a bit like: "There's nothing much to be done, so I feel relief as I made a decision to pull the plug today and end the suffering".

Maybe it would be worthwhile to closely inspect original Greek to shed more light on this sentence?

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### Post by "Joshua" of April 30, 2025 at 5:59 PM

#### Quote

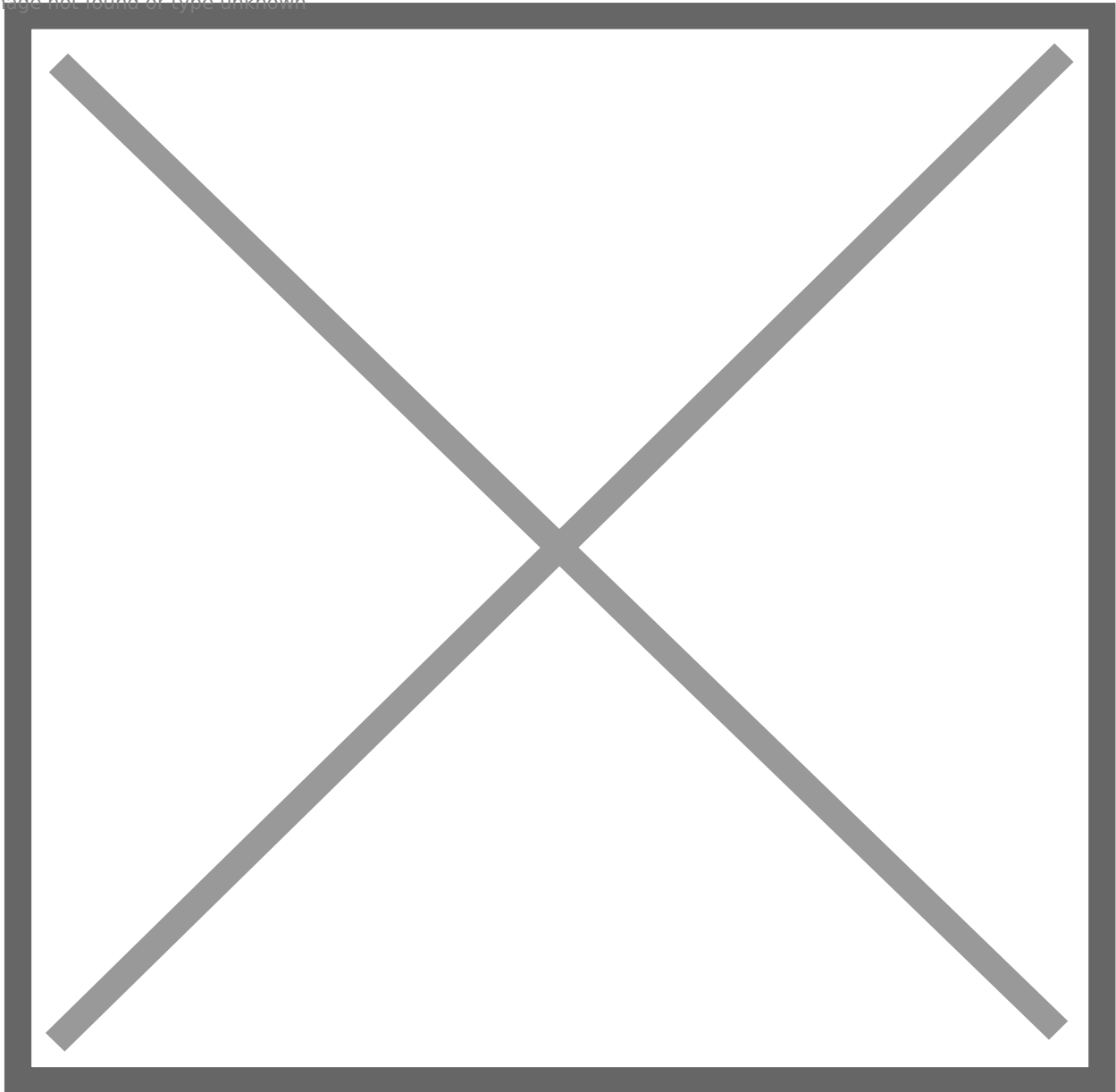
How could Epicurus know that it was the last day and why he called it blissful? To me, it sounds a bit like: "There's nothing much to be done, so I feel relief as I made a decision

to pull the plug today and end the suffering".

It's difficult to separate the fact from the wish-thinking. I knew three different people to whom this kind of foreknowledge has been ascribed. A husband who sent flowers to his wife at work on the morning of his death. A woman who worked tirelessly to repeal a law she believed was immoral, and died in her bed with her hands clasped over her abdomen the day that law was repealed. A man who requested blackberry brandy and died after draining the glass.

I do not accept these uncritically, and would not suggest a cause outside of nature even if I did, but I don't think it's impossible for a person to know that the moment of their death is at hand. Maybe they feel that death is coming on in the same way that we feel a sneeze is coming on. Maybe they can even choose a time to stop struggling for life and let go. Fifty years after signing the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams both died on the 4th of July, the last living members of the committee that had produced that document.

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[Jefferson's Last Words](#)

What did Jefferson say shortly before he died on July 4, 1826.

[www.monticello.org](http://www.monticello.org)

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**Post by “Don” of April 30, 2025 at 6:08 PM**

This is the word used in Epicurus' letter:

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2773-did-epicurus-commit-suicide-due-to-his-disease-merger-of-two-threads-on-when-vol/>

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

"Τὴν μακαρίαν ἄγοντες καὶ ἅμα τελευταίαν ἡμέραν τοῦ βίου ἐγράφομεν ὑμῖν ταυτί.

Why does he use ἐγράφομεν "we write"? 1st person plural?

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### Post by “Eikadistes” of April 30, 2025 at 8:05 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

Why does he use ἐγράφομεν "we write"? 1st person plural?

I've been considering if this choice was a reflection of those texts being expressions of the collective thought held by the leaders of the Garden, or else, if it evident (as I think might be the case with the Last Will) that someone was transcribing on behalf of Epicurus, or else, copying material.

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### Post by “Joshua” of April 30, 2025 at 8:29 PM

I see we have discussed some of these questions at length in a thread from 2022;

Thread

[\*\*Did Epicurus Commit Suicide Due To His Disease? \(Merger of Two Threads On When Voluntary Death Makes Sense\)\*\*](#)

[...]

I know you bring this up on occasion, but I can never remember the textual reference. Where is that?



Don

December 7, 2022 at 7:14 AM

edit; see @Martin's [comment #61](#) in that thread.

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<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2773-did-epicurus-commit-suicide-due-to-his-disease-merger-of-two-threads-on-when-vol/>

## Post by “Cassius” of April 30, 2025 at 9:22 PM

We discussed this issue briefly in tonight's Wednesday Zoom and I thought I remembered that there was another Epicurean thought to have committed suicide. As is often the case i can sometimes remember the first letter of a name but often mess up the main part. In this case the name I could not remember did start with a D, but it appears to be one Diodorus as referenced by Seneca (see below).

And I see in that earlier thread that there is some issue that maybe Democritus went out in similar way.

Post

### [RE: Did Epicurus Commit Suicide Due To His Disease? \(Merger of Two Threads On When Voluntary Death Makes Sense\)](#)

More from James Warren (same source):

it is the result of a calculation that the alternative would be a continued life of pain. Provided life has pleasure left in it,we will continue to live. And the Epicurean sage will be sufficiently schooled to continue to find pleasure in life under conditions which others would find unbearable—Epicurus' own example of composure in the face of terminal illness demonstrates this. 345 Seneca reports the suicide of an Epicurean named Diodorus. On this...



Cassius

December 8, 2022 at 10:14 PM

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## Post by “Don” of April 30, 2025 at 11:36 PM

### [Quote from Bryan](#)

he took his own life by drinking *neat* wine."

-- Pausanias, Description of Greece 10.23.12 (2nd century AD)

ἐκουσίως ἀφείναι τὴν ψυχὴν ἀκράτου πίνοντα τοῦ οἴνου.

DL10.15 Hermippus relates that [Epicurus] entered a bronze bath of lukewarm water and asked for *unmixed wine*,

Ἑρμιππος ἐμβάντα αὐτὸν εἰς πύελον χαλκῆν κεκραμένην ὕδατι θερμῷ καὶ αἰτήσαντα ἄκρατον ῥοφήσαι:...

Just had to check it was the same word. Sure enough. ἄκρατον

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### **Post by “Cassius” of May 1, 2025 at 6:48 AM**

I merged our recent discussion of the effect of unmixed wine with the previous thread on voluntary death since the topic is essentially the same. As discussion on this has progressed one aspect that seem particularly interesting is Bryan's latest post as to the Gaul who was reported to have committed suicide by unmixed wine. Further, there seem to be reasonable conjecture that drinking unmixed wine might have been an accepted euphemism for suicide, or that drinking of unmixed wine was at times accompanied by poison. All of this would need citations to texts for them to become more viable suggestions, so we can pursue all of this discussion here with all the background in one place.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of May 2, 2025 at 2:14 AM**

I'm asking this in complete ignorance on the subject, but is it possible that ancient Greek wine was made through a different process than today's French and California wines? Some type of extremely strong retsina? Something that needed water mixed in just to be palatable as well as safe to drink?

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient\\_G...fore%20pressing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_G...fore%20pressing).

<https://www.badancient.com/claims/ancient...oman%20cultures>.

<https://greekreporter.com/2022/05/09/why-ancient-greeks-mixed-wine-with-seawater/>

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### **Post by “Cassius” of May 2, 2025 at 6:02 AM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2773-did-epicurus-commit-suicide-due-to-his-disease-merger-of-two-threads-on-when-vol/>

Very interesting!

#### Quote

So then, what of Pliny's reference to Roman *Falernian* wine lighting with a flame ( [Natural History 14.8](#))? Or Plutarch's description of Alexander the Great's wine drinking contest where more than 40 men died from excessive consumption ([Life of Alexander 70.1](#))?

The facts of that article are very interesting, but its argument in conclusion that it is false to suppose that ancient wine was stronger than modern wine seems very poorly argued to me. I suppose it's saying "as a general rule" and maybe that's fair, but the conclusion itself seems overbroad to me.

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### Post by "Don" of May 2, 2025 at 6:07 AM

Those are fascinating articles. Thanks for sharing, [Godfrey](#) . To directly respond to:

#### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

Something that needed water mixed in just to be palatable as well as safe to drink?

No, I don't see any evidence of that. One thing counter to that idea I've read in the past is about the symposiarch who ran the drinking parties (symposia, literally "together-drinking") being in charge of how much water to mix in the wine as the evening progressed to regulate the level of drunkenness.

Wine was a ubiquitous beverage with a wide range of qualities and flavors. But it was, from everything I've read, all potable. Granted, we may find some products less palatable ourselves but we're spoiled from modern stabilisation and consistency.

I found this intriguing in the one article:

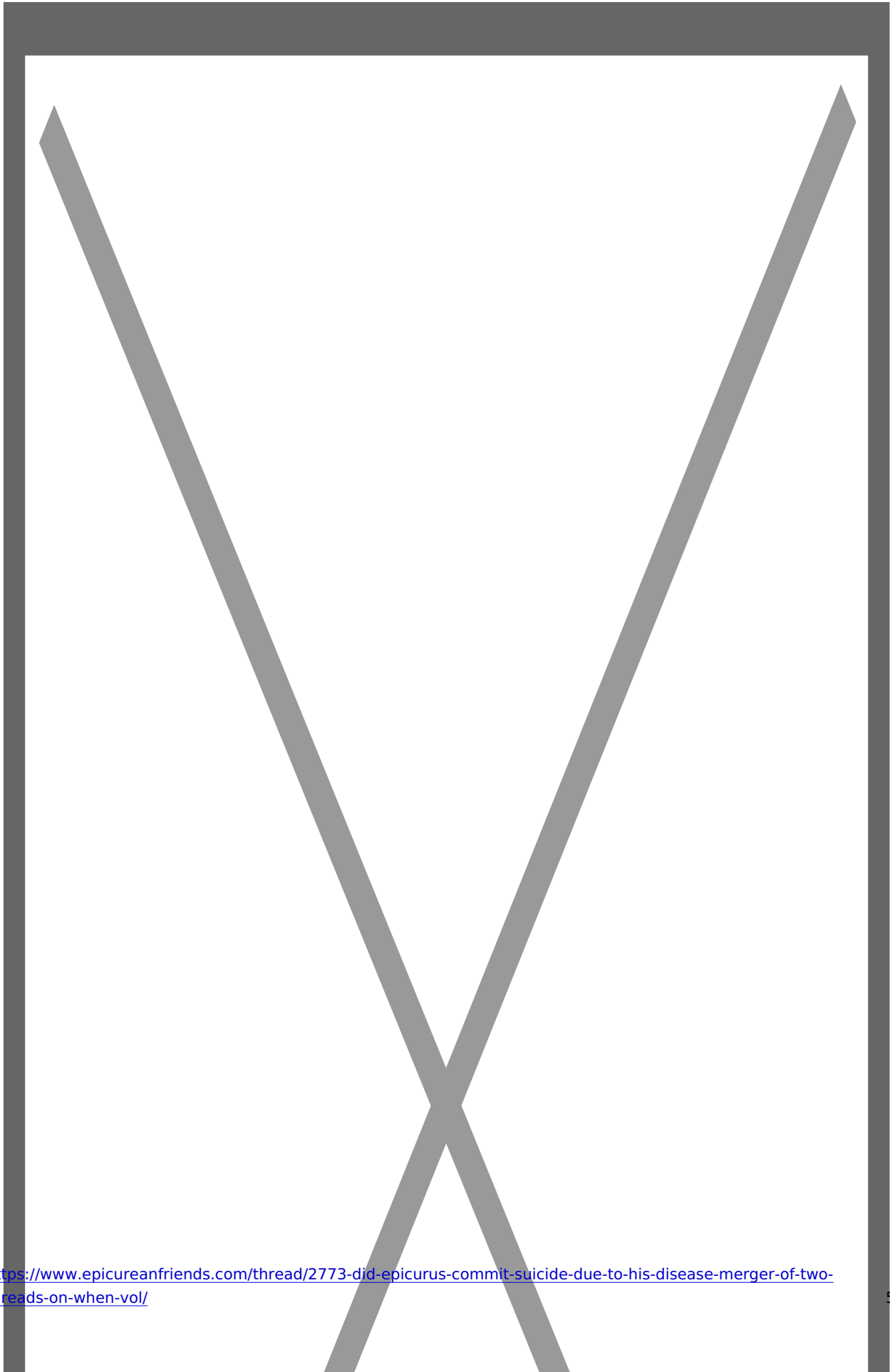
#### Quote

Drinking wine that was not mixed with water (ἀκρατος οἶνος) was considered barbaric. Such wine without water was used only as medicine for the sick or during travel as a tonic.

That Greek is the same word that showed up in our texts above.

For anyone curious about retsina:

Image not found or type unknown



<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2773-did-epicurus-commit-suicide-due-to-his-disease-merger-of-two-threads-on-when-vol/>

### Post by “Bryan” of July 5, 2025 at 9:08 PM

I think this is the most instructive clue I have found, (Laertius 4.44):

"[Arcesilaus] died in a fit of madness, as Hermippus says, after drinking a good deal of unmixed wine, he had by then reached the age of seventy-five, and no man was more highly regarded by the Athenians."

That alone is only suggestive (*just like the example with Epicurus*), however the very next line, Diogenes says:

"My own verses about him run as follows: Why, Arcesilaus, did you draw unmixed wine so *unsparingly as to take leave of your sense?* I pity you not so much for your death..."

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As a side note about Arcesilaus being "highly regarded," Plutarch says "The reputation of Arcesilaus seems to immoderately distress Epicurus -- given that [*Arcesilaus*] was especially admired among the philosophers in those times" Plutarch (fl. 80 CE), *Against Colotes*, 26, 1121 E fin.

Arcesilaus was a pupil of both Theophrastus and Pyrrho, yet he ended up leading the Academy a few years after Epicurus died.

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### Post by “Cassius” of July 5, 2025 at 9:23 PM

So you're reading that to mean that unmixed wine can kill(?), but Bryan I find Laertius' poem hard to decipher too. What is he saying - that he died unintentionally?

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### Post by “Bryan” of July 5, 2025 at 9:47 PM

I take from the poem, and the whole passage, that in Laertius' writings "drinking unmixed wine" certainly stands for "intentional death."

This was already rather clear, but I think 4.44 makes it undeniable.

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## Post by "Don" of July 6, 2025 at 7:40 AM

### [Quote from Bryan](#)

"[Arcesilaus] died in a fit of madness, as Hermippus says, after drinking a good deal of unmixed wine, he had by then reached the age of seventy-five, and no man was more highly regarded by the Athenians."

Hicks translates that section as (my emphasis): He died, according to Hermippus, through drinking too freely of unmixed wine *which affected his reason*; he was already seventy-five and regarded by the Athenians with unparalleled good-will.

### [Quote from Bryan](#)

"My own verses about him run as follows: Why, Arcesilaus, did you draw unmixed wine so unsparingly as to take leave of your sense? I pity you not so much for your death..."

And Hicks in 4.45 (again my emphasis): [45] I have written upon him as follows: Why, pray, Arcesilaus, didst thou quaff so unsparingly unmixed wine *as to go out of thy mind?* I pity thee not so much for thy death as because *thou didst insult the Muses by immoderate potations.*

There's also Diogenes chapter on Chrysippus:

### Quote

On one occasion, as Hermippus relates, when [Chrysippus] had his school in the Odeum, he was invited by his pupils to a sacrificial feast. There after he had taken a draught of sweet wine unmixed with water, he was seized with dizziness and departed this life *five days afterwards*, having reached the age of seventy-three years, in the 143rd Olympiad. This is the date given by Apollodorus in his Chronology. I have toyed with the subject in the following verses<sup>5</sup> :

Chrysippus turned giddy after gulping down a draught of Bacchus ; he spared not the Porch nor his country nor his own life, but fared straight to the house of Hades.

[185] Another account is that his death was caused by a violent fit of laughter ; for after an ass had eaten up his figs, he cried out to the old woman, "Now give the ass a drink of pure wine to wash down the figs." And thereupon he laughed so heartily that he died.

Drinking unmixed wine is certainly frowned upon since it brings on giddiness and takes away reason, but I'm still skeptical of seeing it as a metaphor for committing suicide, although it was deemed dangerous it appears. Barbarians were known to drink unmixed wine which is one reason they were "barbaric." There is [an interesting article I found online](#):

#### Quote

Yet more dramatically, Alexander himself – according to one account – brought on his early death at 32 by drinking a separate toast to each of his twenty dinner guests one by one, and then finishing off a twelve-pint pitcher of unmixed wine.

...

Unmixed wine was deemed dangerous: many a Greek poem lamented it as the cause of an untimely death. Even Cleomenes (died 490 BC), the hardman King of Sparta, couldn't handle wine "in the Scythian fashion", i.e. without water, instead tipping his way into lunacy. Given such risks, unmixed wine was reserved only for drinking forfeits.

...

So next time you find yourself knee-deep in unmixed wine, toast the drink of the uncouth and ungodly – and steel yourself for the madness that must follow...

Unmixed wine brought on dizziness, lunacy, etc., but it was also a potent remedy to feeling pain. That would be my suggestion as to why Epicurus called for akraton "unmixed wine" on his last day. He was in severe pain, not to hasten his death. He knew his death was already imminent from the amount of pain he was in.

Additionally, I continue to maintain that VS47 is not talking about suicide. As a reminder for anyone:

#### [Vatican Saying 47 - Epicurus Wiki](#)

Epicurus Wiki does a good job of giving a literal translation of Metrodorus' saying: "...shall we give ourselves in surrender but when that which is necessary extracts [us] (from life)..."

When death comes eventually for all of us, we should not "rage against the dying of the light" but look back on life with satisfaction and not cling like fearful superstitious children, wishing for immortality or a life after death.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of July 6, 2025 at 8:17 AM**

Lots of interesting stuff there including the rage against the dying light which might need its own thread to analyze.

But I think we are establishing that drinking unmixed wine was known to be very dangerous and thus Epicurus would have known at the least that it might be fatal.

I personally would go further than Don in my conclusions at this point but that might mean diving into what the "rage against the dying light" really means.

At present I am mainly willing to say that there can come a time (mostly cases of clinically certain terminal highly painful disease combined with advanced age) when it can be a rational assessment to conclude that future pleasure is not worth the cost in pain.

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### **Post by "Don" of July 6, 2025 at 8:49 AM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

we are establishing that drinking unmixed wine was ~~known~~ *thought* to be very dangerous

Fixed it.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Epicurus would have known at the least that it might be fatal.

I'm not willing to agree to that.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

At present I am mainly willing to say that there can come a time (mostly cases of clinically certain terminal highly painful disease combined with advanced age) when it can be a rational assessment to conclude that future pleasure is not worth the cost in pain.

I'm not arguing against that, but that's exactly what I'm trying to get across. My primary position is against taking "extraordinary" measures to preserve life "at all costs" when death is imminent or there is no viable way to ameliorate constant, severe pain. I see a difference in actively taking one's life and not prolonging one's life. I don't believe VS47 nor the episode with Epicurus' drinking unmixed wine and taking a bath are talking about suicide.

(PLEASE NOTE: I am NOT making any moral argument against suicide or those who take their lives. This is an *extremely* complicated topic, including people dealing with deep mental health issues, including celebrities like Robin Williams and Anthony Bourdain. This is not a topic to be taken lightly or flippantly, and I don't want anyone to take this discussion that way.

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## Post by “Cassius” of July 6, 2025 at 8:56 AM

Let's do a separate thread on the Dylan Thomas poem:

Thread

[\*\*Epicurus And The Dylan Thomas Poem - "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night"\*\*](#)

Don referenced this poem so maybe we should discuss it:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Do\\_not\\_go...that\\_good\\_night](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Do_not_go...that_good_night)



Cassius

July 6, 2025 at 8:55 AM