

Welcome Quiesco!

Post by "Cassius" of April 6, 2023 at 8:56 PM

Welcome [Quiesco](#) !

Note: In order to minimize spam registrations, all new registrants must respond in this thread to this welcome message within 72 hours of its posting, or their account is subject to deletion. All that is required is a "Hello!" but of course we hope you will introduce yourself -- tell us a little about yourself and what prompted your interest in Epicureanism -- and/or post a question.

This forum is the place for students of Epicurus to coordinate their studies and work together to promote the philosophy of Epicurus. Please remember that all posting here is subject to our [Community Standards / Rules of the Forum](#) our [Not Neo-Epicurean, But Epicurean](#) and our [Posting Policy](#) statements and [associated posts](#).

Please understand that the leaders of this forum are well aware that many fans of Epicurus may have sincerely-held views of what Epicurus taught that are incompatible with the purposes and standards of this forum. This forum is dedicated exclusively to the study and support of people who are committed to classical Epicurean views. As a result, this forum is not for people who seek to mix and match some Epicurean views with positions that are inherently inconsistent with the core teachings of Epicurus.

All of us who are here have arrived at our respect for Epicurus after long journeys through other philosophies, and we do not demand of others what we were not able to do ourselves. Epicurean philosophy is very different from other viewpoints, and it takes time to understand how deep those differences really are. That's why we have membership levels here at the forum which allow for new participants to discuss and develop their own learning, but it's also why we have standards that will lead in some cases to arguments being limited, and even participants being removed, when the purposes of the community require it. Epicurean philosophy is not inherently democratic, or committed to unlimited free speech, or devoted to any other form of organization other than the pursuit by our community of happy living through the principles of Epicurean philosophy.

One way you can be most assured of your time here being productive is to tell us a little about yourself and personal your background in reading Epicurean texts. It would also be helpful if you could tell us how you found this forum, and any particular areas of interest that you have which would help us make sure that your questions and thoughts are addressed.

In that regard we have found over the years that there are a number of key texts and references which most all serious students of Epicurus will want to read and evaluate for themselves. Those include the following.

1. ["Epicurus and His Philosophy"](#) by Norman DeWitt
2. [The Biography of Epicurus by Diogenes Laertius.](#) This includes the surviving letters of Epicurus, including those to [Herodotus](#), [Pythocles](#), and [Menoceus](#).
3. ["On The Nature of Things"](#) - by Lucretius (a poetic abridgement of Epicurus' "On Nature")
4. ["Epicurus on Pleasure"](#) - By Boris [Nikolsky](#)
5. The chapters on Epicurus in [Gosling and Taylor's "The Greeks On Pleasure."](#)
6. [Cicero's "On Ends" - Torquatus Section](#)
7. [Cicero's "On The Nature of the Gods" - Velleius Section](#)
8. The Inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda - [Martin Ferguson Smith translation](#)
9. [A Few Days In Athens" - Frances Wright](#)
10. Lucian Core Texts on Epicurus: (1) [Alexander the Oracle-Monger](#), (2) [Hermodotimus](#)
11. [Philodemus "On Methods of Inference"](#) (De Lacy version, including his appendix on relationship of Epicurean canon to Aristotle and other Greeks)
12. "The Greeks on Pleasure" -Gosling & Taylor Sections on Epicurus, especially the [section on katastematic and kinetic pleasure](#) which explains why ultimately this distinction was not of great significance to Epicurus.

It is by no means essential or required that you have read these texts before participating in the forum, but your understanding of Epicurus will be much enhanced the more of these you have read. Feel free to join in on one or more of our conversation threads under various topics found throughout the forum, where you can to ask questions or to add in any of your insights as you study the Epicurean philosophy.

And time has also indicated to us that if you can find the time to read one book which will best explain [classical Epicurean philosophy](#), as opposed to most modern "eclectic" interpretations of Epicurus, that book is Norman DeWitt's ***Epicurus And His Philosophy***.

(If you have any questions regarding the usage of the forum or finding info, please post any questions in this thread).

Welcome to the forum!

Not Neo-Epicurean, But Epicurean

1. Not "flourishing," "human potential," "self-actualization," or "meaningfulness," but happiness grounded in the feeling of pleasure.
2. Not "absence of pain" as a full statement of the goal of life, but "the Feelings are two, pleasure and pain" and "Pleasure is the beginning and the end of a happy life."
3. Not virtue for the sake of virtue, but virtue as instrumental for the attainment of pleasure.
4. Not "the greatest good for the greatest number," but "Every desire must be confronted with this question: What will happen to me if the object of my desire is accomplished and what if it is not?"
5. Not "humanism," "transhumanism," "individualism," "collectivism," "egoism," "altruism," "social progress," "Marxism," "democracy," "tyranny," or any "one size fits all" political ideal of any kind, but social structure based on friendship which "is formed and maintained by means of a community of life among those who have reached the fullness of pleasure."
6. Not "hard determinism," but "some things happen from necessity, some from chance, and others through our own choice."
7. Not "supernaturalism," but "materialism."
8. Not "supernatural gods," or "life after death," but confidence in a fully material universe and "for those men for whom wisdom is possible, and who do seek it, such men may truly live as gods."
9. Not only "short term hedonism," but "it is to continuous pleasures that I invite you."
10. Not "rationalism," but "all reason is dependent upon sensations."
11. Not fearful of death nor careless of losing life, but valuing life for the opportunity of pleasure it brings.

Our Posting Policy At EpicureanFriends.com:

"No Partisan Politics," "No Supernatural Religion," and "No Absolute Virtue"

This forum is dedicated to promoting the philosophy of Epicurus, and not to any partisan political positions whether "left", "right", or "center". The task of rediscovering Epicurean philosophy requires that such discussions be held elsewhere. Posts violating this rule are subject to removal.



Epicurean philosophy firmly rejects the viewpoint that there are any supernatural forces or absolute virtues or Platonic ideals of any kind. Argument which is based on supernatural claims, or "absolute" virtues or ideals of any kind, are in violation of this rule and subject to removal.

**There are no
supernatural
gods**



**There is
no life
after death**

**All good
and evil exists
in sensation**

**Pleasure is
the beginning
and the end of
the blessed life**

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Post by “Quiesco” of April 7, 2023 at 11:50 AM

Hi everyone! I originally stumbled upon Epicureanism when I branched out from Stoicism to discover more Hellenic philosophies and other philosophies of life. What originally drew me to that side is that they more heavily focus on the practical side of living your life if you accept their arguments of what is a good life. Epicureanism especially seemed to encapsulate what I had already started formulating for myself, that everything I do should be done to ensure pleasure.

I hope to learn more about the metaphysical theory at the base of Epicureanism since it's the weakest part of my understanding of Epicureanism. I wonder how they came to the belief pleasure is the only good and what the underlying arguments are. In particular I found it interesting reading they said if Gods may exist they do not busy themselves with us and there is nothing after death. I'm exploring how they justify their belief in these things after reading mostly about the ethical and practical side. An earlier interest of mine was Pyrrhonism, which states there's no truths we can ascertain and we should suspend our judgments on matters of truth. I found myself drawn to that, but haven't done the entire trip of skepticism. The process of reading and grasping philosophy is rather arduous and time-consuming and sometimes writings are simply unintelligible to my laic brain.

This place seems to discuss questions I have and I hope to grasp the extant texts like I've seen some do here. It's fascinating what a little treasure trove this is of information about Epicureanism, I did not think anything like this would exist for what's quite an unknown philosophy.

Post by "Cassius" of April 7, 2023 at 12:45 PM

Great post and welcome!

Post by "Cassius" of April 7, 2023 at 12:52 PM

This post from the Torquatus section of On Ends is directed to the point about pleasure being the only good. If you accept that Nature gives us only pleasure and pain by which to judge, then everything good resolves to "pleasure" and vice versa:

[Quote from Cicero On Ends](#)

The problem before us then is, what is the climax and standard of things good, and this in the opinion of all philosophers must needs be such that we are bound to test all things by it, but the standard itself by nothing. Epicurus places this standard in pleasure, which he lays down to be the supreme good, while pain is the supreme evil; and he founds his proof of this on the following considerations.

[30] Every creature, as soon as it is born, seeks after pleasure and delights therein as in its supreme good, while it recoils from pain as its supreme evil, and banishes that, so far as it can, from its own presence, and this it does while still uncorrupted, and while nature herself prompts unbiased and unaffected decisions. So he says we need no reasoning or debate to shew why pleasure is matter for desire, pain for aversion. These facts he thinks are simply perceived, just as the fact that fire is hot, snow is white, and honey sweet, no one of which facts are we bound to support by elaborate arguments; it is enough merely to draw attention to the fact; and there is a difference between proof and formal argument on the one hand and a slight hint and direction of the attention on the other; the one process reveals to us mysteries and things under a veil, so to speak; the other enables us to pronounce upon patent and evident facts. Moreover, seeing

that if you deprive a man of his senses there is nothing left to him, it is inevitable that nature herself should be the arbiter of what is in accord with or opposed to nature. Now what facts does she grasp or with what facts is her decision to seek or avoid any particular thing concerned, unless the facts of pleasure and pain?

Which doesn't mean that there aren't lots of individual pleasures but that the unifying common element of all pleasures is the feeling that is given by nature.

Post by “Cassius” of April 7, 2023 at 12:57 PM

We have lots of discussion on that point because it's an interplay of practical and logical. In practice there are lots of pleasures but if you are going to be philosophical and logically rigorous and identify only one thing as the highest and best, then the common element that makes something desirable is that nature tells you that it feels pleasurable. Adding qualifiers as to type of pleasure is not logically consistent - there is only one faculty of pleasure when you get right down to it. There is no separate faculty of joy or separate faculty of tranquility, etc.

On the other hand of course we often choose painful things when that leads to greater ultimate pleasure, so we don't blindly follow the immediate pleasures that are right in front of us. We have the mental ability to look down the road, and to consider all the ramifications, and decide what ends up being of most significance to us.

If you so desire you can also state it in terms of "absence of pain," since the quantity of absence of pain equals presence of pleasure, but that too is a logical point as much as it is practical. They equal each other only in quantity and because there are only two categories of feeling, so if you are experiencing any feeling at all you are experiencing one or the other. Move the slider in either direction and you get more of one and less of the other. When you reach the end of the slider you get 100% pleasure and 0% pain, and that is what I would contend is the best way to understand statements to the effect that "absence of pain" is the "highest pleasure." Yes it is, but not in a mystical or obscure way - when you all your experience is filled with pleasures, by definition there's no part of your experience occupied by pains, and you can't get any better than that.

The ultimate reason to do anything or even be alive is to obtain pleasure, not to please gods or be "virtuous" or to be rational or to escape pain.

All of these are logical points when stated this way, in day to day life we have to do the best we can using these deductions to assist our decision-making.

Edited note: But it's interesting to observe that in the end Epicurus doesn't ground his argument on the type of logical analysis I just mentioned. As Torquatus said, Epicurus grounds his argument on telling you to look around to see what the young of all things do (before they become corrupted with false ideas). They pursue pleasure and avoid pain, and it's on this observation that we find the most important and persuasive proof of the conclusion. The logical discussion helps in talking with Stoics and philosophers, but in talking to regular people it's a matter of common sense observation of the way the world works. All the logic in the world can't prove to you that pleasure is good and pain is bad with the force of persuasion that eating ice cream is pleasurable and desirable and going to the dentist is painful and something most people want to avoid.

Post by “Martin” of April 7, 2023 at 3:41 PM

Welcome Quiesco!

Post by “Don” of April 7, 2023 at 3:51 PM

Great first post, [Quiesco](#) ! Welcome aboard. Look forward to your contributions to our discussions here!

btw, evidently even Epicurus admired Pyrrho's conduct:

[Quote from Diogenes Laertius](#)

In debate he was looked down upon by no one, for he could both discourse at length and also sustain a cross-examination, so that even Nausiphanes when a young man was captivated by him: at all events he used to say that we should follow Pyrrho in disposition but himself in doctrine; and he would often remark that Epicurus, greatly admiring Pyrrho's way of life, regularly asked him for information about Pyrrho;

Post by “Quiesco” of April 7, 2023 at 5:21 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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Which doesn't mean that there aren't lots of individual pleasures but that the unifying common element of all pleasures is the feeling that is given by nature.

I think that's a pretty interesting point, I wonder why one should accept that Nature gives you only pleasure and pain to judge with. I find the argument that Cicero outlines quite similar to the Stoic one, where whether someone lives according to Nature is not something to discuss but you simply know it, whether that be the Stoic version (living in accordance with the force that guides everything into a more perfect form, apparently by living by the virtues) or the Epicurean version (living in accordance with the self-evident attractive force of pleasure). If you simply point to it and it should be self-evident, then Stoics and Epicureans can't use that same argument and come to different conclusions. Perhaps I'm misunderstanding the argument though.

Of course fire is only hot because that is my sense experience, fire in principle just is, if it even really exists in the way that I experience it. My subjective experience is the only thing that is real to me and it does not have a self-evident good-bad dichotomy.

So then I arrive at the fact I can choose to live according to whatever principle, and the most obvious one is pleasure because it is in itself fulfilling. But that is simply my own personal experience and I can not extrapolate that any further. I can only know that I exist since it is self-evident, pleasure is the guiding principle for all that I know exists.

I hope that made any sense to you, it's quite hard to put it into words :) And from there it is of course a question of what pleasure really is so I can live to it to the best of my abilities, which is what made me stumble upon Epicureanism.

Thanks for the welcome!

Post by “Quiesco” of April 7, 2023 at 5:26 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

On the other hand of course we often choose painful things when that leads to greater ultimate pleasure, so we don't blindly follow the immediate pleasures that are right in front of us. We have the mental ability to look down the road, and to consider all the ramifications, and decide what ends up being of most significance to us.

Is there any Epicurean text about this? It would be really interesting what they thought of this, considering it's also a gamble since the way the future will play out is not guaranteed. When is the risk too high?

Post by “Quiesco” of April 7, 2023 at 5:27 PM

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I happened to read about this yesterday, I really wonder what he had to say about him. Thanks!

Post by “Godfrey” of April 7, 2023 at 7:25 PM

[Quote from Quiesco](#)

I wonder why one should accept that Nature gives you only pleasure and pain to judge with.

Welcome, [Quiesco](#) !

The idea that pleasure and pain are the guides (or judges) comes from observation. This seems to be getting confirmation in current neuroscience, but maybe the best way to examine the idea is to pay close attention to your own functioning. To understand pleasure and use it for a guide, one must really understand pain as well. When I looked at my feelings at any given time, my initial thought would often be that I was in a neutral state. But by paying closer attention I would notice some discomfort or perhaps very subtle enjoyment. The term is a bit loaded, but one could say that a principle Epicurean practice is mindfulness of one's Feelings. I capitalize Feelings as they are one of the three faculties in EP from which we can measure reality.

Personally, I would restate "accept that Nature gives you only..." as "our biology is such that" we have three basic faculties of understanding: Sensations, Feelings and Prolepsis.

[Quote from Quiesco](#)

Of course fire is only hot because that is my sense experience, fire in principle just is, if it even really exists in the way that I experience it. My subjective experience is the only thing that is real to me and it does not have a self-evident good-bad dichotomy.

Exactly! This philosophy relies on understanding some science and following personal observations. And there is no universal god-bad dichotomy, there is only what we personally perceive. If you've not listened to the Lucretius Today podcast (you can access it on this site or various podcast apps), the latest episode or two have been discussing Epicurean physics and its ramifications. Basically, in a world in which everything is material and there is no omnipotent god or afterlife, Epicurus determined that the only thing that we can use to construct an ethical theory is our own faculties, which are called the Canon.

[Quote from Quiesco](#)

And from there it is of course a question of what pleasure really is so I can live to it to the best of my abilities, which is what made me stumble upon Epicureanism.

Ah, that's the journey! It gets richer the farther one gets into it.

Post by "Don" of April 7, 2023 at 8:04 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

god-bad dichotomy



I don't know if this was a typo or deliberate, but this made smile: there is NO god-bad dichotomy!

Post by "Cassius" of April 8, 2023 at 6:50 AM

[Quote from Quiesco](#)

considering it's also a gamble since the way the future will play out is not guaranteed.
When is the risk too high?

I don't think there is or can be in Epicurean physics any answer to that other than that you have to make that decision for yourself. Since the universe is not determined in full there is no way to guarantee success in any endeavor, but you can observe and from experience play the odds reasonably and that's the best anyone can do.

Post by “Quiesco” of April 8, 2023 at 10:50 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

The idea that pleasure and pain are the guides (or judges) comes from observation. This seems to be getting confirmation in current neuroscience, but maybe the best way to examine the idea is to pay close attention to your own functioning. To understand pleasure and use it for a guide, one must really understand pain as well. When I looked at my feelings at any given time, my initial thought would often be that I was in a neutral state. But by paying closer attention I would notice some discomfort or perhaps very subtle enjoyment. The term is a bit loaded, but one could say that a principle Epicurean practice is mindfulness of one's Feelings. I capitalize Feelings as they are one of the three faculties in EP from which we can measure reality.

That's a very good point you make and I agree, it asks of you to be in tune with all that you experience and its effect on you. I think experimenting too by adding/removing things from your life so you get an overview of what the effects of that is on you. I bet it's been talked about here as well before, I've been using the search bar a lot and I almost always seem to find a post related to a thought I have :')

Sometimes when pain creeps into a pleasurable state you have to temporarily stop the pleasure to deal with eliminating the pain. I think temporarily stopping does lead to more pleasure in the end, but I tend to gravitate (if the pain isn't strong) to putting up with the pain until I've had enough of it, just to avoid the pausing of the pleasure. I think it's very good to be mindful of those kinds of behaviors that impede you from experiencing full pleasure.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Exactly! This philosophy relies on understanding some science and following personal observations. And there is no universal god-bad dichotomy, there is only what we personally perceive. If you've not listened to the Lucretius Today podcast (you can access it on this site or various podcast apps), the latest episode or two have been discussing Epicurean physics and its ramifications. Basically, in a world in which everything is material and there is no omnipotent god or afterlife, Epicurus determined that the only thing that we can use to construct an ethical theory is our own faculties, which are called the Canon.

That sounds interesting, I'll have to tune in! I'm actually reading the book that was recommended here, 'Epicurus and His Philosophy', and I just got to the part explaining a bit about the Canon. I'm understanding it a little better now. New questions bubbled up instead but I'll venture out of this thread for those

[Quote from Don](#)

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

god-bad dichotomy



I don't know if this was a typo or deliberate, but this made smile: there is NO god-bad dichotomy!

Haha that was definitely a typo! :')

[Quote from Cassius](#)

[Quote from Quiesco](#)

considering it's also a gamble since the way the future will play out is not guaranteed. When is the risk too high?

I don't think there is or can be in Epicurean physics any answer to that other than that you have to make that decision for yourself. Since the universe is not determined in full there is no way to guarantee success in any endeavor, but you can observe and from experience play the odds reasonably and that's the best anyone can do.

Interesting, I thought perhaps with pleasure being the supreme good it might make a person extremely risk-averse since it guarantees the most pleasure.

Post by “Quiesco” of April 8, 2023 at 10:54 AM

Funnily enough, after typing that bit about Stoic Nature and Epicurean Nature I came across this in Epicurus and His Philosophy

It was the lead of Aristotle that Epicurus chose to follow. He looked to organic nature as furnishing the norm just as Plato had looked to reason. This divergence resulted in two opposing interpretations of the phrase “living according to Nature.” To the Stoics, who hitched their wagon to Plato’s star, it signified the imitation of the inflexible celestial order by a rigid and unemotional morality. To Epicurus and Epicureans, “living according to Nature,” though they never made a slogan of it, signified living according to the laws of our being. Of this being the emotions were recognized as a normal and integral part, undeserving of suspicion or distrust.

Post by “Cassius” of April 8, 2023 at 12:13 PM

[Quote from Quiesco](#)

Interesting, I thought perhaps with pleasure being the supreme good it might make a person extremely risk-averse since it guarantees the most pleasure.

That's an interesting thought - you are presuming that being risk-averse guarantees the most pleasure? I am not suggesting I disagree in full or part but I wonder if that is what you mean and if so why? That's probably a question a lot of people should think about.

Post by “Godfrey” of April 8, 2023 at 1:32 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

That's probably a question a lot of people should think about.

Definitely! Some of the most rewarding experiences of my life have been some of the most “risky.” A couple have even scared the wits out of me but, in retrospect, changed my life for the better.

In a similar vein, here's a list of some risky behaviors:

- driving a car, riding public transit
- asking someone out on a date for the first time
- applying for a job that you really want
- having sex
- getting married
- having a child
- going for a hike
- zip-lining 😊 [Martin](#)
- trying a new food
- adopting a new philosophy
- swimming in the ocean
- skiing or snowboarding
- &c

This also leads to thinking about the "absence of pain" interpretation of EP...

Post by “Quiesco” of April 8, 2023 at 2:46 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

[Quote from Quiesco](#)

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That's an interesting thought - you are presuming that being risk-averse guarantees the most pleasure? I am not suggesting I disagree in full or part but I wonder if that is what you mean and if so why? That's probably a question a lot of people should think about.

I meant that some pleasures have some risk which could result in less pleasure or more pain in life overall. The car example by Geoffrey is a good one, since driving a car might just be the most dangerous form of transporting yourself from one place to another in terms of accidents and fatality. I wonder how you weigh the risk of whatever pleasure you derive out of the car drive and/or what you do at your destination to the risk of an accident.

Post by “Quiesco” of April 8, 2023 at 3:14 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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- skiing or snowboarding

- &c

This also leads to thinking about the "absence of pain" interpretation of EP....

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Quite an interesting list! Would you take public transport over a car if it's available, considering it's safer than driving a car?

Some like trying a new food are pretty low risk in that regard since, if you don't like it, the pain would be short-lasting and not that intense, whereas the reward could be very high. Like listening to a new song or watching a movie you've never seen.

Then there's all the stuff that could end in pain due to sickness or an accident or even death, like hiking, swimming in the ocean, skiing/snowboarding, zip-lining, pregnancy, even sex I suppose! There's quite a difference between the amount of risk between these one.

And then we have that which could cause mental pain, like choosing to bind ourselves to another person through marriage, having a child, applying for a job or asking someone out. This one is quite hard to me because I think we can often strongly influence our view on certain issues and the pain they cause us. Take applying for your dream job as an example, I think you can reduce or remove the mental pain by accepting you don't have that job and you might not get it and still trying anyway. But another big factor in mental pain is longing for something you do not have. Maybe you start to crave for a type of food or job, affection from your partner or for your child to act a certain way. In that sense there's lots of mental pain to be had if you do not feel content without these.

The only one I found quite hard to determine was adopting a new philosophy. I suppose that the choice of whether to live according to a philosophy would have to be taken by the same pleasure principle as well. Would holding on to the old philosophy and living a life of ignorance be painful, or lead to you making decisions that cause more pain? Or would the pain after adopting it be greater, perhaps due to being ostracized? I suppose it depends on your surroundings whether it is a risk or not. I think for many people, where I live at least, it would not really be a risk.

Anyway, I'm gonna continue reading Epirucus and His Philosophy now. 😄

Post by "Pacatus" of April 9, 2023 at 3:56 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

This seems to be getting confirmation in current neuroscience,

I recall that Haris Dimitriadis, in his book *Epicurus and the Pleasant Life: A Philosophy of Nature*, while himself not having a scientific background, did pretty extensive personal research into such neuro/biological underpinnings, and spends a good deal of space presenting them.