

# If Death Is Nothing To Us, Then Life Is Everything to Us

Post by "Cassius" of October 7, 2023 at 12:06 AM

Don and several of us have been discussing the implications of [PD02](#) and we should open this to everyone. Don has pointed out that we should consider the wording:

[Death is nothing to us](#); for what has disintegrated lacks awareness (ἀναισθητεῖ), and what lacks awareness (ἀναισθητεῖ) is nothing to us.

ἀναισθητεῖ is simply a negated form of αἴσθησις which means:

1. Perception from the senses, feeling, hearing, seeing
2. Perception by the intellect as well as the senses
3. That which is perceived: scent
4. Ability to perceive: discernment

We have discussed many times that hypotheticals can be dangerous, but to go down a rabbit hole, the mirror universe positive version of PD2 may be something like:

"Life is everything to us, for what perceives the senses, feelings, and perceptions of the intellect is everything to us."

Let's consider that "mirror universe positive version" of [PD02](#) and discuss whether we think this would be true statement of Epicurean doctrine.

In this case I will go forward and state my own opinion. As it now appears to me to be justified to hold that it is core Epicurean doctrine that all experiences in life which are not painful are pleasurable, then Epicurus would indeed support this mirror image. Epicurus is identifying the normal state of life as pleasurable unless pain intervenes, and given that Epicurus has explicitly stated that pleasure is the alpha and omega of the blessed life, viewing life itself in its normal state to be a pleasure would justify holding that "life is everything to us."

So to repeat I would say that I think Epicurus embraced this view on these grounds:

If [death is nothing to us](#) then life is everything to us because we identify all non-painful experiences as pleasurable. Life is desirable, and the default Epicurean position is that to be alive is understood to be pleasurable unless some specific pain intervenes. "Quod dolore caret id in voluptate est." (Torquatus / Cicero - On Ends - Book One XI - 39) [T]hat which is free from pain is in a state of pleasure. (Parker)

I also think this is a clear meaning of On Ends 1:56: "We refuse to believe, however, that when pleasure is removed grief immediately ensues, excepting when perchance pain has taken the place of pleasure...."

i think it is fair to interpret that as meaning that the presumption is that life is a series of pleasures, both stimulating and normal, and that the norm of life is (or can be for a person living prudently) a succession of pleasures unless specifically interrupted by some non-normal pain. "Effort" - such as the effort of breathing - is not painful in and of itself but is instead normal and pleasurable. The hand in its normal state of existence may not be being stimulated at a particular moment, but unless it is for some specific reason experiencing a pain it is experiencing pleasure.

Further from the letter to Menoeceus; "And therefore a right understanding that [death is nothing to us](#) makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not because it adds to it an infinite span of time, but because it takes away the craving for immortality."

That is a statement that because the wise man understands and views life as desirable and pleasurable, the "normal" state is itself desirable and pleasurable.

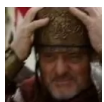
And given that nothing is desirable in and of itself unless it is pleasurable, this following wording too supports the same conclusion:

"And he who counsels the young man to live well, but the old man to make a good end, is foolish, not merely because of [the desirability of life](#), but also because it is the same training which teaches to live well and to die well."

Let's discuss. I think it is time (for those of us who haven't already) to endorse the view that "life is everything to us" is in fact the corollary that [death is nothing to us](#). Whereas in the past we may have drawn back from doing so because we would have preferred to say "[Pleasure](#) is everything to us," the identification of the normal state of life as pleasurable supports the conclusion that "[Life](#) is everything to us." This may not be wording that we find normal and familiar, but it is up to an Epicurean to be able to explain the proper relationship of "pleasure" and "life" just as an Epicurean explains a proper view of "gods" and of "virtue."

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Reference Note: A search of the forum here for "life is everything" indicates this issue previously came up in at least two places:



### [\*\*Discussion of Article: "On Pleasure, Pain and Happiness"\*\*](#)

- [Cassius](#)

- Jul 13th 2019
- [The Feelings / Passions / Internal Sensations: Pleasure and Pain](#)

Post

...y I think it is conveying that we have no concerns after we are dead because there is no sensation that would drive a concern. And one of the most important results of "[death is nothing to us](#)" properly understand is something very close to "life is everything to us." As I remember DeWitt saying somewhere, pain and pleasure "have meaning only to the living." Does that explanation help bridge our issue, or make my viewpoint more confusing? (Quote from Elayne) On this issue I am attempting to consi...



[Doubt is Unpleasant, But It's Not Your Worst Enemy](#)

- [Cassius](#)
- Dec 20th 2015
- [General Discussion And Navigation](#)

Post

...in, this summary obscures the deeper issues. Of course there's no need to fear anything about the state of being dead, because we feel nothing after we cease to live. But just as it is true that "[death is nothing to us](#)" it is also true that life is everything to us because only while we are living are we able to experience pleasure. And it is quite legitimate - in fact the height of wisdom - to be careful about the way you live your life so that your happiness can extend as long as possible. If ...

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### **Post by "Cassius" of October 7, 2023 at 12:42 AM**

From DeWitt's "Summum Bonum Fallacy" (December 1950). DeWitt is not using precisely the reasoning we are discussing in this thread, but I think his observations are helpful regardless of the "greatest" question, because what would arguably support "life is greatest" would also support "life is everything."

The rest of this post is a quote from the article:

Recognition of life as "the greatest good" is on record in Vatican Collection 42: "The same span of time embraces both beginning and end of the greatest good." The meaning of this is not obscure. It marks life as limited by birth and death. It denies both pre-existence and survival of the soul, and is a contradiction of Plato, who sponsored both these doctrines. Editors, however, misled by the summum bonum fallacy, feel bound that "the greatest good" shall be pleasure, and consequently emend the text, producing a sentence genuinely obscure, which need not concern us.

Other confirmatory passages are citable. The "desirability of life" is mentioned as a reason for placing a higher value upon old age as against youth,' contrary to a prevailing opinion. The same feeling motivates the scorn expressed for a dictum of Theognis : "A good thing it is never to have been born or, being born, to have passed with all speed through the gates of Hades." The supreme value placed upon life determines also the attitude toward suicide (Vatican Collection 38) : "Small is the man from every point of view who discovers many plausible reasons for taking leave of life."

This doctrine of Epicurus furnished philosophy with a perennial topic. He thought of life as a voyage<sup>14</sup> or a journey<sup>5</sup> in which the wise man should always find a balance of pleasure over pain.<sup>6</sup> Suicide in his opinion was not a dereliction of duty, but the abandonment of an opportunity to enjoy happiness to the fullest degree.

In the second of his books On Lives he is reported as saying: "But even if deprived of his sight, [the wise man] will not turn aside from the journey of life." It is from this point that Cicero discusses the topic, and that too with specific mention of Epicurus, in the Tusculan Disputations,' where he extends it to include loss of hearing.

Once the ball had been started to roll the temptation presented itself to go on through the list of deprivations, as in the sorites syllogism, and this is exactly what happened. Life being the greatest good, the question takes the shape, At what stage of deprivation would it lose all value? The answer came from Maecenas:

debilem facito manu, debilem pede coxo,  
tuber adstrue gibberum, lubricos quate dentes,  
vita dum superest, bene est; hanc mihi vel acuta  
si sedeam cruce, sustine.

The beginning of the poem is lacking; only the lines that horrified Seneca are quoted. It may be assumed that Maecenas ran through the list of deprivations, working his way up to a climax.

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**Post by "Cassius" of October 7, 2023 at 12:49 AM**

Once Don takes a look at Vatican Saying 42 I will probably revise - or at least annotate with DeWitt's opinion - the Bailey version included as the current forum title. I agree with DeWitt that Bailey's rendering (if that is the one DeWitt is referring to) makes no sense:

[VS 42 - The greatest blessing is created and enjoyed at the same moment.](#)

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### **Post by “Cassius” of October 7, 2023 at 12:59 AM**

We need a translation of that Maeceanas text! Unfortunately only the latin is here:

[Two Kinds of Crux, neither of them Christian \(Maecenas, Fr. 4.4\) | Curculio - Michael Hendry](#)

Here's the Perseus Latin, but i never can easily find how to flip to the English (or whether it exists at Perseus);

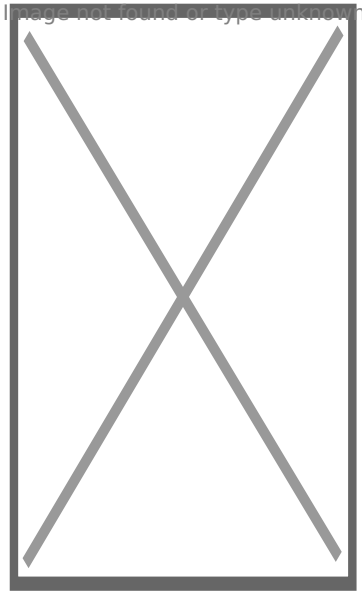
[Seneca, Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales, Seneca Lucilio suo salutem](#)

Finally!

steals along in its place, and the fear of death, a curse which lays a curse upon everything else. Thence came that most debased of prayers, in which Maecenas<sup>a</sup> does not refuse to suffer weakness, deformity, and as a climax the pain of crucifixion—provided only that he may prolong the breath of life amid these sufferings: <sup>b</sup>

Fashion me with a palsied hand,  
Weak of foot, and a cripple ;  
Build upon me a crook-backed hump ;  
Shake my teeth till they rattle ;  
All is well, if my life remains.  
Save, oh, save it, I pray you,  
Though I sit on the piercing cross !

There he is, praying for that which, if it had befallen him, would be the most pitiable thing in the world ! And seeking a postponement of suffering, as if he were asking for life ! I should deem him most despicable had he wished to live up to the very time of crucifixion : “ Nay,” he cries, “ you may weaken my body if you will only leave the breath of life in my battered and ineffective carcase ! ” “ Maim me if you will, but allow me, misshapen and deformed as I may be, just a little more time in the world ! You may nail me up and set my seat upon the piercing cross ! ” Is it worth while to weigh down upon one’s own wound, and hang impaled upon a gibbet, that one may but postpone something which is the balm of troubles, the end of punishment ? Is it worth all this to possess the breath of life only to give it up ? What would you ask for Maecenas but the indulgence of Heaven ? What does he mean by



[Ad Lucilium epistulae morales : Seneca, Lucius Annaeus, ca. 4 B.C.-65 A.D : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

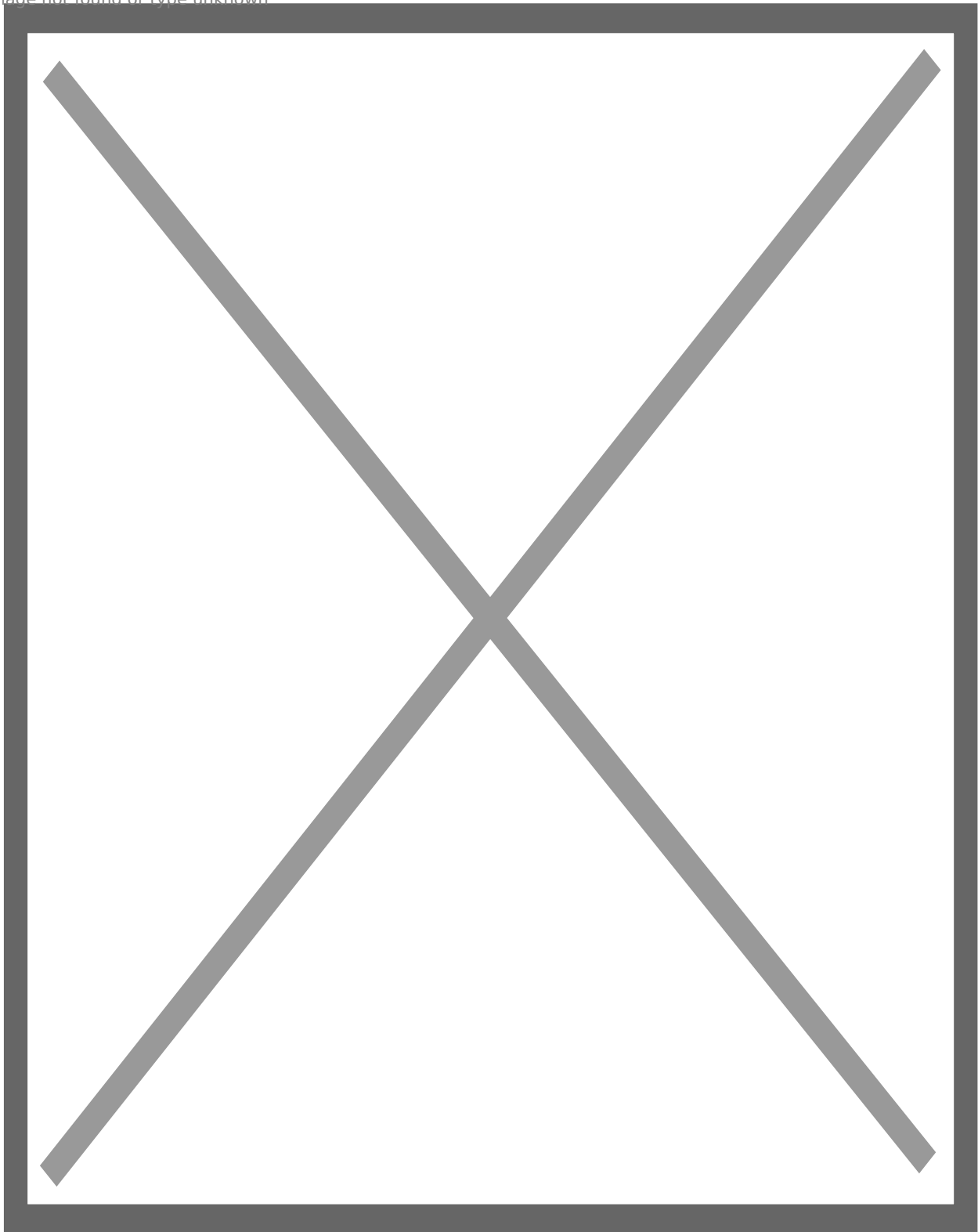
Includes bibliographical references (v. 1, p. xiv-xv) and indexes  
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### **Post by “Cassius” of October 7, 2023 at 1:49 AM**

Given that poem and this history, you have to speculate that Maecenas was in fact Epicurean himself, and that poem is in fact a statement of the Epicurean viewpoint on the value of life. I could see that being true especially since as Epicurus indicates the wise man is going to generally be able to find more reason for pleasure than pain except only in the most extreme of circumstances:

Image not found or type unknown



[Gaius Maecenas - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org)  
en.wikipedia.org

I don't see that poem as asking for those pains, as Seneca seems to say, but rather simply saying that he can put up with an awful lot so long as he remains alive to savor the pleasures available to him. Is that not what Epicurus was doing in his final days?

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### **Post by “Joshua” of October 7, 2023 at 2:58 AM**

How do we square these considerations with VS47?

"47. I have anticipated you, Fortune, and entrenched myself against all your secret attacks. And we will not give ourselves up as captives to you or to any other circumstance; but when it is time for us to go, spitting contempt on life and on those who here vainly cling to it, we will leave life crying aloud in a glorious triumph-song that we have lived well."

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### **Post by “Randall Moose” of October 7, 2023 at 3:53 AM**

I appreciate the positive spin, focusing on life instead of death.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of October 7, 2023 at 5:43 AM**

#### [Quote from Joshua](#)

How do we square these considerations with VS47? "47. I have anticipated you, Fortune, and entrenched myself against all your secret attacks. And we will not give ourselves up as captives to you or to any other circumstance; but when it is time for us to go, spitting contempt on life and on those who here vainly cling to it, we will leave life crying aloud in a glorious triumph-song that we have lived well."

Joshua:

I would square it this way:

"When it is time for us to go" means (1) when we have no other choice or possibility, or (2) when our pain is truly so much that we can no longer outweigh it by pleasure, and a life of unremitting intolerable pain is certain.

When we have no other choice or possibility would be that we see that we are caught in some situation that is going to kill us and we have no way to stop it.

When we are facing unremitting overwhelming pain for either bodily reasons or mental reasons (and this is where we would give our life for a friend if failing to do so would cause us such pain afterwards that we could not live with ourselves).

Thus "...spitting contempt on life and on those who here vainly cling to it..." refers to those situations listed above, and when we have exhausted our options we spit contempt on those who fail to be willing to die, because they do not understand that [death is nothing to us](#) and that there is nothing to fear in death. And in a way that is one of our last acts of pleasure for ourselves, because we are as in Lucretius Book 2 taking pleasure in not being subject to the fear and anxiety that others suffer from when they fail to understand the nature of things.

So from these perspectives I don't think squaring is too difficult. So long as we have the strength of mind to balance mental pleasure against physical pain we will hold out because the balance is still pleasurable. Once the pain is so great and no remedy is possible it would then be appropriate to "exit the theatre when the play has ceased to please us." But we would certainly not want to be a "small man" and give in to the suffering and exit until we were certain that the balance had irredeemably shifted.

This would be why it is so important to see these issues in terms of constant balancing of discrete pleasurable experiences and discrete painful experiences as we have been doing in recent discussions. Some people (Buddhists?) tend to want to think that "being in pain" is all you need to know, but the real issue is "What is the duration, intensity, and location of your pain, and is it manageable and offsetable by pleasures of greater duration, intensity, and location?"

You train yourself not to be a snowflake and give in to pain at its first emergence, you work as hard as you can to achieve a balance of pleasure over pain. Some people are going to say "That sounds like a Stoic attitude!" and I would say to them in reply that I am a proud Epicurean who takes his life extremely seriously, and that they need not insult me as being a Stoic because:

*I have anticipated you, Fortune, and entrenched myself against all your secret attacks. And I will not give myself up as captive to you or to any other circumstance; but when it is time for me to go because I can no longer find enough pleasure to remain in life, I will spit contempt on the idea of staying longer, and on those who vainly cling to life under such circumstances, and because I have no fear of death I will leave life crying aloud in a glorious triumph-song that I have lived well.*

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## Post by “Cassius” of October 7, 2023 at 5:47 AM

Do we already have Maecenas in our list of later Epicureans? If we don't I am wondering if we shouldn't, because the more I read the more Epicurean he sounds. And I would bet that some people are denying that he is Epicurean because of his preference for luxury, and the ascetic-version of Epicurean philosophy (which I think is wrong) prevents them from accepting that he was in fact pursuing Epicurean philosophy as he thought appropriate under his circumstances, somewhat like Atticus.

EDIT: Yes i see Nate has him listed - good work @Nate!

CAIUS TREBATIUS TESTA (84 BCE – 4 CE) a friend of Cicero who supported Julius Caesar  
CALPURNIA CAESARIS (c. 75 BCE – 66 BCE) Daughter of Publius  
PUBLIUS VIRGILIUS MARO (70 – 19 BCE) student of Siro at the Garden of Naples  
CAIUS CIPIUS MAECENAS (70 – 8 BCE) political adviser to Octavian/Augustus  
QUINTUS HORACE FLACCUS (65 – 8 BCE) Coined *carpe diem* or "seize the day!"  
CAIUS STALLIUS LAURANUS (1st-century BCE – 1st-century CE) a student in Naples

## Introduction

Maecenas, a descendant of Etruscan kings and a friend of Emperor Augustus, was a leading figure in both the late Roman Republic and the early Empire. During the civil wars that followed Julius Caesar's death, he acted as a diplomat, a close adviser to the future Augustus, and for a time was even in charge (with Agrippa) of the government of Rome and Italy. He is also believed to have played a major role in the emergence of the imperial regime. Although rarely present on the battlefield, he is often seen as Caesar the Younger's right-hand man. Above all, from the late 40s BCE, he was the patron of some of the most famous Latin poets. He symbolized from very early on the golden age of literary patronage and it is mainly to this activity that he still owes his fame today: for example, Virgil's *Georgics* and *Aeneid*, Horace's *Odes* or Propertius's *Elegies* were composed under his aegis. He also left behind the image of a bon vivant with an unusual, one might even say eccentric, personality, and of an epicurean who preferred staying in the shadows to the limelight. The very limited and scattered data from ancient sources (even his date of birth is uncertain) derives in part from opponents who did not appreciate the fact that a simple knight, who had refused to be a magistrate and privileged his personal relationship with Caesar the Younger, played a leading role in Rome at a time when the city was in the throes of transformation. The singularity of his behavior, in a very normative society, accentuated certain misunderstandings. Thus, Maecenas left a controversial image which is still widely debated today. In all likelihood, if he became involved in Roman politics, alongside the future Augustus during the civil wars, it was out of duty, as he was probably convinced that troubled times required action. After Caesar the Younger's victory over Antony and Cleopatra, in 31–30 BCE, he felt the need to regain his freedom and, at the end of what was a political epiphany (Maecenas remained in the political limelight for only a few years), only retain his role as a discrete personal advisor. He also continued to spearhead a movement to

turn Rome not only into a political and military power, but also a cultural one. The death of this faithful and loyal companion in 8 BCE was experienced by Augustus, his friend, as an irreparable loss.

## General Overviews

The political and cultural context explains to a large extent, despite Maecenas's oddities, the modalities of his political action and cultural work. Rome changed profoundly at the time of Augustus's Principate and, even though a political culture endured, institutions and society underwent transformations that distinguished it in part from Republican Rome. In this framework, the personality of the prince, Augustus, friend of Maecenas and man of literature, was pivotal ([Le Doze 2020](#)). Because of his authority and the accumulation of powers, all eyes were on him. His reformist policies, including their traditionalist dimension that should not be overlooked, shaped a new Rome after the civil wars ([Hurlet and Mineo 2009](#), [Rivière 2012](#)). However, others than the prince contributed to the transformation of the empire's capital ([Morrell, et al. 2019](#)) and to the profound developments of this period, which are not limited to institutional changes ([Galinsky 1996](#), [Galinsky 2005](#), and [Wallace-Hadrill 2008](#)). The triumviral period ([Osgood 2006](#), [Pina Polo 2020](#)), which preceded the establishment of the Principate, generated a lot of anxiety, and created a context that influenced poetic production. [Zanker 1988](#) is an excellent introduction to the debates that surround Maecenas, for the author studies how the values advocated by the Augustan regime permeated Roman society through images: similarly, historians have often suggested that Maecenas exploited poets to serve Augustus's interests.

### [Maecenas](#)

"Maecenas" published on by null.  
[www.oxfordbibliographies.com](http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com)

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## Post by "Don" of October 7, 2023 at 7:37 AM

Good catch, Joshua...

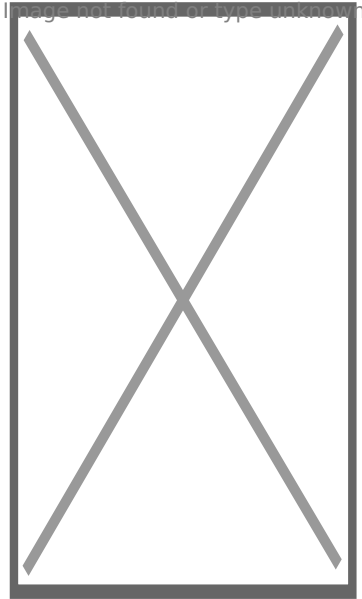
### [Quote from Joshua](#)

when it is time for us to go, spitting contempt on life and on those who here vainly cling to it,

I'd offer the following: The key phrase in that translation isn't the spitting on life, it's the "when it is time for us to go." I don't think VS47 has anything to do with having the option to "exit the

stage" if we're in pain as above where Cassius implies (and states that outright).

VS47 is attributed to Metrodorus:



[Metrodori Epicurei Fragmenta collegit scriptoris incerti Epicurei Commentarium morale, subiecit Alfredus Koerte : Metrodorus, of Lampsacus, d. 277 B.C : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

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And the Epicurus Wiki does a really nice job parsing the Greek:

[Vatican Saying 47 - Epicurus Wiki](#)

This saying of Metrodorus hammers home that we *are* mortal. We are going to die. When it's time - when it's necessary - to shuffle off this mortal coil - an Epicurean should acknowledge that and not cling to life as if struggling against some offense to them. I'm thinking of the saying that pneumonia used to be called "the old man's friend."

#### [Quote from PubMed](#)

The term is attributed to William Osler, who in the first edition of his book *The Principles and Practice of Medicine* (1892) wrote:

In children and in healthy adults the outlook is good. In the debilitated, in drunkards and in the aged the chances are against recovery. So fatal is it in the latter class [i.e. the elderly] that it has been termed the natural end of the old man

If one has a terminal illness with no prospect of recovery or quality of life, one can, of course, take advantage of medical science but at some point all the medical intervention isn't going to change the outcome. And severe pain doesn't necessarily have to be a part of that; the body is just wearing out. The spitting in VS47 is directed at life (time to go!) BUT ALSO those who cling to it. Many have the anguish of seeing a family member hooked up to tubes and machines with no hope of regaining consciousness. Let them go. The last line is the attitude Metrodorus is advocating. When it's time to die - as it will be for everyone! - go out with a victory song!! Celebrate the life that was lived. The word in Ancient Greek is παιᾶν (paiǎn, "a chant or song, especially a thanksgiving or victory hymn, to Apollo under the name Παιᾶν (Paiǎn)"), from the phrase ἰὼ Παιᾶν (Iò Paiǎn, "O Paeon!, Thanks to Paean!"). According to Homer, Paián or Paeon was the name of the physician of the gods. ([Source](#))

See also

[PAEON \(Paieon\) - Greek Physician of the Gods](#)

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### **Post by "Don" of October 7, 2023 at 7:57 AM**

And, let me state for the record - ad nauseum at this point - that I find Dewitt's formulation that "life is the greatest good" to be worded nonsensically. I did not, do not, and don't plan to accept his argument in his "summum bonum fallacy" paper. I don't think his argument holds up. He's trying to make a point but making it in a convoluted and erroneous way in my opinion. Life isn't the "greatest good", but...

Having stated that...

Live is everything to us because life, right now, here, is the only way of experiencing pleasure (and pain). Feeling has no meaning as a word, as a concept, as a thing, apart from a living being. Death is literally nothing to us. No feeling. No existence. Nothing. When someone dies, we cannot say "She is dead." She doesn't exist after she dies. There is no "she" apart from the memories others have of her. That's why experiencing life right here and now is so important. It's not a dress rehearsal for something else!! It's not a proving ground to show your worthiness for something else! This is it.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of October 7, 2023 at 8:31 AM**

### [Quote from Don](#)

Life isn't the "greatest good", but...

Having stated that...

Live is everything to us because life

I think you and I will have to disagree on that one. When I say something is "everything" to me i pretty much mean to myself that it is the most important thing that I have, and I have no issues with thinking that the most important thing i have is my "greatest good." And when i identify life as pleasurable when I am not in pain, I have no problems seeing 'pleasure' as meaning 'life.' It all depends on the context in which you are speaking. My goal is to pleasure can be said as my goal is to live pleurably. If we are using constructs like 'pleasure is the absence of pain" which requires thought to understand since it is not our normal usage, it's not much different to consider "life" as a placeholder for "pleasure." But we can agree to disagree because I don't think it's particularly important to state it that way - it is more clear to us to say "pleasure is the goal" or "pleasure is the greatest good."

I am also very interested in your comment on whether Vatican Collection 42 is being emended by translators. We may have covered it already but I don't recall.

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## **Post by “Don” of October 7, 2023 at 8:55 AM**

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

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

Life isn't the "greatest good", but...

Having stated that...

Live is everything to us because life

I think you and I will have to disagree on that one. When I say something is "everything" to me i pretty much mean to myself that it is the most important thing that I have, and I have no issues with thinking that the most important thing i have is my "greatest good."

I'm using "greatest good" in the strict literal sense of a translation of "summum bonum."

My take is that there is nothing apart from life.

I've been down this road before, ad nauseum, so apologies to those who have had to suffer through this polemic of mine previously.

As I understand it, in philosophical discourse, the summum bonum "the greatest good" is that to which everything points, that which answers "Why do you do what you do?" For Epicurus, that is pleasure. We do everything for the sake of pleasure, to move toward a more pleasurable existence. And I like Epicurus's expansive, all-encompassing definition of pleasure. But, one can't answer the question "Why do you do what you do?" by saying "Life" or "I do everything because I'm alive." Well, of course you do! You don't exist after you die! There's no alternative. Saying "life is the greatest good" doesn't really say anything to me ... as opposed to what? Death? Death is nothing to us. "We do everything for the sake of life" doesn't seem to me to make any sense either. Yes, we protect our life, but, as Metrodorus says, when it's time to go, go out singing and celebrating. Dewitt's shot himself in the foot on this argument when he tries to make hay out of "Latin doesn't have a definite article." But more than that, calling living, existing, being alive, "the greatest good" doesn't get us anywhere. "Life is everything" in contrast gets at the fact that your life that you're living right here and right now is literally the totality of what you will experience ever in the expanse of the universe.

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## Post by “Cassius” of October 7, 2023 at 9:44 AM

Since my view on this is evolving I will extend this a little further:

### Quote from Don

But more than that, calling living, existing, being alive, "the greatest good" doesn't get us anywhere.

See this is where I think affirmatively identifying life with pleasure does get you somewhere. When you start identifying "living, existing, being alive" tightly with pleasure, and you don't insist that the word pleasure applies only to the "tickling" of the senses, then "living, existing, being alive" does become a legitimate way to state your objective, pretty much as Maecenas is saying in his poem. Give me life because so long as I have life I can offset the pleasure of being alive against the pains he is listing.

That 's not the way we normally speak that our goal is just to remain alive, but seeing past the way we normally speak seems to be exactly a trademark Epicurean approach. The pleasure of

simply "living, existing, being alive" (unless perchance we are experiencing some specific pain) is an essential part of the big picture as to why we want to continue to live.

Is calling "life" the "greatest good" the best way to get to the point were people have a proper and full understanding of all that is included in the term "Pleasure." I doubt it is, but the very discussion we're having now helps drive home the point that "pleasure" isn't limited to "tickling."

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

But, one can't answer the question "Why do you do what you do?" by saying "Life" or "I do everything because I'm alive."

If you equate in your mind the normal state of "life" or "because I am alive" to "pleasure," then you do get pretty close to answering those questions that way.

I'd have to think further about it but saying (1) "Life is pleasure" is not much less clear or acceptable as saying (2) "pleasure is the absence of pain."

I can understand (2) as correct only because i know the background explanation that there are only two feelings. I could probably understand (1) as correct just as firmly by knowing the background explanation that life is the one pleasure that is essential to all others.

If we wanted we could discuss this parallel even further by discussing the analogies between pleasure and health / saving vs pain and disease / destruction. >> VS37. Nature is weak toward evil, not toward good: because it is saved by pleasures, but destroyed by pains.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of October 7, 2023 at 9:53 AM**

Another reason I find this interesting is that Torquatus clearly says exactly what Don is saying -- that Epicurus finds the highest good to be in pleasure. That seems clear and does make sense and Cicero does not object on that point.

But Torquatus does not seem to be as clear and successful in explaining Chrysippus' hand or the equation of pleasure as the absence of pain in a way that Cicero finds persuasive. (And I think most of us agree that for some reason - Cicero with his finger on the scale? - the point is not being made clearly.)

But whatever the reason, the "failure to communicate" seems to revolve around this very issue -- clarity and agreement in identifying simply "living, existing, being alive" as being pleasure.

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## Post by "Don" of October 7, 2023 at 9:53 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I am also very interested in your comment on whether Vatican Collection 42 is being emended by translators. We may have covered it already but I don't recall.

For reference, this is VS42 from Saint-Andre:

42. At the very same time, the greatest good is created and the greatest evil is removed.

ὁ αὐτὸς χρόνος καὶ γενέσεως τοῦ μεγίστου ἀγαθοῦ καὶ ἀπολύσεως <τοῦ κακοῦ>.

I would have to check the manuscripts, but the brackets around <τοῦ κακοῦ> leads me to believe that's added. In fact, Bailey had "XLII. The greatest blessing is created and enjoyed at the same moment." So he doesn't amend. Here's his comment:

*σαρκὸς φωνή.*

XLII. A rather obscure fragment, which it is impossible to interpret with certainty without its context. τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν must be 'pleasure', and the general sense will then be that pleasure is enjoyed at the moment when it is brought into being: the two processes are simultaneous. Bignone believes it to be an argument against the Platonic doctrine that pleasure is a *γένεσις* not an *οὐσία*, and compares it with K. Δ. iii, where Epicurus denies that pleasure and pain can coexist. But it seems difficult to take the present fragment as a representation of the Epicurean point of view, as it can hardly be reconciled with the importance attached to the pleasures of memory, and it looks more like a statement of the Cyrenaic view of the *μονόχρονος ἡδονή*. But compare XXVII, which suggests that the reference here may be to the pleasure of philosophic study.

2. ἀπολαύσεως, Usener, seems a certain correction of ἀπολύσεως.

XLIII. An interesting aphorism on avarice, which Greek thought

I think the manuscripts have ἀπόλαυσεως instead of ἀπολύσεως which completely changes the import of the saying and eliminates the need for <τοῦ κακοῦ> "the evil" to be added.

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

This is also directly related to the word used in the letter to Menoikeus in verse 132 when talking about "enjoying."

So, I think Bailey has the upper hand on this one.

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### **Post by “Don” of October 7, 2023 at 9:58 AM**

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

Torquatus does not seem to be as clear and successful in explaining Chrysippus' hand or the equation of pleasure as the absence of pain in a way that Cicero finds persuasive

Remember, "Torquatus" is simply Cicero's Epicurean mouthpiece. Cicero isn't taking dictation. "Torquatus" is a character created by Cicero loosely based on a real person who is dead at the time of the composition. Cicero can conveniently pick and choose exactly what he wants "Torquatus" to say.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of October 7, 2023 at 10:09 AM**

Yes I agree there, but I think what Torquatus does say is textbook Epicurean viewpoints. At the moment my preferred interpretation of the situation is that where Torquatus speaks the words are textbook Epicurean, but that Cicero is leaving out the extended development of how life is pleasure that we are discussing now. The problem that most of us have with understanding the Chrysippus hand analogy is evidence that more explanation is needed than Cicero provides. I think the roots of it are there, as we are pulling out now in identifying normal life as pleasure, but it's so contrary to standard ways of thinking that much more development is needed, and I think that's where Cicero deliberately chose to leave it out.

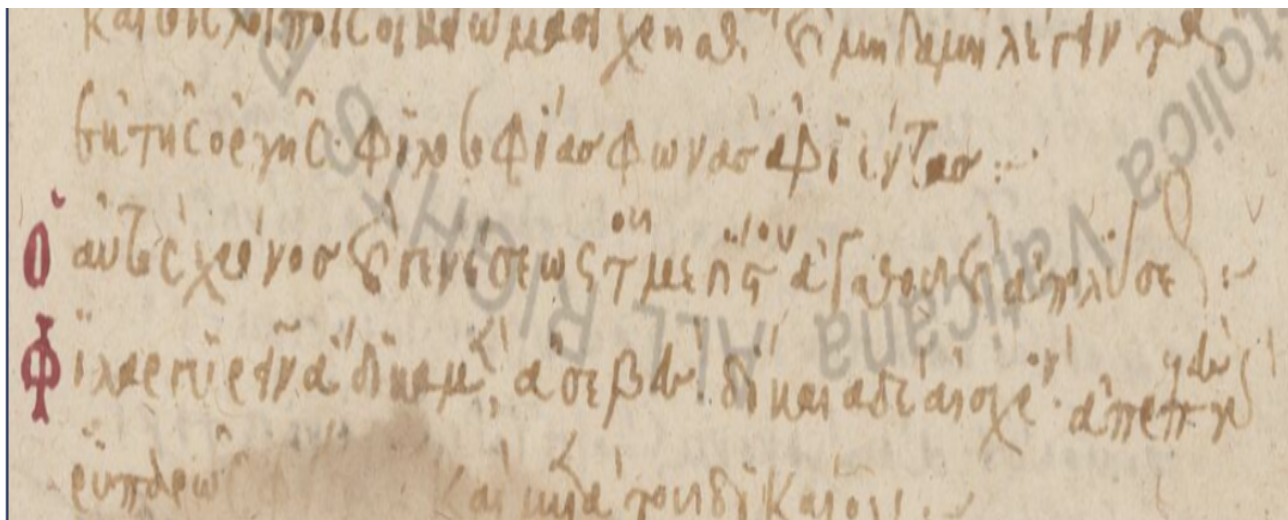
And by leaving it out the full explanation of how it is legitimate to see normal life as pleasure we'll see how Cicero is able to harp over and over on this point as we continue in Book Two.

For better or worse i am afraid we have only started this discussion. On the podcast and in future discussion we will want to find a way to express this linkage without boring everyone to tears of frustration.

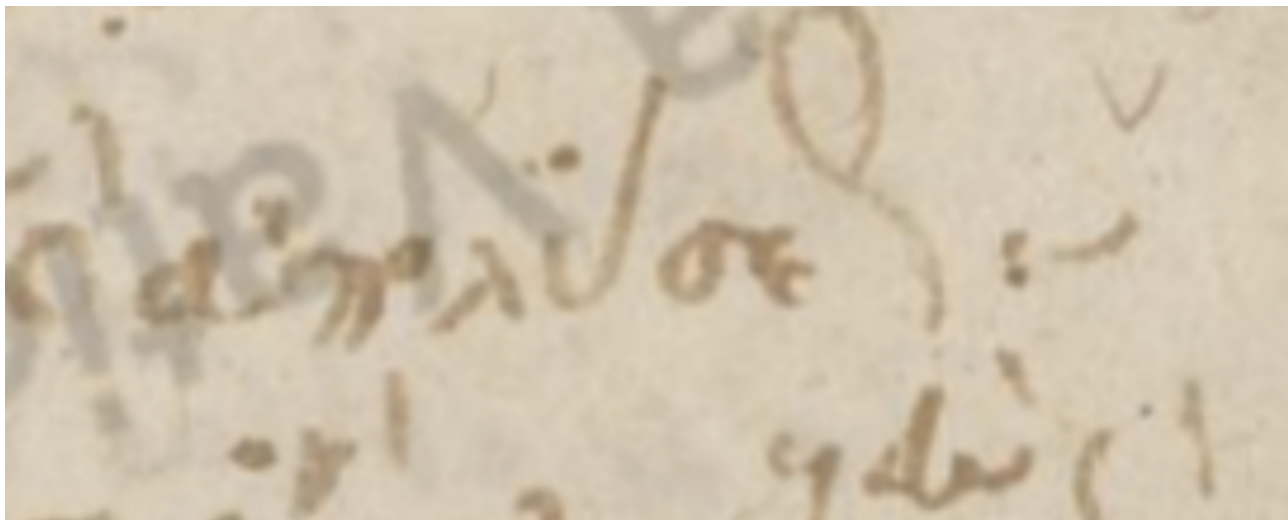
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**Post by “Don” of October 7, 2023 at 10:30 AM**

Okay, here's VS42 in the manuscript:



starting with the big red O. It's just one line. There's a lot of abbreviation and ligatures going on in that last pivotal word! It's almost like the scribe didn't know what to copy either 😊



απολ... is uncontroversial. That's right there.

The loopy "Nike swoosh" after that also has a dot above it. It looks like an exaggerated epsilon υ, but why exaggerate it? Idiosyncratic handwriting? Have to think more about that, but there's your data.

And there is NO <τοῦ κακοῦ>! That doesn't appear in the manuscript. So whatever interpretation one does, it shouldn't involve that addition.

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## **Post by "Cassius" of October 7, 2023 at 11:13 AM**

It occurs to me to say this about the alternatives:

FIRST:

42. At the very same time, the greatest good is created and the greatest evil is removed.

That could be correct if stated in the context of Usener 423, that the realization of the escape from death, which is from most perspectives the worst thing that can happen to someone, brings the greatest joy in exhilaration that you have avoided death:

U423 Plutarch, That Epicurus actually makes a pleasant life impossible, 7, p. 1091A: Not only is the basis that they assume for the pleasurable life untrustworthy and insecure, it is quite trivial and paltry as well, inasmuch as their "thing delighted" - their good - is an escape from ills, and they say that they can conceive of no other, and indeed that our nature has no place at all in which to put its good except the place left when its evil is expelled. ... Epicurus too makes a similar statement to the effect that the good is a thing that arises out of your very escape from evil and from your memory and reflection and gratitude that this has happened to you. His words are these: "That which produces a jubilation unsurpassed is the nature of good, if you apply your mind rightly and then stand firm and do not stroll about {a jibe at the Peripatetics}, prating meaninglessly about the good."

SECOND:

Epicurus.net "The same time produces both the beginning of the greatest good and the dissolution of the evil."

Understandable in pretty much the same as as the first alternative.

THIRD:

Bailey: "The greatest blessing is created and enjoyed at the same moment."

I agree with DeWitt that this statement is counterintuitive, not true, and therefore in DeWitt's word nonsensical.

FOURTH (DeWitt)

The same span of time embraces both the beginning and the end of the greatest good.

Presuming Don is correct as I do, this is an interpretation of a difficult sentence. I would say that regardless of whether it is what the original text said, this (along with the first two above alternatives) are correct statements of Epicurean theory. And I would further say that while the first two alternatives are limited to the situation of "escape from death," DeWitt's interpretation has the advantage of being both true to Epicurus and being more broadly applicable and therefore useful along the lines of the airliner analogy from the last podcast. I am not going to frequently need to understand that "escape from death" is one way to get a rush of enjoyment. On the other hand, I am frequently going to need to remind myself that there is no pleasure, no good of any kind, except for the span of time between birth and death while I am alive.

This may be an instance where DeWitt's interpretations outrun the text, but nevertheless I think where he ends up is both correct and highly valuable.

And that would be another example where, if the Epicurean commentator world had accepted this sentence from DeWitt in the 1950's when he wrote it, we would be a lot further along in rebuilding an Epicurean "movement" true to the origins of the school:

Quote from Quote from "Epicurus And His Philosophy" page 240 - Norman DeWitt (emphasis added)

"The extension of the name of pleasure to this normal state of being was the major innovation of the new hedonism. It was in the negative form, freedom from pain of body and distress of mind, that it drew the most persistent and vigorous condemnation from adversaries. The contention was that the application of the name of pleasure to this state was unjustified on the ground that two different things were thereby being denominated by one name. Cicero made a great to-do over this argument, but it is really superficial and captious. *The fact that the name of pleasure was not customarily applied to the normal or static state did not alter the fact that the name ought to be applied to it; nor that reason justified the application; nor that human beings would be the happier for so reasoning and believing.*"

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I am conscious that many people probably read my exchanges with Don on this and think we are arguing with each other for no reason other than stubbornness. On the contrary, I think it is not really an "argument" but an exploration of the details, and the discussion is highly useful because it is going to lead to a lot of beneficial results. If we weren't having this back and forth

it would be highly tempting just to drop the subject before the implications are fully brought out. We'd just be adding to the long list of people who read about Chrysippus' hand with glazed eyes and move on. Instead of making progress those people would just keep looking for the new form of pleasure that is better than sex, drugs, and rocknroll that they have been told by the commentators is hiding somewhere and will be found if they will just live a more ascetic life. The normal course is that they eventually stop looking and drop Epicurus altogether, and that needs to change.

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### Post by “Don” of October 7, 2023 at 11:24 AM

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

I am conscious that many people probably read my exchanges with Don on this and think we are arguing with each other for no reason other than stubbornness.



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

On the contrary, I think it is not really an "argument" but an exploration of the details, and the discussion is highly useful because it is going to lead to a lot of beneficial results. If we weren't having this back and forth it would be highly tempting just to drop the subject before the implications are fully brought out.



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### Post by “Don” of October 7, 2023 at 11:55 AM

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

42. At the very same time, the greatest good is created and the greatest evil is removed.

I think we need to throw out any translations that add "the greatest evil." That's not in the manuscript and adding things just to make a convenient translation seems disingenuous to me.

The manuscript has:

ὁ αὐτὸς χρόνος καὶ γενέσεως τοῦ μεγίστου ἀγαθοῦ καὶ ἀπολύσεως

with that last word being open to discussion.

Something like:

(At) the same time the greatest good (is) both created and ἀπολύσεως/ἀπολαύσεως.

If we go with ἀπολύσεως, we have to go with a meaning like to do away with, to remove, to set free, to release from.

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

If we accept ἀπολαύσεως, we get to take pleasure in, enjoyment, delight. It's literally one letter difference!

The HUGE issue here is that the saying is completely divorced from its original textual context. Was Epicurus arguing against a specific point? Was he speaking generally? Here's an out of the box: if we take ἀπολαύσεως, was he using it as an argument against a virtue argument that you can't say you're only doing the act of virtue for itself; you do the virtuous act (create) and immediately enjoy it, you get satisfaction and joy the moment it is created. You can't separate the two.

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

Bailey: "The greatest blessing is created and enjoyed at the same moment."

I agree with DeWitt that this statement is counterintuitive, not true, and therefore in DeWitt's word nonsensical.

I don't agree, other than to say Bailey's unfortunate choice of "blessing" for ἀγαθοῦ agathou "good" is unfortunate. And I think you know my position on Dewitt calling something nonsensical 😊 I think the meaning of Bailey's translation is almost too obvious. We enjoy pleasure "the greatest good" at the moment we feel it. There is no intermediate step. There is no intervening rational intrusion. Pleasure feels good at the moment it is created.

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**Post by "Cassius" of October 7, 2023 at 12:08 PM**

### [Quote from Don](#)

The HUGE issue here is that the saying is completely divorced from its original textual context. Was Epicurus arguing against a specific point? Was he speaking generally?

To me this question shows the way to the answer. The items in a collection of quotes would more than likely be selected according to the generality and importance of its application. To say that we enjoy pleasure when we feel it without intervening step (thinking about it) is possible, but to me that is so obvious as to not likely be the meaning. To my knowledge no one contends that you have to think about pleasure before you feel it.

To say that we feel pleasure as soon as it happens is also true, but again adds little if anything that would qualify this as a great insight worthy of inclusion in the list.

I think we are in agreement that the focus is on time more than anything about evil.

I would see two options: (1) It could be having to do with something about the argument with the Cyreniacs which seems to be about whether we experience pleasure at the time we do something (philosophy as stated example) or later on. (2) It could have to do with pleasure being inseparable from life and being available only while you are alive.

I think both points would be correct Epicurean philosophy, and I think we agree that it's hard to know without more context.

I don't know that 42's sequence in the list tells us much, but it seems to be in a section of very practical advice.

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## **Post by “Don” of October 7, 2023 at 12:33 PM**

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I don't know that 42's sequence in the list tells us much, but it seems to be in a section of very practical advice.

I would be skeptical of an interpretation using the Vatican Sayings sequence. This list is never mentioned in the ancient sources. On the other hand, Principle Doctrines is mentioned by name.

## Post by “Don” of October 7, 2023 at 12:41 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

To say that we enjoy pleasure when we feel it without intervening step (thinking about it) is possible, but to me that is so obvious as to not likely be the meaning. To my knowledge no one contends that you have to think about pleasure before you feel it.

However, it would assert the primacy of feeling over reason. Reason is subordinate to the immediate feelings of pleasure.

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## Post by “Don” of October 7, 2023 at 1:06 PM

I have found this excerpt of a debate between Matt Dillahunty and Jordan Peterson interesting where Peterson tries to defend the premise that death is preferable to life. Cards on the table: I'm in agreement with Dillahunty here:

[https://youtu.be/FmH7JUeVQb8?si=WgELrAxNQVkzEJV\\_](https://youtu.be/FmH7JUeVQb8?si=WgELrAxNQVkzEJV_)

Skip ahead to 49:30 for the discussion of life vs death.

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## Post by “Cassius” of October 7, 2023 at 2:50 PM

I have never heard of Dillahunty but he sure seems to be on the right side. If this is the way Peterson generally talks then he's insufferable. I think in these contexts this Thomas Jefferson quote is helpful. "Feeling" and "pleasure" are the key words, and it doesn't look like anyone today is willing to go there.

### **Jefferson to John Adams, August 15, 1820:** [\(Full version at Founders.gov\)](#)

.... But enough of criticism: let me turn to your puzzling letter of May 12. on matter, spirit, motion etc. It's crowd of scepticisms kept me from sleep. I read it, and laid it down: read it, and laid it down, again and again: and to give rest to my mind, **I was obliged to recur ultimately to my habitual anodyne, 'I feel: therefore I exist.' I feel bodies which are not myself: there are other existencies then. I call them *matter*. I feel them changing place. This**

**gives me motion. Where there is an absence of matter, I call it *void*, or *nothing*, or *immaterial space*. On the basis of sensation, of matter and motion, we may erect the fabric of all the certainties we can have or need.**

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### **Post by “Don” of October 7, 2023 at 2:54 PM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Dillahunty but he sure seems to be on the right side.

I've been a fan of his for awhile now.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

If this is the way Peterson generally talks then he's insufferable

Yep (in my opinion)

[Quote from Cassius](#)

'I feel: therefore I exist.'

I think a better formulation would be "I exist, therefore, I feel." Existence comes before feeling.

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### **Post by “Don” of October 7, 2023 at 7:52 PM**

btw [Cassius](#) I am thoroughly enjoying this deep dive. I find it hard to believe this entire thread, all 28 posts is a product of 24 hours (here and in a private conversation)!! These are the kinds of discussions not available anywhere else on the Web! Thank you! And keep it coming unless you think we've exhausted the topic! 😊

[Quote from Cassius](#)

The items in a collection of quotes would more than likely be selected according to the generality and importance of its application.

I would concur.

On a side note: we need to start calling The Vatican Sayings Επικουρου προσφωνησις (Epikourou prosphonesis) "Epicurus's Declaration" or "The Declaration of Epicurus." That is the section title in the manuscript. It seems appropriate since not all of the quotes come from Epicurus but also Metrodorus and the other Founders I think. It's like they speak with one voice to the voice of Epicurus. I've shared before that I've seen the title translated as "The Voice of Epicurus." That's pretty good, too. Takes the emphasis off the barrier Vatican and back onto Epicurus. We don't call Marcus Aurelius's book The Vatican Diary (I seem to remember it's in the same manuscript)

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### **Post by “Cassius” of October 7, 2023 at 8:22 PM**

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

I think a better formulation would be "I exist, therefore, I feel." Existence comes before feeling.

I tend to agree with Jefferson, but I am not ready to disagree with your statement either. Given my understanding that Epicurus is taking the information provided by the senses (and prolepsis and feelings) as the ultimate way we determine what is true, I could see an argument that Jefferson's sequence is correct, and that we start with the senses/anticipations/feelings as given - because we have to - and go from there. I could also see some kind of combination that requires both simultaneously, and I tend to think that the decision of the Epicureans to combine canonics and physics may be related to that.

I hope we can find some material at some point from people like Sedley or others who have spent more time with what Sextus Empiricus has to say about Epicurus (which i have not studied). And surely there are many critical commentaries on that "I think therefore I am" formulation. Until we look at it further I better reserve taking a firm position on that one.