

## Another Tetrpharmakos Video Discussion

Post by "Cassius" of May 6, 2024 at 9:43 AM

Today I saw someone at Reddit post that the video I am going to reference here is "[A Great Introduction to Epicurus' Four Part Cure For Happiness](#)." I know in the past I have seen this and I may have posted about it earlier, but it bears repeating how off base some (not all, but a significant part!) of this video is:



As a first comment I would ask "Why can't this person actually find a picture of Epicurus rather than use a false drawing of a bald Epicurus that is totally unlike what the ancients used?"

**MEDITATE ON THESE  
IDEAS DAY AND NIGHT,  
AND THE ONES RELATED  
TO THEM, BOTH ALONE  
AND WITH SOMEONE  
LIKE YOURSELF, AND YOU  
WILL NEVER BE BADLY  
DISTURBED  
WHETHER AWAKE OR DREAMING.**



Then I would point out that never does Epicurus himself ever state that these four short statements are his "capital doctrines:" There is *\*one\** occurrence of a formulation similar to this, in a Herculaneum scroll, and no other ancient source contains this formulation. Yes it's arguable that the actual doctrines can be construed to say something similar, but they say much more, with much different connotation.

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1. GOD IS NOTHING TO FEAR

2. DEATH IS NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT

3. IT IS EASY TO ACQUIRE  
THE GOOD THINGS IN LIFE

4. IT IS EASY TO ENDURE  
THE TERRIBLE THINGS



CAPITAL  
DOCTRINES  
OF EPICUREANISM

# TETRAPHARMAKOS

But this next clip is the real reason I made this post:

# 2 KINDS OF PLEASURE

PLEASANT, AGREEABLE,  
SWEET STIMULATION

KINETIC PLEASURE



TRANQUIL, SATISFIED,  
SELF-SUFFICIENT AND  
SELF-ASSURED STATE



STATIC PLEASURE



This is the real heart of the problem. This slide and the audio overlay state that these are the two kinds of pleasure that Epicurus promoted, and this is simply not correct.

The true division of Pleasure into two kinds that characterizes the heart of Epicurean ethics is:

- (1) Agreeable stimulation (for which *sweet* is a fine additional word if you want to use it to make things clear)
- (2) **All other awareness in life** which is not painful.

This second type is NOT limited to a "tranquil, satisfied, self-sufficient, and self-assured stated." All of those adjectives are fine, as they are *\*parts\** of pleasure, but the implication of this formulation is that "tranquility," "satisfaction," "self-sufficiency," and "self-assurance" (which I will now refer to as "TSSS") are somehow the *\*only\** types of experience other than agreeable stimulation that are counted as within pleasure.

Even worse is to state or imply that this second category of TSSS describe a "higher" or "true" type of pleasure, for which agreeable stimulation is only a tool for achieving TSSS, and which can be dispensed when this TSSS is achieved (as if it can be achieved and maintained without the agreeable stimulation, which it can't, but that's an argument for later).

Once you read past these presentations of the "tetrapharmakon" into Epicurus' own letters, and into Diogenes Laertius, and into Cicero's summaries, you see that the key to the real picture is that Epicurus held there to be only two kind of feelings, pleasure and pain, and that every experience which is not painful should be considered as pleasure, and vice versa. [Citations for this are here.](#)

There is much more to say about this video, but I have circled in this next clip one particularly irritating way in which this viewpoint leads people astray:

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Knowing that there is a limit to suffering definitely DOES remove fear of being dead, and other fears as well, but it does not removed "Longing for more life." The rest of Epicurean philosophy (which is butchered in this video by the restrictive definition of pleasure) does indeed remove the longing for an \*unlimited\* life span, because "[PD19](#). *Infinite time contains no greater pleasure than limited time, if one measures, by reason, the limits of pleasure.*"

But Epicurean philosophy not only does not teach that there is no need to wish for "more" life, it teaches that life is desirable, because life is absolutely necessary for the experience of pleasure. Life is so desirable, and so important, that every aspect of life which is not specifically painful is worthy to be considered pleasurable.

One of the worst distortions of Epicurus that comes from Stoic and Buddhist eclecticism is that there is somehow no need to be concerned about staying alive, because you're part of the universal divine fire and should be happy to return to it if you're a Stoic, or because life is suffering and you should be happy to escape it if you're a Buddhist.

There are many people who are vulnerable to the idea that their lives are unimportant and that they should not do everything they can to lead the best life possible while they are alive. That's a point I think we need to hit home as frequently and persuasively as possible.

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### **Post by “Bryan” of May 7, 2024 at 5:40 PM**

Yes, I agree. Although we will not be experiencing any pain after we are dead, and this *is* good news, this is not the focus -- instead, the "good news" of Epicurus is pointing out how much of life is actually already and easily pain-free -- which helps us be grateful for what we have and make the most of our lives.

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### **Post by “Pacatus” of May 7, 2024 at 5:41 PM**

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

But Epicurean philosophy not only does not teach that there is no need to wish for "more" life, it teaches that life is desirable, because life is absolutely necessary for the experience of pleasure. Life is so desirable, and so important, that every aspect of life which is not specifically painful is worthy to be considered pleasurable.

And the natural fact that pleasure is linked to well-being (physical and mental), while pain is linked to ill-being (with the occasional exceptions where a temporary pain must be endured – e.g., a trip to the dentist – to ensure continued pleasurable well-being). And well-being is conducive of a longer, healthier, happier (more pleasurable) life; ill-being, the opposite. Of course, there are nuances in the real complexities of living and choosing – but I remain amazed at how these simple, clear concepts have gotten so corrupted.

[I hasten to admit that I am not particularly disciplined *re* the so-called “hedonic calculus” on a day-by-day basis – but that is my responsibility, and I will not hide it “under the bushel” of some obfuscatory philosophy.]

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### Post by “Pacatus” of May 9, 2024 at 5:46 PM

In my random surfing, I found the essay cited below, from which I include the following quotations:

*“Our body enjoys doing what is healthy.* And this may be a key to Epicurus’ view. What Epicurus terms katastematic pleasure is much like Aristotle’s unimpeded activity of a natural state; it is the natural pleasure experienced when the organism is functioning smoothly. It is the pleasure of being alive; living and functioning in a healthy way feels good because it is good.”

“Lack of disturbance does not mean lack of sensory perceptions, and lack of pain does not imply lack of feeling or pleasure. Since we are hylomorphic beings--beings of animate and sensate flesh--pleasure requires involvement of the body and senses. To enjoy sensory pleasure we need to have a healthy constitution; therefore, we can most enjoy sensory pleasures when we enjoy them in moderation.”

“To summarize, it is clear that Epicurus believed that the highest pleasure is the stable pleasure of complete calmness of soul and lack of pain. Human beings in that state can enjoy the kinetic pleasures that sweeten the senses: music, art, nature, sensory delights. Pleasure comes from sufficiency, not lack. ... However, Epicurean wisdom teaches that in fact we do not need much to live a rich and fulfilling life. When we experience a state in which we are satisfied and complete, we can enjoy all the variations that life brings.”

<https://cup.columbia.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Philosophies-of-Happiness-Appendix-6.pdf>

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The author seems to commit the same “higher pleasure” error mentioned by Cassius above – but does seem to succeed in arguing against the notion that a state of katastematic pleasure somehow obviates the natural, healthy desire for varying kinetic pleasures – on the contrary. And pleasure is pleasure.

Late Note: I found the author of the above -- Diana Lobel, associate professor of religion at Boston University. The above comes from her book *Philosophies of Happiness*.

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As a personal aside, re the italicized sentence above – A therapist friend once asked why I continued my particular indulgences in tobacco. I said: “Because I enjoy it.” His response: “Your body doesn’t.” 😏

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### Post by “Don” of May 9, 2024 at 6:44 PM

Great article find (at least from that excerpt you shared), [Pacatus](#) ! I'm looking forward to reading the whole thing.

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

The author seems to commit the same “higher pleasure” error mentioned by Cassius above – but does seem to succeed in arguing against the notion that a state of katastematic pleasure somehow obviates the natural, healthy desire for varying kinetic pleasures – on the contrary. And pleasure is pleasure.

I find their use of "highest" unfortunate, but I don't see them making the usual "highest pleasure" mistake many authors do. I personally would agree with the author. One can enjoy every other pleasure more if one's mind isn't troubled and one's body is in (reasonably) good working order. That's my general perspective: we need to find that state of equilibrium and good working order (katastematic) as a ground from which to enjoy the stimulative (kinetic) pleasures of life. Even the kinetic pleasure of good memories generally happens easier if we're not anxious or worried or unhealthy.

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### Post by “Pacatus” of May 9, 2024 at 7:11 PM

### [Quote from Don](#)

One can enjoy every other pleasure more if one's mind isn't troubled and one's body is in (reasonably) good working order.

Yes, that seems to be the author's general point. And I found it to be an enlightening one (probably means I haven't been paying close enough attention to you! 😞 ).

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## **Post by “Godfrey” of May 9, 2024 at 8:29 PM**

### [Quote from Don](#)

One can enjoy every other pleasure more if one's mind isn't troubled and one's body is in (reasonably) good working order. That's my general perspective: we need to find that state of equilibrium and good working order (katastematic) as a ground from which to enjoy the stimulative (kinetic) pleasures of life. Even the kinetic pleasure of good memories generally happens easier if we're not anxious or worried or unhealthy.

Agreed. And of course (preaching to the choir) this isn't some sort of mystical state, but confidence in one's worldview through observation and study. And managing (not eliminating!) one's desires using an understanding of the categories of desire. Not magic: philosophy.

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## **Post by “Titus” of June 3, 2024 at 1:43 PM**

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Then I would point out that never does Epicurus himself ever state that these four short statements are his "capital doctrines:" There is \*one\* occurrence of a formulation similar to this, in a Herculaneum scroll, and no other ancient source contains this formulation. Yes it's arguable that the actual doctrines can be construed to say something similar, but they say much more, with much different connotation.

In general, I found the video quite appealing and every of the four points of emphasize was embedded in explanations and references to the letter to Menoikeus. The author also delivers graphics which give more color to the topics.

I do agree that the Tetrpharmacos formula falls short of delivering the whole curriculum of Epicureanism and we even don't know exactly the context in within it is delivered. On the other hand it catches topics that are of great importance in both Menoikeus, PDs, DRN. I still find it valueable as a formula for repetition and "meditation" on Epicurean ethics.

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

This is the real heart of the problem. This slide and the audio overlay state that these are the two kinds of pleasure that Epicurus promoted, and this is simply not correct.

I agree with you that it is problematic and the video's author isn't doing a good job in explaining what he is probably trying to argue. I like Don's statement:

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

That's my general perspective: we need to find that state of equilibrium and good working order (katastematic) as a ground from which to enjoy the stimulative (kinetic) pleasures of life.

For the lay people who aren't familiar with Epicurus at all it's important to know, that pleasure isn't simply eating ice-cream or drinking wine. That's probably why the video's author mentioned it.

My main issue with the video is, that it doesn't promote this forum 😊 where to find more nuanced and source-orientated discussions, that leave behind the simplistic terms for the laymen.