

# A Fable on Unattainable Expectations

Post by “Pacatus” of October 16, 2024 at 5:12 PM

I came upon this fable recently during some cursory browsing, and thought it might also be helpful for others ...

## A Fable

Once upon a time, a woman moved to a cave in the mountains to study with a guru. She wanted, she said, to learn everything there was to know. The guru supplied her with stacks of books and left her alone so she could study.

Every morning, the guru returned to the cave to monitor the woman's progress. In his hand, he carried a heavy wooden cane. Each morning, he asked her the same question: “Have you learned everything there is to know yet?” Each morning, her answer was the same. “No.” she said, “I haven't.” The guru would then strike her over the head with his cane.

This scenario repeated itself for months. One day the guru entered the cave, asked the same question, heard the same answer, and raised his cane to hit her in the same way, but the woman grabbed the cane from the guru, stopping his assault in midair.

Relieved to end the daily batterings but fearing reprisal, the woman looked up at the guru. To her surprise, the guru smiled. “Congratulations,” he said, “you have graduated. You know now everything you *need* to know.”

“How's that”? the woman asked.

“You have learned that you will never learn everything there is to know,” he replied. “And you have learned *how to stop the pain.*”

- As told by Melody Beattie in *Codependent No More*

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Of course, no one here would condone or affirm such harsh “therapy” in reality (nor would Beattie). But, recognizing it as a fable, one might see where circumstances (and people) in one's life have been that harsh: demanding what you could not deliver - and punishing you for your failures to measure up, or fit into the “proper” box. (And perhaps, sometimes we ourselves collaborated in that, because of what we were taught and didn't know better.)

Till you see through the games, and learn how to stop the pain.

Seems to me that is what, at bottom, Epicurus was trying – with his gentler therapy – to impart. Then we can begin to live a simpler eudaimonic life in serenity and pleasure.

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### **Post by “SillyApe” of October 18, 2024 at 9:50 AM**

This is the kind of thinking that first made me love Epicurean Philosophy. In the past, I was full of these vain desires and expectations, which brought me so much pain. One day, I read about Epicurus encouraging his followers to analyze their desires and do the calculation to see if they are worth it or not. Once I realized the futility of my pursuits and let these desires and expectations go, I felt so much light, as if I were a locked bird, now free to fly to the skies. Later on, I discovered the concept of "cognitive load", which explained through Psychiatry what Epicurus taught many centuries ago through Philosophy.

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### **Post by “Patrikios” of October 20, 2024 at 4:01 PM**

#### [Quote from SillyApe](#)

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SI,

Thanks for your description of the feelings (sensations) you experienced when applying some of Epicurus's writings to analyze desires. When I think of Epicurus concept of living prudently, I try to do the right analysis of pleasure vs. pain to determine how much effort, resources, pain to expend to achieve what expected benefits that make life more pleasant. I have found this Epicurean analysis is helped when we better understand how to use our natural biology to ‘program’ our minds to apply the principles more naturally.

Recently I have been reading papers by **Christos Yapijakis**. He adds a medical perspective that shows how what Epicurus advocated is supported by our modern understanding of human biology & psychology. Through the Epicurean practice, the right thinking that leads to tranquility also helps the body operate in harmony as our bodies are intended to operate. This leads to the desired state of whole body & mind & spirit in balance - a state of **homeostasis**. This natural state of our body at 'ease' helps reduce dis-ease, which reduces body pains.

Here is an example of how Yapijakis describes the biological process (with my **bolded** emphasis).

"This tripartite neurophysiological functioning of the brain is greatly reminiscent of Epicurus' teachings. The Athenian philosopher emphasized the fact that the basic needs of human nature lay on our instincts ("reptilian brain"), which correspond to **natural and necessary desires** and should be satisfied or else our bodies will suffer: «Σαρκὸς φωνὴ τὸ μὴ πεινῆν, τὸ μὴ διψῆν, τὸ μὴ ῥίγοῦν» ("The cry of the flesh: not to be hungry, not to be thirsty, not to be cold")<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, Epicurus recognized the critical importance of the positive emotion of pleasure and it seems that he almost described the selective role of the amygdala when he said: «Τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος λέγομεν εἶναι τοῦ μακαρίως ζῆν. Ταύτην γὰρ ἀγαθὸν πρῶτον καὶ συγγενικὸν ἔγνωμεν καὶ ἀπὸ ταύτης καταρχόμεθα πάσης αἰρέσεως καὶ φυγῆς» ("We say that **pleasure is the starting point and goal of living blessedly**. For we recognized this as our first innate good, and **this is our starting point for every choice and avoidance**")<sup>13</sup>. He determined the purpose of human life on emotional grounds ("mammalian brain") aiming at the **blissful state of physical** ἀπονία (lack of pain) and mental ἀταραξία (calmness, lack of agitation). Above all, Epicurus considered **prudence** ("primate brain") as the supreme regulator of conscious selection of what brings happiness, with wise satisfaction of physical needs and preservation of emotional balance by tasting those pleasures that do not result in greater pain instead of pleasure<sup>14</sup>. With great foresight, the philosopher realized that prudence should govern, because this is the ultimate nature of humans as primates, without forgetting feelings which also play a major role in their life, since humans are mammals, too."

### ***Epicurean Biological Psychology***

**Christos Yapijakis**

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## Post by “Kalosyni” of October 21, 2024 at 9:24 AM

Thanks [Patrikos](#) for the above info in previous post.

Some further thoughts...given that there is a clear aspect of the therapeutic benefits from Epicureanism, it is also important to remember that different people need different things, and this can have a basis in temperaments (from a combination of nurture and genetics). So I believe that it is very important to emphasize the movement to **pleasure**, rather than the movement to tranquility (as some people have no need to become more tranquil)...and because an emphasis on pleasure will include all temperament types:

Here are temperament differences that have been seen in psychology research (source link follows below):

### Quote

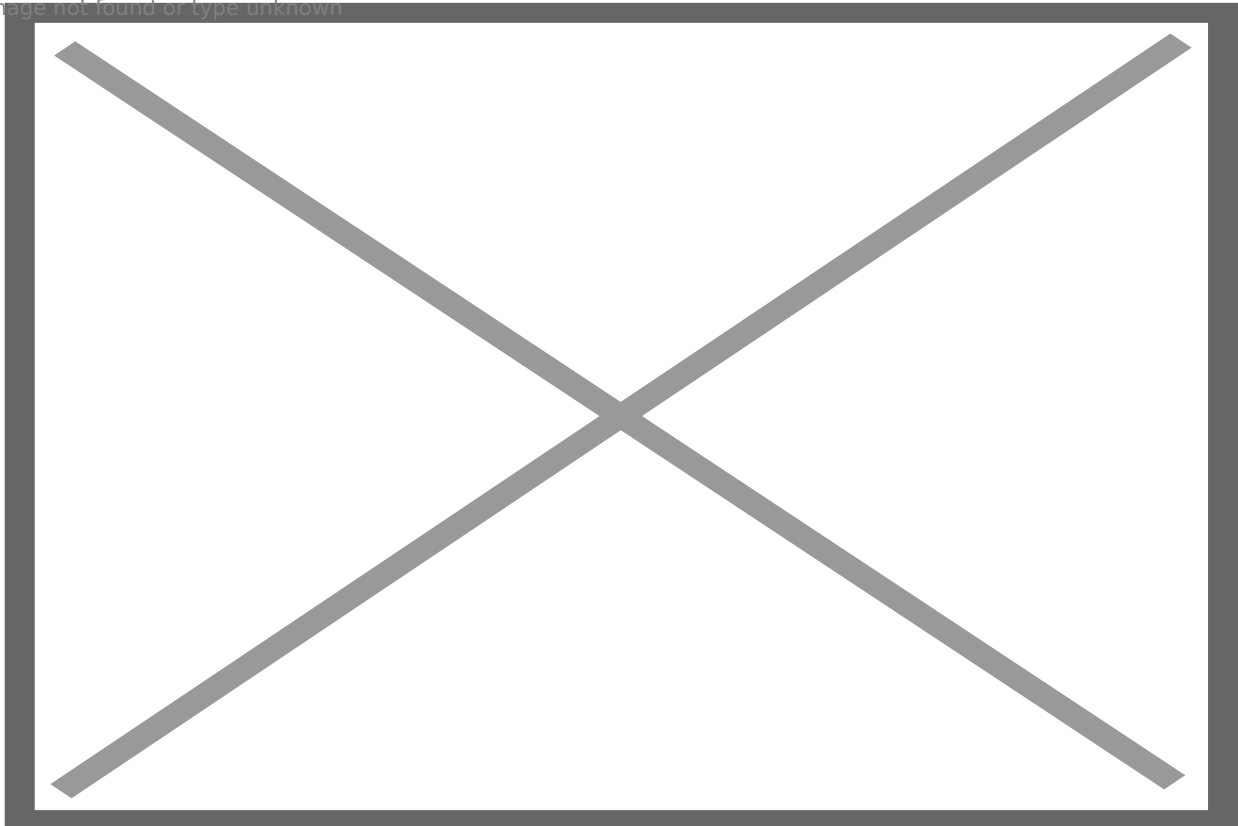
1. **Activity level:** This temperament refers to how active a person is. For instance, some individuals feel the need to move constantly. These high-activity individuals tend to move from one physical activity to another. As children, they may have trouble sitting still in class and fidget with their pencils. In contrast, low activity individuals tend to enjoy calmer activities.
2. **Biological rhythms:** This temperament is associated with the regularity of fulfilling biological needs, such as eating and sleeping. People with regular rhythms tend to stick to routines and have predictable daily patterns. On the other hand, people with irregular rhythms might forget to eat a meal, feel sleepy sometime during the day or not feel sleepy past their bedtime.
3. **Sensitivity:** Sensitivity refers to the intensity of the perception of certain stimuli. For instance, highly sensitive people may be bothered by many sounds, textures, and bright lights that others don't even notice.
4. **Intensity of reaction:** This temperament is associated with how strongly a person reacts to something. High-intensity individuals tend to have powerful reactions to even the slightest situations and create drama. In contrast, low-intensity individuals respond to even a major event as if it isn't a big deal.
5. **Adaptability:** [Adaptability](#) indicates whether someone can easily adjust to changes in their environment. Highly adaptable individuals can handle unexpected changes with ease. However, slow to adapt individuals may need additional time to feel comfortable with the same change.
6. **Approach/withdrawal:** Similar to adaptability, this temperament refers to how people tend to approach new situations or changes. People with an approaching style can easily meet new people or try new things. Yet, withdrawing individuals

may hang back, observe, and assess the new situation or people before joining in or taking action.

7. **Persistence:** This trait focuses on how long someone is willing to try and stick to a task. Persistent individuals tend to do whatever they can to reach the finish line. People with low persistence can be **overwhelmed** by the slightest challenge and give up easily.
8. **Distractibility:** This trait refers to whether a person tends to be distracted easily. Highly distractible people have difficulties paying attention to a task for long periods. They may also find it challenging to focus on a task when there are distractions in the environment. On the other hand, people with low distractibility can be absorbed in what they are doing, even in the loudest places.
9. **Mood:** Mood indicates the direction of our feelings. People with positive moods tend to see things from a brighter perspective and appear generally cheerful. In contrast, people with negative moods may have a gloomier **attitude**.

And the source site has a very good article (including a history about temperaments which first began with Hippocrates).

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### [Temperaments: Definition, Examples, & Types](#)

What are temperaments? Discover the meaning and origins of this concept, and explore its implications for child development and our behaviors.

www.berkeleywellbeing.com

And also something that [Onenski](#) said in yesterday's Zoom (paraphrased as I remember it) that we need pleasure when in pain (which includes removal of pain) and we also still need pleasure when no longer in pain. It is just part of human nature.

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### **Post by “Pacatus” of November 21, 2024 at 1:57 PM**

Here is a link to a PDF of the Christos Yapijakis article quoted by [Patrikios](#) above:  
[https://www.epicuros.gr/arthra/23\\_filo.pdf](https://www.epicuros.gr/arthra/23_filo.pdf)

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of November 22, 2024 at 9:15 AM**

Regarding the article [Pacatus](#) posted above, and the "three brains" (reptilian, mammalian, and primate) -- the "three brains" is no longer the considered the best model for the human brain.

The new model is called the "adaptive brain" and you can read about it [here](#).

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### **Post by “Don” of November 22, 2024 at 11:32 AM**

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

the "three brains" (reptilian, mammalian, and primate) -- the "three brains" is no longer the considered the best mode

Yes! Thanks for emphasizing that. Dr. Lisa Felman Barrett has done her best to dispel the myth of the triune brain, too.