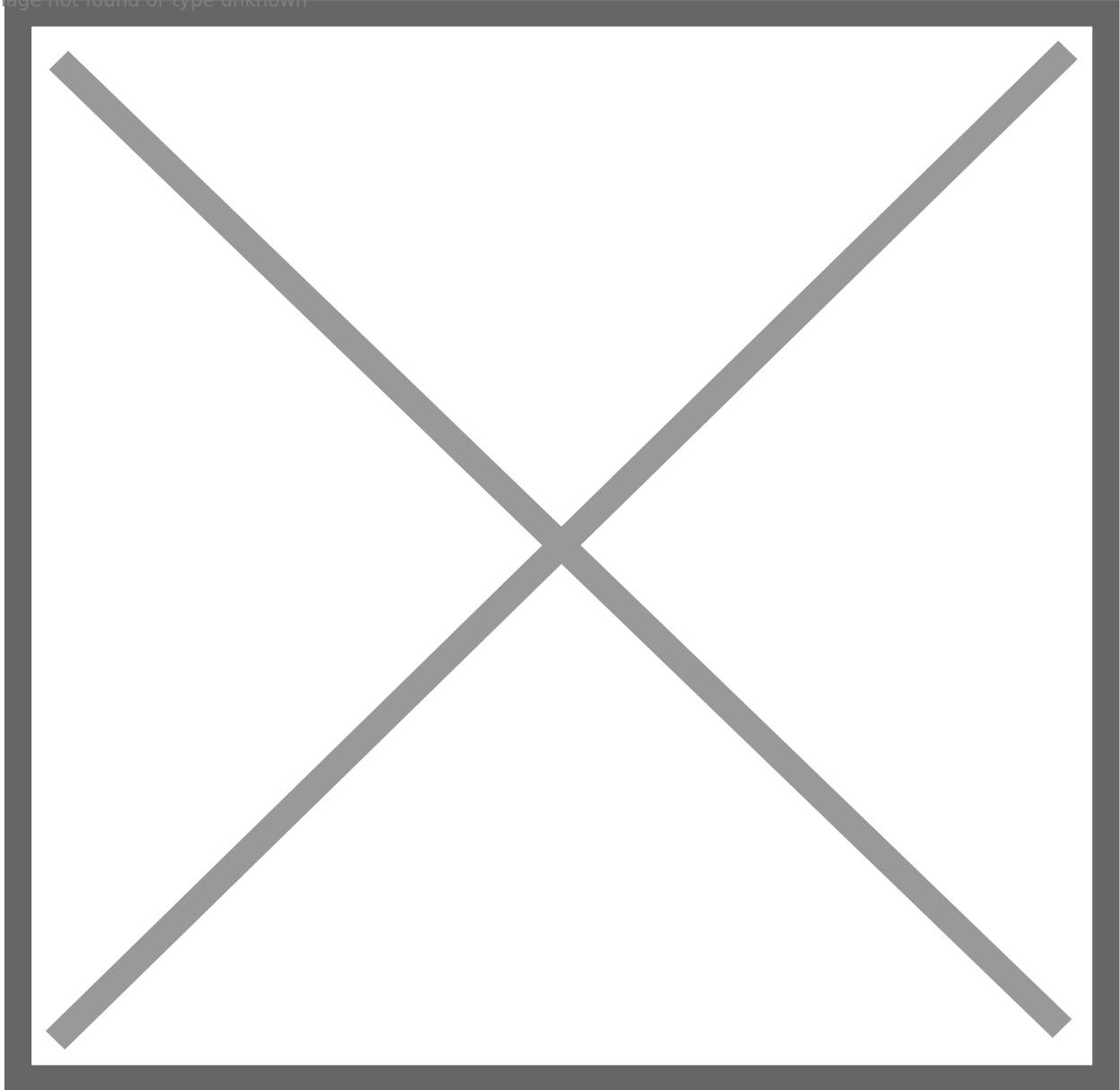


New Religious Landscape Study from Pew Research

Post by "Don" of February 26, 2025 at 10:40 PM

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[Decline of Christianity in the U.S. Has Slowed, May Have Leveled Off](#)

After years of decline, the U.S. Christian share now shows signs of leveling off. The new Religious Landscape Study explores trends in identity, beliefs and...

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We got some work to do 🙄

- 86% believe people have a soul or spirit in addition to their physical body.
- 83% believe in God or a universal spirit.
- 79% believe there is something spiritual beyond the natural world, even if we can't see it.
- 70% believe in an afterlife (heaven, hell or both).

Interesting study from Pew Research.

Post by “Kalosyni” of February 27, 2025 at 6:25 AM

Very interesting...and the section on: **Religion and views of right and wrong**

Quote

A majority of U.S. adults (55%) say that whether something is right or wrong often depends on the situation. Fewer than half say there are clear and absolute standards by which to decide whether something is right or wrong, according to the 2023-24 Religious Landscape Study (RLS).

In response to a separate question, the survey finds that 68% of Americans say it is possible to be moral and have good values without believing in God. Just 30% say it is necessary to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values.

Half of highly religious Americans say that belief in God is necessary to be moral and have good values, and 61% say there are clear and absolute standards for right and wrong.⁷⁸

The survey also asked Americans about various factors they may consider when making moral decisions.

Slightly more than half of Americans (53%) say religious teachings and beliefs are *extremely* important or *very* important when making decisions between right and wrong. But the percentage of U.S. adults who say this is considerably lower than the shares who view practical experience and common sense (93%), logic and reason (92%) and scientific information (75%) as extremely or very important for moral decision-making.

The vast majority of U.S. adults at all levels of religiousness say that “practical experience and common sense” and “logic and reason” are extremely or very important for deciding between right and wrong.

Highly religious Americans are less likely than those with low levels of religious engagement to consider scientific information to be an important factor in moral decisions. Nevertheless, a clear majority of the highly religious (67%) view scientific information as important.

Not surprisingly, Americans who are highly religious are much more likely than those with low religious engagement to view religious principles as important for deciding between right and wrong. Overall, 94% of highly religious Americans say religious teachings and beliefs are extremely or very important to how they think about matters of right and wrong.⁷⁹

Display More

[Source link](#)

Post by “Don” of February 27, 2025 at 6:38 AM

Thanks for pointing those out, [Kalosyni](#) !

That's a little more encouraging. I hadn't dug that far into the report.

Post by “Cassius” of February 27, 2025 at 8:34 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

We got some work to do

Very much true.

If supernatural religion, and life after death with reward and punishment are true, then the Epicurean worldview makes no sense.

If the Epicurean worldview is true, then supernatural religion and life after death with reward and punishment make no sense.

Pointing this out doesn't mean that we have to go on a crusade and hit people over the head with a crowbar with these issues on first meeting. Probably all of us here, and even Epicurus

and the founders of the school themselves, started out being taught and believing to at least some extent a standard religious worldview. It would be very hypocritical to lock out people "who are well-disposed" from coming to the same adjustments in thinking that we went through ourselves. Some will never be disposed to accept these views, but many can and will.

As Bryan cited in our zoom last night, Lucretius said in Book Three (this is the 1743 / Daniel Brown / Dunster? translation):

[Quote from Lucretius Book 3](#)

[307] The mind of man is formed of the same principles; though the discipline of philosophy may polish and correct some, yet it leaves behind the marks of the original nature of the mind, nor are we to think that the seeds of vice can be wholly rooted out. One man, we see, runs more rashly into passion, another is more disposed to fear, and a third is apt to be more merciful than just; It is impossible but the various tempers of mankind, and actions that follow them, must differ in many other instances, the reasons of which are at present out of my power to explain; nor can I find words to express that variety of figures by which the seeds are distinguished, and from which this variety of disposition is produced. This, however, may justly be asserted on this occasion: that the traces of original nature which cannot be corrected by the rules of reason are so very small that nothing hinders us from leading a life worthy of the Gods.

If we're concerned about living the best life that we can, and we should be, then we have to plan out how to work toward as complete an implementation of core Epicurean positions as possible. And in most cases, we'll want to do that without getting driven out of our towns (Epicurus) or stoned (the Epicurean in Alexander the Oracle-Monger). 😊

Post by "Eikadistes" of February 27, 2025 at 9:19 AM

I wonder how many *astrology-and-tarot* "Nones" are going back to their childhood religion.

Post by "Novem" of February 27, 2025 at 11:53 AM

Has anyone identified as Epicurean in official surveys when asked by a pollster? Even the Census?

Post by “Cassius” of February 27, 2025 at 12:15 PM

Ha. I bet not yet ☐☐

Post by “Kalosyni” of February 27, 2025 at 12:37 PM

[Quote from Novem](#)

Has anyone identified as Epicurean in official surveys when asked by a pollster? Even the Census?

There was probably a time when few atheists would admit it in a survey.

There would need to be a significant cultural movement before Epicureanism would ever come up.

I also wonder how they conduct the Pew Research (will need to look into it) because some states in US are very different than others.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

If supernatural religion, and life after death with reward and punishment are true, then the Epicurean worldview makes no sense.

If the Epicurean worldview is true, then supernatural religion and life after death with reward and punishment make no sense.

Pointing this out doesn't mean that we have to go on a crusade and hit people over the head with a crowbar with these issues on first meeting.

In my opinion, due to the awareness and tolerance toward atheism (in most big cities), it seems that it would be important to present Principal Doctrine 1 ... "non-involvement of God with humankind" before anyone comes to a meeting.

Post by “Eikadistes” of February 27, 2025 at 7:53 PM

[Quote from Novem](#)

Has anyone identified as Epicurean in official surveys when asked by a pollster? Even the Census?

[The census doesn't like it.](#) 😞

Post by “Kalosyni” of February 27, 2025 at 8:42 PM

Here is the Pew methodology...

Short excerpt:

Quote

A total of 205,100 sampled addresses were mailed survey invitations. Respondents were given a choice to complete the survey online, by mail, or by calling a toll-free number and completing the survey over the phone with an interviewer. Of the 36,908 U.S. adults who completed the survey, 25,250 did so online, 10,733 did so by mail, and 925 did so by phone.

[Source](#)

Post by “Titus” of February 28, 2025 at 7:22 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

If supernatural religion, and life after death with reward and punishment are true, then the Epicurean worldview makes no sense.

If the Epicurean worldview is true, then supernatural religion and life after death with reward and punishment make no sense.

I would argue that both statements can be true. Both worldviews can lead to a life filled up with pleasure and enjoyment.

The difference is Epicureanism is reaching out for a straightforward understanding of the world. It offers in simple terms everything we can ever hope to learn about the mechanisms of the universe and their implications for how to live a good life.

(Supernatural) Religion is a mechanism of life that very often benefits the people pursuing it. In a functional way of understanding it can make sense, as it helps people to connect with each other, giving an ethical framework and trust in the world.

We all know there are side effects, but there is a reason why people put their trust into systems of supernatural religion.

Post by “Cassius” of February 28, 2025 at 9:53 AM

[Quote from Titus](#)

(Supernatural) Religion is a mechanism of life that very often benefits the people pursuing it. In a functional way of understanding it can make sense, as it helps people to connect with each other, giving an ethical framework and trust in the world.

Yes, but the same could be said for cannibalism or any other system of the type that Epicurus references in [PD10](#). No matter how ridiculous the system, since there is in fact no "fate" or "supernatural gods." then it is "possible" for even the most upside down theories to provide pleasure at least for short periods of time. It's probably greatly exciting and even pleasurable for the first couple of seconds to fly through the air after jumping off a skyscraper. And there are examples of terrible people who succeed in remaining on the top of the heap for very long periods of time.

So yes even supernatural religion "can" sometimes lead to success, and in fact Epicurus says it would be better to believe in such things rather than give in to hard determinism.

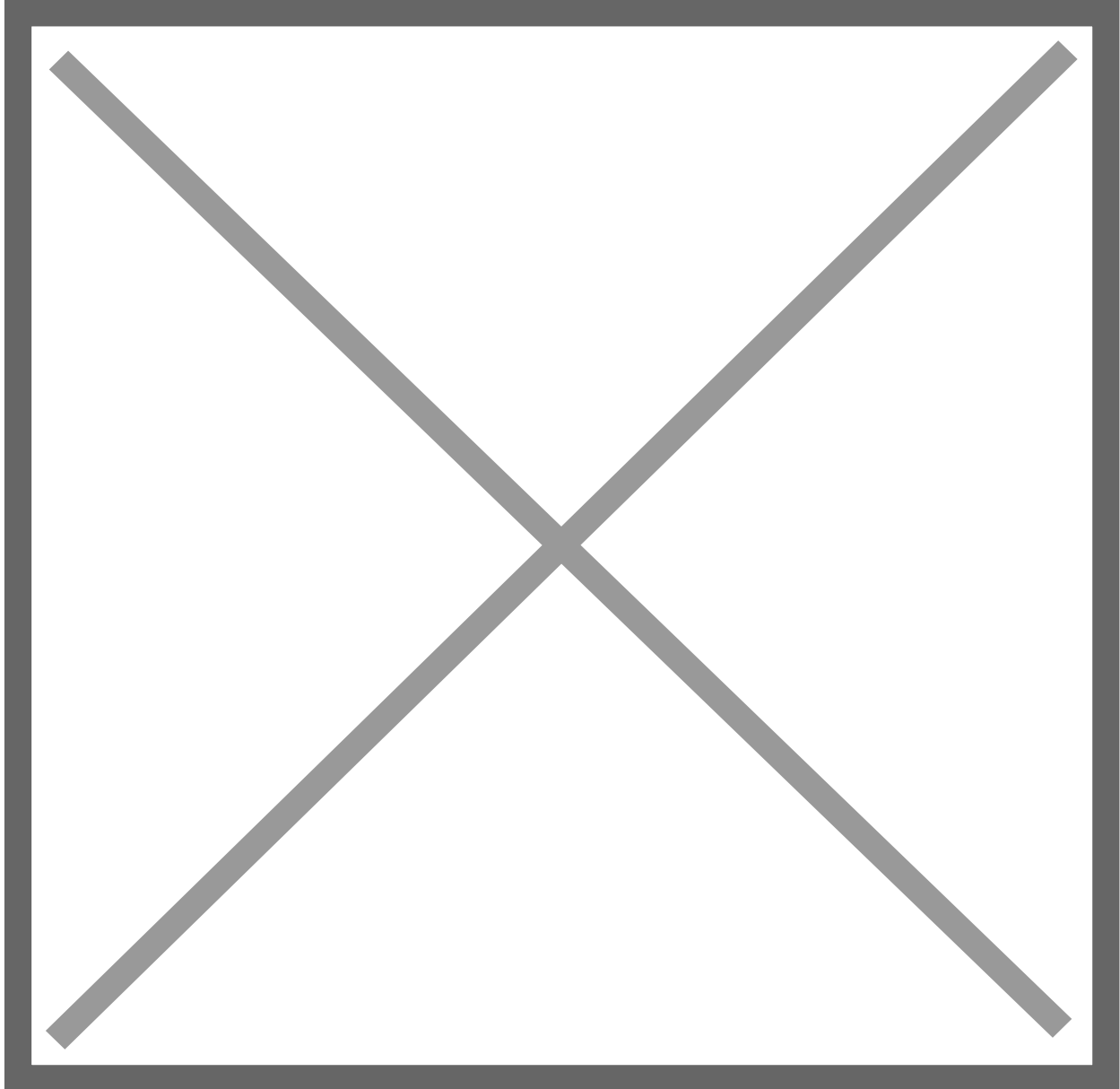
But I don't think that observations makes "both statements true" in terms of them "making sense." It does not "make sense" to structure one's life based on fantasies and made-up notions about supernatural forces unless you are in an extremely unusual situation -- extreme to the point of practical nonexistence.

Also I think it's useful to point out that you're right that supernatural religion does give people a way to "connect" with each other and provides an ethical framework. That's why "connecting" -- even "friendship" itself -- has to be seen for what it is -- a TOOL, and "instrument," which is sometimes very productive, and sometimes the worst thing you can do. Unless you have solid plans to be the "top cannibal" yourself, I wouldn't want to be a "connected" with a group of

cannibals.

Post by “Kalosyni” of February 28, 2025 at 10:01 AM

Here is another interesting section from the Pew Research:



[23. Religion and views of science](#)

Americans are split over whether religion and science are compatible or in conflict. But more see science as beneficial than as harmful for society. Religious...

www.pewresearch.org

[Quote from Titus](#)

(Supernatural) Religion is a mechanism of life that very often benefits the people pursuing it. In a functional way of understanding it can make sense, as it helps people to connect with each other, giving an ethical framework and trust in the world.

Yes it has the ability to create a common goal for uniting a community of people.

Unfortunately it has been used for nefarious purposes over and over again, for those who are in control of the masses and want to maintain power over them.

Also, the "set aside reason" and instead "just have faith and believe" reinforces a lack of rational thinking skills that are needed to have a well-running government and political system ---> let's just go by "what God wants" (which is just an intuitive feeling rather than actually looking at long term results or consequences) and which is a great way for those at the top to do what ever they want.

Post by "Kalosyni" of February 28, 2025 at 11:12 AM

[Quote from Titus](#)

trust in the world.

Unfortunately for many religious people they are united by their distrust in the world, and their hope for something other than the world ---> seeking to transcend the world rather than inhabit the world, and seeking for a heavenly afterlife.

And prayer is their "Harry Potter magic wand" (which may only work 50 percent of the time, depending on what they pray for). Here is an interesting [article on prayer by Psychology Today](#).

Post by "Titus" of February 28, 2025 at 12:25 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Unfortunately for many religious people they are united by their distrust in the world, and their hope for something other than the world ---> seeking to transcend the world rather than inhabit the world, and seeking for a heavenly afterlife.

Ironically, from an outsider's perspective it almost always seems to materialize in socialising, setting up frameworks etc. I can hardly recognize anything otherworldly. It's always about this world.

Yes, every kind of religious system is imperfect, but:

[Quote from Cassius](#)

So yes even supernatural religion "can" sometimes lead to success, and in fact Epicurus says it would be better to believe in such things rather than give in to hard determinism.

This is the point. People aren't yet ready for the philosopher's stone. One ideology seems to exchange for another and even the atheist's pursue new agendas.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

But I don't think that observations makes "both statements true" in terms of them "making sense." It does not "make sense" to structure one's life based on fantasies and made-up notions about supernatural forces unless you are in an extremely unusual situation -- extreme to the point of practical nonexistence.

I speak from a perspective of Epicurean "universalism". 😊

I would argue that even if they say they pursue the afterlife and are not seeking pleasure they are lying or not recognising their reality. It's as obvious as water is wet and the sunlight at noon is bright to me.

I agree with you, that the stories may misguide them but on the other hand the force of our innate pleasure-pain-mechanism is immensely powerful. No-one can escape this reality.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

If supernatural religion, and life after death with reward and punishment are true, then the Epicurean worldview makes no sense.

Even in this case people are seeking pleasure (reward). Additionally, as long as I am in this world, I am still rewarded with pleasant impressions.

I know, from a logical point of view both arguments exclude each other. But I think, the Epicurean perspective overturns this logic epistemologically.

Post by “Kalosyni” of February 28, 2025 at 2:13 PM

[Quote from Titus](#)

I would argue that even if they say they pursue the afterlife and are not seeking pleasure they are lying or not recognising their reality. It's as obvious as water is wet and the sunlight at noon is bright to me.

I agree with you, that the stories may misguide them but on the other hand the force of our innate pleasure-pain-mechanism is immensely powerful. No-one can escape this reality.

I must be still affected by my upbringing as a child, which was strict Christian fundamentalist, and they would end the church service by asking if anyone wanted to become "saved" and which was understood as "saved from hell"...so it was an appeal to the desire to remove the pain of uncertainty after death.

As I think about it, the most pleasure oriented religion now would be Neo-paganism (vastly different than Christianity).

We can see some form of ancient paganism in Lucretius, when he appeals to Venus at the start of his poem:

"Mother of Rome, delight of Gods and men,
Dear Venus that beneath the gliding stars
Makest to teem the many-voyaged main
And fruitful lands- for all of living things
Through thee alone are evermore conceived,
Through thee are risen to visit the great sun-
Before thee, Goddess, and thy coming on,
Flee stormy wind and massy cloud away,
For thee the daedal Earth bears scented flowers,
For thee waters of the unvexed deep
Smile, and the hollows of the serene sky

Glow with diffused radiance for thee!"

[Source](#)

Post by "Cassius" of February 28, 2025 at 2:41 PM

[Quote from Titus](#)

Even in this case people are seeking pleasure (reward). Additionally, as long as I am in this world, I am still rewarded with pleasant impressions.

I know, from a logical point of view both arguments exclude each other. But I think, the Epicurean perspective overturns this logic epistemologically.

I think some of this discussion revolves around the issue of "psychological hedonism" and I will be the first to admit that I have never found "psychological hedonism" to be a very helpful way to analyze things.

Saying that "You're doing what you're doing - *whatever you're doing* - because you think it will bring you pleasure" does not seem to me to be a very helpful way of looking at much of anything. I realize that many people that this helps them defend "hedonism," and if so than I suppose whatever floats one's boat is good.

But to me, it's an argument that smacks of circularity and even disrespect for the other person who is earnestly suggesting that whatever they are pursuing is not pleasure at all.

I'm all for a very wide perspective on what the word "pleasure" includes, but once you've come to the place in a discussion where you disagree with someone on their definition, it doesn't seem to me that anything helpful is achieved by saying "you really agree with and you're just not willing to admit it."

Most of the time in an Epicurean vs Non-Epicurean discussion, the issue comes down to the fact that Epicureans say that Nature through the faculty of pleasure and pain is the proper standard to which to look on how to live, and the non-Epicureans are saying "Supernaturalism or logic of virtue is the proper standard too look to on how to live." And the debate between those two standards is important to address directly.

Post by “Titus” of February 28, 2025 at 4:11 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

I must be still affected by my upbringing as a child, which was strict Christian fundamentalist, and they would end the church service by asking if anyone wanted to become "saved" and which was understood as "saved from hell"...so it was an appeal to the desire to remove the pain of uncertainty after death.

I am sorry for underestimating the influence that religious views seem to have - perhaps I've been too long outside of the discourse.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Saying that "You're doing what you're doing - whatever you're doing - because you think it will bring you pleasure" does not seem to me to be a very helpful way of looking at much of anything. I realize that many people that this helps them defend "hedonism," and if so then I suppose whatever floats one's boat is good.

But to me, it's an argument that smacks of circularity and even disrespect for the other person who is earnestly suggesting that whatever they are pursuing is not pleasure at all.

You are right that it would be disrespectful and it also cancels the opportunity to grasp the meaning of what the partner in a discussion is talking about. But from my personal point of view I would argue this is - more or less - the way we work as humans.

I can put your mind at ease - I would never argue about religion this way to a stranger 😊

Post by “Patrikios” of February 28, 2025 at 4:14 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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In my everyday conversations with family and friends who are practicing Christians, another key topic to consider is the 'telos' of our respective lives. When I explain that a life of wellbeing (eudaemonia) is what the Epicurean philosophy leads to, using prudent reasoning of the pleasure-pain choices (vs public perception of unchecked hedonism); that seems to open a less confrontational dialogue. Then we can get into proper positioning of PD-5 about "living wisely, honorably, and justly" in order to live pleasantly. There can often be more agreement around that approach, before getting into the more controversial details around afterlife vs death's finality.

Thanks for this enlightening discussion that helps us in explaining our philosophy and how we practice this in our daily lives!☺☺

Post by "Cassius" of February 28, 2025 at 4:34 PM

[Quote from Patrikios](#)

Then we can get into proper positioning of PD-5 about "living wisely, honorably, and justly" in order to live pleasantly. There can often be more agreement around that approach, before getting into the more controversial details around afterlife vs death's finality.

There's definitely a time and place for everything. As Titus said (which is reflected in the Lucian story of the Epicurean who almost got attacked by the local religious crowd) you have to be very careful what you say to very religious people, who frequently are very intolerant.

To me the big picture is that you have to look at your circumstances and do what makes the most sense. But in the end, after you look at your circumstances, you then act to change them if you can. As Epicurus says in the last of the PD's if you find yourself surrounded by people who have very different world-views from yours, you probably need to rethink how and where you are spending your time.

Of course we can't change everything about our circumstances in an instance, or overnight. But in the end the overriding consideration to me is that life is short, so we can't indefinitely delay the hard decisions that lead to the happiest living. To me it's a very big deal not to think that I was lazy or procrastinating or just didn't have enough courage to take the steps that would lead to the best life possible to me. In the past lots of people crossed oceans and deserts and mountains and gave up their lives looking for a "better life," and I'd like to think that I haven't become so "soft" that I'm not willing to make hard choices myself.

Post by “Don” of March 1, 2025 at 11:09 PM

[Quote from Titus](#)

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I would argue that even if they say they pursue the afterlife and are not seeking pleasure they are lying or not recognising their reality. It's as obvious as water is wet and the sunlight at noon is bright to me.

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But to me, it's an argument that smacks of circularity and even disrespect for the other person who is earnestly suggesting that whatever they are pursuing is not pleasure at all.

I'm all for a very wide perspective on what the word "pleasure" includes, but once you've come to the place in a discussion where you disagree with someone on their definition, it doesn't seem to me that anything helpful is achieved by saying "you really agree with and you're just not willing to admit it."

I'm going to go on record to say that I lean heavily toward what [Titus](#) wrote. From my perspective, Epicurus was not positing a philosophical position in that "pleasure is the telos." He was identifying a universal trait of human beings - in fact, a trait of all living beings.

I sincerely don't care if Epicureanism is defined as "psychological hedonism" or Axiological hedonism or Ethical hedonism or whatever-ical hedonism or hedonism at all. Epicurus had an insight into the motivation of all living beings that they move toward pleasure and move away

from pain, and he used this starting point to shed light on how living beings interact with their world and ultimately what is the goal of life of living beings, with humans being able to take that information and to move toward eudaimonia.

The meaning of the telos or the "supreme good" is that thing which is the telos or the "supreme good" is that for which ALL actions are ultimately motivated by. One may say virtue is their ultimate motivating factor, but why? Keep asking why? And it is going to be that it gives them a sense of satisfaction that they're doing what's right. And what is a sense of satisfaction? It is pleasure. One can dress up their motivation and their rationalizations and their justifications. They move toward the supreme good which is pleasure.

People lie all the time to themselves to get through the day and through their life. People can convince themselves of almost anything!

I am not saying we MUST convince everyone we come in contact with that "Pleasure is the supreme good and why you do what you." We pick our battles. But the more I look at the world and how people act, I can see them trying to comfort themselves, to mask their insecurities, to belittle others to aggrandize their own self-image. They are in pain and are trying to move toward pleasure. The feelings are only two after all. BUT Epicurus calls us to make prudent choices, to live nobly, well, and prudently, to try to fill our lives with more pleasure than pain. That's what I believe ALL living beings are doing. And Epicurus was brilliant in his attempt to explain this. Not everyone is going to listen. Not everyone is going to be convinced. Not everyone is going to accept that universal truth. But that is exactly what I believe is going on in the psyche of every living being.

Whether we should try to convince them of that or whether they'll accept it... that is a completely different discussion. But truth is truth, and I think Epicurus squarely hit the proverbial nail on the head.

Post by "Cassius" of March 2, 2025 at 3:32 AM

At this point it's probably good to remember how this thread started (emphasis added):

We got some work to do 😞

- 86% believe people have a soul or spirit in addition to their physical body.
- 83% believe in God or a universal spirit.
- 79% believe there is something spiritual beyond the natural world, even if we can't see it.
- 70% believe in an afterlife (heaven, hell or both).

Interesting study from Pew Research.

Has the idea that everyone pursues pleasure whether they admit it or not resulted in progress toward possible solutions to the problems listed in the bullet points?

If so, how?

Post by “Kalosyni” of March 2, 2025 at 8:05 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Has the idea that everyone pursues pleasure whether they admit it or not resulted in progress toward possible solutions to the problems listed in the bullet points?

The problem with religion is when people insist or force others into it (such as back in history when rulers insisted on forcing an official religion that everyone had to adhere to). So the idea that there is only one "right" way, the idea that God dictates "right and wrong", and the idea that everything in the world exists to please God, and the idea that there are the religious leaders (or priests) who alone know what God wants and how to please God -- these ideas (and behaviors that come out of them) are the problem.

[Quote from Don](#)

One may say virtue is their ultimate motivating factor, but why? Keep asking why? And it is going to be that it gives them a sense of satisfaction that they're doing what's right. And what is a sense of satisfaction? It is pleasure. One can dress up their motivation and their rationalizations and their justifications. They move toward the

supreme good which is pleasure.

People lie all the time to themselves to get through the day and through their life. People can convince themselves of almost anything!

I am not saying we MUST convince everyone we come in contact with that "Pleasure is the supreme good and why you do what you." We pick our battles. But the more I look at the world and how people act, I can see them trying to comfort themselves, to mask their insecurities, to belittle others to aggrandize their own self-image. They are in pain and are trying to move toward pleasure.

The problem here is that people need to look at the big picture and the longterm consequences of their actions. Both Epicureans (those who seek pleasant living) **and** those that put virtue (or religion) as the deciding factor --- both sides can develop mistaken ideas and then take actions based on those mistaken ideas which result in bad consequences.

There are two areas of influence that our choices affect:

- 1) Our own sphere - your own body, your own household, and anything that only affects yourself
- 2) Our surrounding sphere affecting other people - family and friends, neighbors, community members, and the country in which we live.

The religious people may end up believing that "the end justifies the means" and so they do things such as hurt people physically, or take away or destroy resources or property, or change laws to remove freedoms, the safety, or the security of others --- all in the name of "religion" and because "God has laws" (or that there are "correct" or "virtuous" ways that must be adhered to).

But after a time, when people are hurt or trampled on, eventually they will rise up, are able to resist --- maybe it takes several generations but it is innate in humans to seek justice and to crave freedom and well-being.

This is why we need to understand that justice is a compact that must be agreed upon not to harm or be harmed. Because humanity is caught in an endless loop --- and until we understand this, then it will repeat forever. Endless war, endless suffering of oppression.

Unfortunately religion (and it's leaders) often interfere with the compacts that are made in order to live in peace with others.

Post by “Don” of March 2, 2025 at 8:20 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Has the idea that everyone pursues pleasure whether they admit it or not resulted in progress toward possible solutions to the problems listed in the bullet points?

If so, how?

A valid question; however, my first reaction is going to respond to this a little sideways.

As I stated and from my perspective, "Pleasure is the telos" a fact of the natural world - [like gravity or evolution](#) - that Epicurus discovered and articulated through his philosophy. It's the way living beings work and how they interact with the world and each other.

Christians believe they've discovered the way the world works and how humans need to act to have salvation and eternal life.

Muslims believe they've discovered the way the world works and how humans need to act to serve Allah and to please him.

Buddhists believe they've discovered the way the world works and how humans need to act to be released from this world of dukkha, of suffering and dissatisfaction.

Stoics believe they've discovered the way the world works and how humans need to act to align their lives to Nature and to live virtuously.

And so on.

Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Stoics and the rest don't water down their underlying principles. They believe what they believe. If one sees value in their worldviews, that person accepts the "tenets of the faith" (so to speak) and is accepted into the community.

I don't see any difference with Epicurean philosophy.

"Here are the fundamental core principles of the philosophy. Do they resonate with you? Do they make sense to you? They do? Welcome! All are invited to explore the way of life the school offers."

I'm not saying we should be combative or be argumentative or should beat people over the head or even start conversations with "You're wrong!" or "You're lying to yourself!" That is certainly not the way to make friends and influence people, as the saying goes.

But I also don't advocate a watered-down, kumbaya, join hands, we're all one approach either. Epicurean philosophy has to stand for something, and the current round of podcast episodes has been doing a good job of staking out some turf on the fundamentals. "Pleasure is the telos" is a fundamental, and I would say a fundamental of human existence and not just one option

among many equally-valid options.

Epicurus' Garden had a welcome sign posted, but once you were inside the walls, everyone got taught that "Pleasure is the goal."

"Go to his Garden and read the motto carved there: '**Stranger, here you will do well to tarry; here our highest good is pleasure.**'"

So, to respond directly to:

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Has the idea that everyone pursues pleasure whether they admit it or not resulted in progress toward possible solutions to the problems listed in the bullet points?

If so, how?

Not everyone is going to be attracted to Epicurean philosophy, and, in fact, many may be hostile to the philosophy. The only solution, from what I can see, is to be visible in the marketplace of ideas, to make the philosophy known, to welcome people who find themselves Epicurious.

I have a friend with whom I've raised my Epicurean leanings. He has shared some therapy methods like [ACT](#) and the [positive psychology concept of "savoring"](#) that he said remind him of what I've brought up about Epicurean philosophy. One thing I've mentioned is that there are a lot of Epicurean-adjacent ideas that don't get credited to Epicurus but that resonate with the philosophy. That has opened up a dialogue between us to explore some ideas. It's a way into the philosophy possibly for him. I didn't come out all barrels blazing with "Pleasure is the telos." But I'm not going to compromise. If at some point I bring it up and he pushes back (He's a very smart guy), I hope I can come up with cogent arguments, etc. for what I believe. If he comes up with better arguments, I remain open to exploring outside the school. For now, Epicurus makes the most sense and provides a guide for life that resonates with me.

Post by "Don" of March 2, 2025 at 10:56 AM

Quote from Seneca

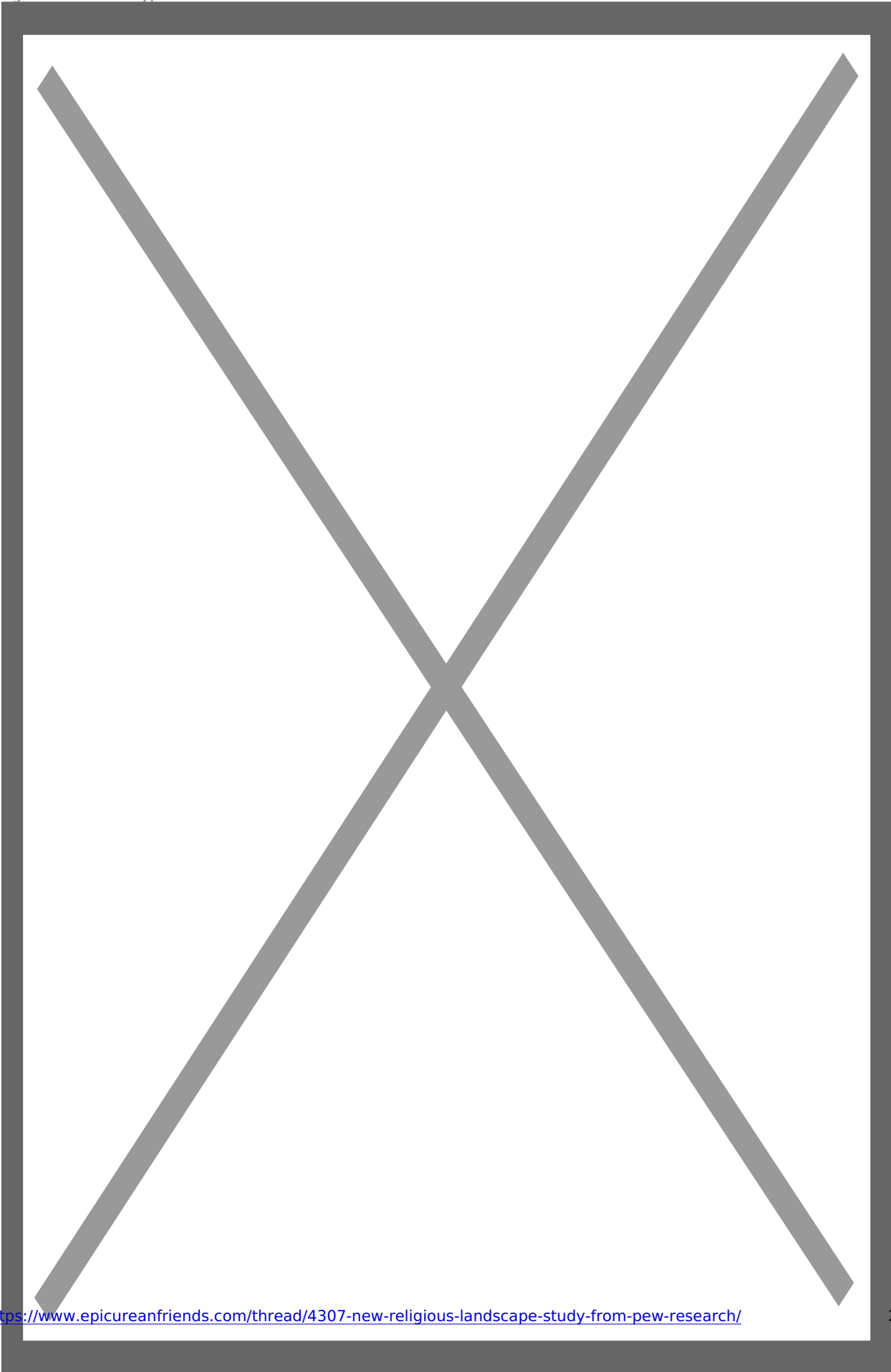
"Go to his Garden and read the motto carved there: 'Stranger, here you will do well to tarry; here our highest good is pleasure.'"

Seneca's Latin is:

HOSPES HIC BENE MANEBIS, HIC SVMMVM BONVM VOLVPTAS EST

I'd suggest the inscription would have been in Greek with maybe a Latin version later. In light of that, HOSPES is a Latin translation of XENOS (xenos). The concepts of the XENOS and XENIA (xenia) are applicable to this thread.

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[Xenia \(Greek\) - Wikipedia](#)

en.wikipedia.org

"Xenia consists of two basic rules:

"1. The respect from hosts to guests. Hosts must be hospitable to guests and provide them with a bath, food, drink, gifts, and safe escort to their next destination. It is considered rude to ask guests questions, or even to ask who they are, before they have finished the meal provided to them.

"2. The respect from guests to hosts. Guests must be courteous to their hosts and not be a threat or burden. Guests are expected to provide stories and news from the outside world. Most importantly, guests are expected to reciprocate if their hosts ever call upon them in their homes."

As "strangers" learn about Epicurean philosophy - as they metaphorically pass by the gate to the Garden - they should be welcomed, we should be hospitable, answer questions courteously, etc. We should practice philosophical χενια.

PS. Note also that Seneca specifically uses SVMVM BONVM, so likely that would have been ΤΕΛΟΣ in Greek. So, that last phrase could be interpreted as "Here, pleasure is the telos."

MANEBIS is Latin for ΜΕΝΩ "stay, lodge, linger, remain"

BENE translates ΚΑΛΟΣ (kalos) that slippery word denoting well, nobly, beautifully, etc.

Post by "Pacatus" of March 9, 2025 at 7:41 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

From my perspective, Epicurus was not positing a philosophical position in that "pleasure is the telos." He was identifying a universal trait of human beings - in fact, a trait of all living beings.

[Quote from Don](#)

As I stated and from my perspective, "Pleasure is the telos" a fact of the natural world - like gravity or evolution - that Epicurus discovered and articulated through his philosophy. It's the way living beings work and how they interact with the world and each other.

I keep coming back to this in my mind, and it cements a lot of stuff for me. Thank you. 👍

Post by “DaveT” of March 28, 2025 at 2:35 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

I sincerely don't care if Epicureanism is defined as "psychological hedonism" or Axiological hedonism or Ethical hedonism or whatever-ical hedonism or hedonism at all. Epicurus had an insight into the motivation of all living beings that they move toward pleasure and move away from pain, and he used this starting point to shed light on how living beings interact with their world and ultimately what is the goal of life of living beings, with humans being able to take that information and to move toward eudaimonia.

The meaning of the telos or the "supreme good" is that thing which is the telos or the "supreme good" is that for which ALL actions are ultimately motivated by. One may say virtue is their ultimate motivating factor, but why? Keep asking why? And it is going to be that it gives them a sense of satisfaction that they're doing what's right. And what is a sense of satisfaction? It is pleasure. One can dress up their motivation and their rationalizations and their justifications. They move toward the supreme good which is pleasure.

People lie all the time to themselves to get through the day and through their life. People can convince themselves of almost anything!

I am not saying we MUST convince everyone we come in contact with that "Pleasure is the supreme good and why you do what you." We pick our battles. But the more I look at the world and how people act, I can see them trying to comfort themselves, to mask their insecurities, to belittle others to aggrandize their own self-image. They are in pain and are trying to move toward pleasure. The feelings are only two after all. BUT Epicurus calls us to make prudent choices, to live nobly, well, and prudently, to try to fill our lives with more pleasure than pain. That's what I believe ALL living beings are doing. And Epicurus was brilliant in his attempt to explain this. Not everyone is going to listen. Not everyone is going to be convinced. Not everyone is going to accept that universal truth. But that is exactly what I believe is going on in the psyche of every living being.

To me, this is a near perfect recitation of what I look for in Epicureanism. I look at every living thing as seeking to maximize their potential (for humans--happiness). This is the beauty of the teaching. Indeed, one might say everything down to the smallest particle of matter or energy is

following its nature to maximize its potential to be what it is. That looks a bit weird as I write it, but nothing needs to be sentient to naturally seek its potential, its highest potential as declared by Epicurus.

Post by “Pacatus” of April 6, 2025 at 6:50 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

From my perspective, Epicurus was not positing a philosophical position in that "pleasure is the telos." He was identifying a universal trait of human beings - in fact, a trait of all living beings.

Once again, I come back to this.

I came across the following while reading Tim O’Keefe’s treatise on Epicureanism. I’m not sure that O’Keefe takes it all the way to the logical conclusion that you do (so well) here, but it did remind me -

“So we do not need to discern our inherent telos in order to discover the purpose of life. Instead, in order to find the highest good we simply have to observe what, as a matter of fact, people desire and pursue for its own sake and not for the sake of anything else.”

- Timothy O’Keefe, *Epicureanism*

In other words, it’s an empirical question - not some “second order” philosophical one, as in, say, Plato.

Post by “Pacatus” of April 17, 2025 at 4:32 PM

Another “interesting take” on [Don](#)’s position above (which was a game-changer for me), that I came across in my reading. The quote is about the Aristippian Cyrenaics, but seemed to me to be relevant here: some pleasures may not be contingently choiceworthy because they would lead to greater pains - but pleasure itself, *in se*, is intrinsically choiceworthy.

“In [the example cases, a particular] pleasure is not choiceworthy given the circumstances, since its acquisition involves more than countervailing pains. **But it remains choiceworthy**

for itself and in itself. In other words, its intrinsic ability to motivate choosing is *a matter of its self-evident phenomenal character*, which is not altered by prudential circumstances.”

- Kurt Lampe, *The Birth of Hedonism: the Cyrenaic Philosophers and Pleasure as a Way of Life*. [My generalizing edits in brackets.]

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Note: Lampe seems generally to think that **some** of the differences between the Cyrenaics and the Epicureans (while real and worthy of note) have been perhaps overstated - to the detriment of the Cyrenaics as philosophers. [At least in terms of what Lampe calls “mainstream Cyrenaicism” - e.g. of Aristippus and Aristippus the Younger (the “Metrodidact”), and presumably Arete, the Younger’s mother who inherited the role of teacher from her father, Aristippus the Elder (and who might be one of the unsung women philosophers of antiquity)].

Post by “DaveT” of April 19, 2025 at 8:31 AM

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

Another “interesting take” on [Don](#) ‘s position above (which was a game-changer for me), that I came across in my reading. The quote is about the Aristippian Cyrenaics, but seemed to me to be relevant here: some pleasures may not be contingently choiceworthy because they would lead to greater pains - but pleasure itself, *in se*, is intrinsically choiceworthy.

“In [the example cases, a particular] pleasure is not choiceworthy given the circumstances, since its acquisition involves more than countervailing pains. **But it remains choiceworthy for itself and in itself.** In other words, its intrinsic ability to motivate choosing is *a matter of its self-evident phenomenal character*, which is not altered by prudential circumstances.”

- Kurt Lampe, *The Birth of Hedonism: the Cyrenaic Philosophers and Pleasure as a Way of Life*. [My generalizing edits in brackets.]

Pacatus, I'm not familiar with the Cyreniacs, though I have to say your post brought back a memory and concrete example of this to me. Many years ago, I attended a McKenzie clinic for certain lower back issues. Part of his treatment method involved prescribed body stretches to alleviate physical pain. I was taught to never put up with pain for one minute, but rather do the stretches that were prescribed. We were not to just suffer and wait for the pain to ease.