

# Epicurean philosophy skewing toward elements of Stoicism in the time of Lucretius??

Post by “Kalosyni” of April 25, 2025 at 8:38 AM

The following was contributed elsewhere by forum member [Bryan](#)

Quote

Lucretius' list is:

1. cupīdinēs
2. timōrēs
3. superbia
4. spurcitia
5. petulantia
6. dēsīdia
7. lūxūs

DRN 5.44 onward:

But if the mind's not cleansed, what dubious battles  
Must we then stalk, and enter against our will!  
How sharp are the (1) **lusts** that tear a man in two  
And trouble his life! How many (2) **fears** will follow!  
What (3) **insolence**, (4) **filth**, and (5) **shamelessness**!  
How many Disasters they deal!  
What (6) **sloth** and (7) **debauchery**!

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I am seeing this as showing some evidence that later Epicureans were skewing toward elements of Stoicism (unless some Christian monks added it in 🤔). This list of vices gives abstractions not tied to specific actions or sensations of pain or pleasure, and also implies that one is seeking a kind of perfection by removal of vices.

Thoughts?

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Post by “Cassius” of April 25, 2025 at 10:21 AM

I don't agree that this list indicates what you are concerned about, but before I weigh in much more I'd like to hear what others have to say. This should be a good opportunity to talk about where Stoicism and Epicureanism diverge and why.

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### **Post by “Joshua” of April 25, 2025 at 12:40 PM**

These lines come from the proem to Book V, and should be understood in that context. The proems of each book show Lucretius at his most poetical, and here in the fifth book he is draping Epicurus with plaudits - the labors of Epicurus in philosophy should be compared with labors of Hercules, and Epicurus himself should be regarded with the reverence due to a god.

Indeed, the labors of Hercules were as nothing compared with the things that Epicurus has saved us from. The Lernaen Hydra, Nemeaeen Lion, and Calydonian Boar could have been easily avoided. Just don't go near those wild places and you'll be safe. But who will save us from the dangers that are so near us that we cannot flee them?

Epicurus. His philosophy was a gift far greater than any given in the old stories, because he gave us the clarity and strength of mind to confront these dangers ourselves - there is no longer any need to cower behind the club of Hercules, or the shields of Ajax, Achilles, or the Aegis of Athena.

The *vera ratio* or 'true philosophy' does all this and more. And so we honor him above all the rest.

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### **Post by “Rolf” of April 25, 2025 at 12:41 PM**

Hmm. On one hand, I suppose all of these *could* in fact lead to pain. Likely to, even. As Lucretius points out, these vices “tear a man in two” and “trouble his life”, and he laments about “how many disasters they deal”. To me, this points towards him illustrating how these vices lead to material pain, not any kind of abstract moral failing.

At the same time though, I see your concern Kalosyni - I agree that we ought to be careful about abstract virtues and vices detached from the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain.

I suppose it could simply be a matter of Lucretius being a product of his time, in the same way that Epicurus wrote from a perspective of gods existing (though not interfering of course).

It could also be Lucretius being Lucretius. From what I've seen, he's rather flowery and dramatic with his language, and seems to use language in a way intended to elicit emotions, even if it takes away from precision.

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### Post by "Don" of April 25, 2025 at 12:44 PM

Wasn't Hercules a favorite of the Stoics? By setting up Epicurus' deeds as greater than those of Hercules, Lucretius would in a way be thumbing his nose at the Stoics.

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### Post by "Cassius" of April 25, 2025 at 2:34 PM

I was thinking Don might weigh in from another direction as well. Don is very strong on [PD10](#) being a reference to reprobate acts being *bad because they do in fact lead to pain in most cases*. I always insist that it is important to observe that there is no "necessity" that they lead to a bad result, and that that is part of the point of [PD10](#). But we both agree that Epicurus is saying that pursuing the life of a reprobate is a bad idea. And in that case someone who is against making lists of undesirable characteristics might say that both Don and I sound like prudish Stoics to dare to say anything that implies that being a reprobate is generally bad.

As I read Kalosyni, she is objecting to Lucretius listing these character traits as undesirable "in general" because she thinks that sounds too much like a Stoic.

I would apply Don's reasoning on [PD10](#) to this list by Lucretius, and I think most people would say, as Don would, that even though it might be theoretically possible that a particular human being might pursue these courses and yet still manage to experience a happy life, the weight of experience is strongly against anyone being successful in doing so except in the most unusual of circumstances.

(As a reminder, the list is : (1) **lusts** that tear a man in two and trouble his life! How many (2) **fears** will follow! What (3) **insolence**, (4) **filth**, and (5) **shamelessness**! How many Disasters they deal! What (6) **sloth** and (7) **debauchery**!)

Therefore I do not think it smacks of Stoicism to think that generally sloth and debauchery and filth and the rest are going to lead in the end to more pain than pleasure. Therefore I think it's fine for an Epicurean like Lucretius to create a list of such things to be generally avoided.

The red line I think needs to be respected is that you need to be clear, like Lucretius is being, that this list doesn't come from the gods, or from abstract logic divorced from experience. An Epicurean gets lists like this from practical experience, and that's all the difference in the world from a Stoic who says that these things are "bad in themselves" or "bad because Zeus / Home / Plato's ideal forms say so."

So I think an Epicurean can easily maintain a personal list of desirable character traits that is in many cases (not all) similar to a list written by a Stoic. Certainly a Stoic would embrace Lucretius' list (and that's probably why Kalosyni is suspicious of it.) Further, making such a list is explicitly what [PD05](#) is doing in saying that the happy life requires prudence, honor, and justice.

But the difference in how you get your list, and how you support it and explain it to other people, makes all the difference in the world.

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### Post by “Don” of April 25, 2025 at 11:13 PM

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

I was thinking Don might weigh in from another direction as well. Don is very strong on [PD10](#) being a reference to reprobate acts being bad because they do in fact lead to pain in most cases.

Okay, now having re-read the proem, I will weigh in from my customary ( [Cassius](#) may say predictable 😊 ) direction. To me, it seems Lucretius is setting the imaginary hazards against the real hazards of living a pleasurable life. In practical terms, those activities - not abstract vices but real-life activities involving those behaviors - likely lead to more pain than pleasure *in the long run*. That's my take on [PD10](#) + 11 + 12 (I take those as a unit) and that's my take here. Indulge in these if you wish. There's no divine commandments. But you'll have to reap the consequences.

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### Post by “Patrikios” of April 28, 2025 at 3:55 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

As I read Kalosyni, she is objecting to Lucretius listing these character traits as undesirable "in general" because she thinks that sounds too much like a Stoic.

Lucretius could also be considering the implications of PD-5:

**“It is impossible to live a pleasant life without living wisely and honorably and justly, and it is impossible to live wisely and honorably and justly without living pleasantly.”**

The list of vices could be examples of acts that would **not** be considered wise, honorable, or just in most situations. I found PD-5 to be a good way of prudently making choices that require what DeWitt referred to as “calculus of pleasure”.

Thanks, [Kalosyni](#) for this interesting question.

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## Post by “Kalosyni” of April 28, 2025 at 7:21 PM

### [Quote from Patrikios](#)

The list of vices could be examples of acts that would not be considered wise, honorable, or just in most situations.

What I object to is that *how and when* a word from "the vice list" is used will change depending on *who* is using the word.

A Stoic, a Christian, a Buddhist, an Epicurean, etc., - each person will define a "vice" according to what they value (each will define as either a vice or not a vice depending on what they value).

As for an Epicurean, there is no good or evil except pleasure and pain. Pain = harm. We don't like it, and others don't like it if we cause them pain (causing others pain most likely comes with unwanted consequences).

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## Post by “Godfrey” of April 29, 2025 at 12:36 AM

I believe that in the Voula Tsouna article, "Philodemus and the Therapy of Vice", it's mentioned that an Epicurean vice is a type of action which generally results in pain.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4427-epicurean-philosophy-skewing-toward-elements-of-stoicism-in-the-time-of-lucretiu/>