

# Sunday November 2, 2025 - Zoom Discussion 12:30 PM EST - Continuation of Discussion of Nature of Pleasure

## Post by "Cassius" of October 27, 2025 at 1:49 AM

This is to start a thread for us to discuss preparation of the discussion for this meeting. [DaveT](#) has suggested a focus which sounds good, and it will be helpful if we talk through some of the details here in this thread beforehand.

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## Post by "Cassius" of October 27, 2025 at 11:04 AM

Here is a request for the topic for 11/2 submitted by [DaveT](#). I think this is an excellent suggestion and it's also something we can discuss during the week before we have the live discussion. Let's use this thread to discuss it where it can be found in the future rather than continuing in the private conversation. Thanks!

### Quote

[Cassius](#), do you think we might continue the topic you selected for the Zoom today and revisit it on Nov. 2nd? The way [Joshua](#) contrasted the primacy of *Pleasure* over necessity rather than the reverse really caught my attention.

Might we take more time to consider your question on ways to respond to newcomers to Epicurus, considering our discussion today about *Pleasure* and its connotation with shamefulness? I think it is important not just for newcomers to Epicurus, but also for students like me who are digging into the pleasure/pain concept.

For example, *Pleasure* is such a loaded word! When [Joshua](#) said it should not be associated with shame, it resonated with me a lot. I think the common understanding in the English language *is* that pleasure is associated with shame, or sin, or antisocial behavior, at least in America. As someone said today about the Stoics, we seek pleasure, but don't like to admit it.

So, back to the question of responding to initial inquiries about Epicureanism, might another tack be considered? I see a larger question that we might consider. Why must

even a knowledgeable Epicurean always have to explain the pleasure-pain principle as limited by prudence as soon as that emotion-laden word *Pleasure* surfaces?

Robert wondered if “re-branding” our word choice would be useful. I think that is an important enough question for us to discuss collectively. Maybe we can discover a different way for both new *and* old followers to avoid the common ridicule that tends to shame not just the timid, but the courageous person who says, they follow Epicurus’ ethics about *Pleasure*.

Am I suggesting we consider another English word for Epicurus’ wording for *Pleasure* as a concept? No, but I think it might be appropriate to consider new ways of dealing with Epicurus’ concept of *Pleasure*.

Can I ask our eminent ancient Greek linguists in the Forum for help with the following questions?

I wonder how the most highly regarded English translations render Epicurus’s use of the word *Pleasure*. Are they agreed? Is any one of them considered above the others?

Does Epicurus’ ancient Greek word have a singular meaning or multiple meanings within the context of mental vs physical?

Is his use of the word always consistent without his explaining the distinction between mental and physical meanings?

I wonder if his followers in the varied parts of the eastern Mediterranean all deduced the same meaning(s) he intended with his usage of the Greek word for *Pleasure*?

I’m looking forward to responses from one and all.

• **Dave Tamanini**

**Harrisburg, PA, USA**

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**Post by “Don” of October 27, 2025 at 11:43 AM**

Quote from DaveT

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4783-sunday-november-2-2025-zoom-discussion-12-30-pm-est-continuation-of-discussion-o/>

Does Epicurus' ancient Greek word have a singular meaning or multiple meanings within the context of mental vs physical?

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

Also...

FWIW Headwords for ἡδονή (hēdonē) "pleasure"

Woodhouse, S. C. (1910), English-Greek Dictionary: A Vocabulary of the Attic Language[1], London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Limited.

allurement idem, page 25.

amusement idem, page 28.

caprice idem, page 112.

cheer idem, page 128.

complacency idem, page 151.

dalliance idem, page 193.

delectation idem, page 207.

delight idem, page 208.

ecstasy idem, page 261.

elation idem, page 265.

enchantment idem, page 270.

enjoyment idem, page 275.

entrancement idem, page 278.

exhilaration idem, page 291.

fascination idem, page 308.

gaiety idem, page 351.

gladness idem, page 361.

glee idem, page 361.

gratification idem, page 370.

hilarity idem, page 400.

idiosyncrasy idem, page 413.

intoxication idem, page 454.

jollity idem, page 464.

joy idem, page 464.

light-heartedness idem, page 491.

merriment idem, page 526.

mirth idem, page 532.

pleasure idem, page 620.

rapture idem, page 672.

ravishment idem, page 674.

rejoicing idem, page 689.

satisfaction idem, page 734.

transport idem, page 889.

treat idem, page 892.

zest idem, page 997.

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## Post by “Eikadistes” of October 27, 2025 at 12:42 PM

Quote

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Quote

I wonder how the most highly regarded English translations render Epicurus's use of the word *Pleasure*. Are they agreed? Is any one of them considered above the others?

*Though language is fluid (and I do think it's helpful to paraphrase), so far as I have found, "pleasure" is the universal, English translation for ἡδονή (hēdoné) found in the academic world of Epicurean scholars. For example, in the (x15) translations of the [Kuriai Doxai that I compiled](#), a declension of hēdoné is used in Key Doctrines 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 12, 18, 19, and 20, and **all** of the translators (including Yonge, Wallace, Hicks, Bailey, de Witt, Geer, Long, Sedley, O' Connor, Inwood, Gerson, Anderson, Makridis, Saint-Andre, Strodach, Mensch, and White) use "pleasure" as their preferred term. This is one of *only a few* Greek words for which all translators (of the Epicurean works) seem to agree.*

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

Quote

Does Epicurus' ancient Greek word have a singular meaning or multiple meanings within the context of mental vs physical?

Is his use of the word always consistent without his explaining the distinction between mental and physical meanings?

Hēdoné **always** means "pleasure" as I have seen, and includes *physical* pleasures, *mental* pleasures, *lasting* pleasures, *fleeting* pleasures, *red* pleasures, *blue* pleasures, "me" pleasures, and "you" pleasures. **All** pleasures are implied by and included in the definition ἡδονή (hēdoné). **All pleasure is pleasure:** "If every pleasure were compressed, and eventually existed throughout the whole atomic assembly of the human form or even just the most important parts of one's nature, it would never be possible to distinguish one pleasure from another" (Key Doctrine 9).

For the sake of coherence, I maintain that same conventions in my own translations. As Epikouros further writes, "no pleasure by itself is evil" (KD 8 ) because "wherever pleasure is, for the time that it is, there is neither discomfort, nor distress, nor both" (KD 3). Since pleasure is not an evil, I feel right defending the word against those who might consider it "tainted".

Now, given that conceptual treatment of pleasure, there are different varieties of hēdoné. Principally, he discusses ἀταραξία (*ataraxía*), "impassiveness", which might be

seen to correspond with the pure pleasures δῖανοίᾱς (*dianoías*) "of the mind", and ἀπονία (*aponía*), which might be seen to correspond with the pure pleasure σᾶρκός (*sarkós*) "of the flesh". Unlike the Kyrenaics, ancient Epicureans maintained that *both* pleasures and pains of the mind were *worse* than both pleasures and pains of the flesh. Still, all pleasures are pleasurable.

He provides us (as I see it) with *at least* 2-4 other qualities of sorts of pleasures: on one axis, pleasures are characterized as being "of the mind" and "of the body", and on another, they are characterized as being either *kinetic* (or "active") or *katastematic*, "*stable*" or "*static*":

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Quote

*He differs from the [Kyrēnaícs](#) regarding the [definition of] pleasure; for they do not accept the [katastēmatic](#)<sup>54</sup> [balanced state] but only the [pleasure] in activity; but he [accepts] both, [pleasure] of mind and of body, as he affirms in the [book] On Choice and Avoidance and in that On the End, and in the first [book] On the Conduct of Life and in the Epistle to the Philosophers in [Mytilénē](#). So also Diogénēs [the Epicurean] in the seventeenth book of his Epilekta, and [Mētródōros](#) in the [book] Timokrátēs, they say thus: "We then conceive of pleasure both as [kinetic] activity and [katastematic] equilibrium." (Lives of Eminent Philosophers 10.136)*

Her further says, "in the [book] *On Choice*, simply says: "Tranquility [[ataraxía](#)]<sup>55</sup> and painlessness [[aponía](#)]<sup>56</sup> are centered<sup>57</sup> pleasures; but the [pleasures of] joy [[kharà](#)]<sup>58</sup> and cheerfulness [[euphronsynē](#)]<sup>59</sup> are seen to [include] action [and] activity", so we are provided with words to further characterize the [1] "active pleasures of the mind", [2] "stable pleasures of the mind", [3] "active pleasures of the flesh", and [4] "stables pleasures of the flesh". As I see it:

1. [ἈΤΑΡΑΞΙΑ](#) or [ἀταραξία](#) (*ataraxía*), the *katastematic* state of painlessness of the mind. ↵
2. [ἈΠΟΝΙΑ](#) or [ἀπονία](#) (*aponía*), the *katastematic* state of painlessness of the flesh. ↵
3. [ΧΑΡΑ](#) or [χαρὰ](#) (*kharà*), the *kinetic* act of pleasuring the flesh, meaning "joy". ↵
4. [ΕΥΦΡΟΣΥΝΗ](#) or [εὐφροσύνη](#) (*euphronsynē*) the *kinetic* act of pleasuring the mind, "cheer". ↵

And, of course, we may also see some correspondence between the various pleasures and the types of desires. Natural, and necessary desires usually correspond with pleasures like eating, drinking, and socializing. Natural, but unnecessary desires might correspond with pleasures like sex. Vain desires correspond with pleasures that include building a ballroom to preserve your legacy. While there are differences between pleasures and desires, these help shape our understanding.

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

#### Quote

...considering our discussion today about *Pleasure* and its connotation with shamefulness? [...]

For example, *Pleasure* is such a loaded word! When [Joshua](#) said it should not be associated with shame, it resonated with me a lot.

Epíkouros understood that "pleasure" had a bad rap, and he saw a need to add a nuance for those who might misunderstand. So, he explicitly explains to Menoikeus that,

#### Quote

*Then when we say the goal is Pleasure, we are not counting the pleasures of the debauched and those lying sick with enjoyment, and those who, not knowing and not acknowledging or having barely received [advantage] from considering, but rather [seeking] neither suffering throughout the body nor grieving throughout the soul.*" (Epíkouros, *Epistle to Menoikeus* 10.131).

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

#### Quote

I wonder if his followers in the varied parts of the eastern Mediterranean all deduced the same meaning(s) he intended with his usage of the Greek word for *Pleasure*?

In general, *hēdoné* was seen by Epicurean opponents as the root of all evil. They weren't shy about it. Everyone from Platonists, to Cynics, to Stoics, to Christians contextualized *hēdoné* as the dishonorable goal of shallow people with weak minds. *Everyone* rejected his categorization of "mental impassiveness" as a "pleasure", including his fellow hedonists, the Kyrenaics.

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

#### Quote

Robert wondered if "re-branding" our word choice would be useful.

I think the Hegemon gives us some attitude on this idea: "*Frankly at least [as a] student-of-nature, I would prefer to deliver what is useful to all humanity, even if no one is likely to take*

notice, than profit from affirming the firm doctrines that fell from the side of widespread approval." ([Vatican Saying](#) 29). He also says, "Never did I reach to please the masses, for truly what pleases them, I did not understand, but what I understood was far away from their perception" ([Usener](#) 187).

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## Post by “Eikadistes” of October 27, 2025 at 12:46 PM

TL;DR

If the masses don't find our words pleasing, that's their loss. 😊

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## Post by “Patrikios” of October 27, 2025 at 2:14 PM

Quote

Quote from DaveT

"Why must even a knowledgeable Epicurean always have to explain the pleasure-pain principle as limited by prudence as soon as that emotion-laden word *Pleasure* surfaces?

Robert wondered if “re-branding” our word choice would be useful. I think that is an important enough question for us to discuss collectively. Maybe we can discover a different way for both new *and* old followers to avoid the common ridicule that tends to shame not just the timid, but the courageous person who says, they follow Epicurus’ ethics about *Pleasure*."

[DaveT](#) Thanks for raising the question on 're-branding' when introducing Epicureanism to someone. Maybe before introducing the word '**pleasure**' up front, the introduction of Epicureanism should highlight the benefits that accrue from following this framework for a life of **wellbeing** (eudaimonia).

I describe Epicureanism as the way of a life of wellbeing, which comes from wisdom, gained through prudent consideration of choices and avoidances. We acquire this wisdom through unceasing study of nature, through contemplation of the writings of the sage, Epikouros and his followers; through fellowships with like-minded friends; and by endeavoring to live practically,

properly, peaceably and pleasantly. Our guide for pleasant living comes from Divine Nature, who teaches us to use our body's senses, feelings and apprehensions for right choices and avoidances. Only after describing the framework and benefits of Epicureanism, should we get into the details of describing how 'pleasure' is the absence of 'pain'. With an understanding of what the desired state of a pain-free body and tranquil mind that enables wellbeing, we can then describe how the absence of pain/disturbance (in body and mind) is achieved through both kinetic and static pleasures.

For example, @Eikadistes takes 3-1/2 pages of the introduction in his [Hedonicon](#), before the word '**pleasure**' is even mentioned, and only then by introducing: "*The **Patron of Pleasure** prescribes a practice for maximizing the serenity (aponia) of the flesh and for magnifying the tranquility (ataraxia) of the mind.*

Does this approach provide a more acceptable method for discussing Epicureanism, without getting into the issue of shameful pleasures?

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## Post by “Don” of October 27, 2025 at 3:02 PM

### [Quote from Eikadistes](#)

XAPA or χαρὰ (kharà), the kinetic act of pleasuring the flesh, meaning “joy”. ←

One interesting (to me) note is that XAPA does not seem to be exclusive to the body/flesh. Case in point:

"On this blissful day, which is also the last of my life, I write this to you. My continual sufferings from strangury and dysentery are so great that nothing could augment them ; but over against them all I set *gladness of mind at the remembrance* of our past conversations. But I would have you, as becomes your life-long attitude to me and to philosophy, watch over the children of Metrodorus."

"Τὴν μακαρίαν ἄγοντες καὶ ἅμα τελευταίαν ἡμέραν τοῦ βίου ἐγράφομεν ὑμῖν ταυτί. στραγγουρία τε παρηκολουθήκει καὶ δυσεντερικὰ πάθη ὑπερβολὴν οὐκ ἀπολείποντα τοῦ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς μεγέθους. ἀντιπαρετάττετο δὲ πᾶσι τούτοις τὸ κατὰ ψυχὴν χαῖρον ἐπὶ τῇ τῶν γεγονότων ἡμῖν διαλογισμῶν μνήμῃ. σὺ δ' ἀξίως τῆς ἐκ μειρακίου παραστάσεως πρὸς ἐμὲ καὶ φιλοσοφίαν ἐπιμελοῦ τῶν παίδων Μητροδώρου."

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gladness of mind

τὸ κατὰ ψυχὴν χαῖρον (to kata psykhe khairon), lit. "the rejoicing throughout (my) mind"

χαῖρον is related to the "kinesis/energeia" pleasure χαρά "joy"

To enjoy [+dative = something] = μνήμη (dative) "remembrance, memory"

So, τὸ κατὰ ψυχὴν χαῖρον ἐπὶ τῇ ... μνήμη "the enjoying throughout (my) mind... of the memory"

So I don't think we can make a firm body (flesh)/mind dichotomy with ΧΑΡΑ/ΕΥΦΡΟΣΥΝΗ. There seem to be more nuances going on, at least in Epicurus' use of the terms.

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### Post by “Patrikios” of October 27, 2025 at 4:22 PM

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

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[Don](#) @Eikadistes ,

Could this use of ΚΑΡΑ be describing a whole-body-mind feeling of pleasure that occurs when a vivid mental recollection of a past significant joyous event, causes the mind to trigger the brain/body to release of the pleasure chemicals (endorphins)? Is this one of those nuances? 😊

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### Post by “Eikadistes” of October 27, 2025 at 4:27 PM

#### [Quote from Patrikios](#)

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

So, τὸ κατὰ ψυχὴν χαῖρον ἐπὶ τῇ ... μνήμῃ "the enjoying throughout (my) mind... of the memory"

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Good thought! I agree with [Don](#) that there isn't a sharp, technical division, they're just expressions of different qualities and varieties of pleasure, which is ultimately seen as a single concept.

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## Post by “DaveT” of October 27, 2025 at 5:23 PM

@Eikadistes Thank you for taking the time to respond to the above questions. I think your explanations were instructive to me and also they solidified my instincts. Additionally, (and however) I think the point of this thread is not explaining Epicurus to the masses.

### [Quote from Eikadistes](#)

He also says, "Never did I reach to please the masses, for truly what pleases them, I did not understand, but what I understood was far away from their perception" (Usener 187).

On the contrary, the focus at least for me, is to address the newcomer to EpicureanFriends, as well as when I'm explaining my beliefs to a friend in casual conversation.

The Pleasure/Pain focus, rather than the absolute truth of his belief, is not the most pressing issue for the modern day understanding of Epicurus' brilliant analytic methods. And I thought when @Cassius was asking for feedback at the Zoom meeting for ways to give clear and concise explanations of Epicureanism to newcomers, it was an important topic.

I think understanding of Pleasure/Pain motivations for living happily should depend less on a reliance on defining Pleasure over and over with one caveat after another and which every reader may interpret in their own way depending on their life experiences and depend more on the overall truth Epicurus discovered.

De Witt, in [Philosophy for the Millions](#), says: "In spite of this teaching it was not the doctrine of Epicurus that pleasure was the greatest good. To his thinking the *greatest good was life itself*. (Italics added) This was a logical deduction from the denial of immortality. Without the afterlife this present life becomes the concentration of all values...."

My guesstimate is that the newcomer to Epicureanism is seeking clarity of purpose. And therefore they may be best served by a response focused on an overall belief that the "greatest good" is "life itself". Phrased that way, that avoiding suffering and finding happiness are the tools to the greatest good, seems a far better approach to me.

Final note: When you want to win an argument with detractors, and we understand there have been over two thousand years of detractors who (still) have won over the western world culture, you don't repeat the very word they demean when you respond to attack. The ingrained inference that pursuing pleasure is shameful in a world where sacrifice to attain the next life is simply too strong a current to swim against by giving deeper and deeper explanations of the meaning of the word. Sometimes you need to cede the battle of "well pleasure does not mean...." and move on to building a better understanding of Epicureanism with alternate words like Life Itself is the Greatest Good.

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## Post by "Don" of October 27, 2025 at 7:06 PM

### [Quote from DaveT](#)

"well pleasure does not mean...."

### Quote from Epicurus

Therefore, whenever we say repeatedly that "pleasure is the goal (τέλος)," *we do not say* the pleasure of those who are prodigal and those stuck in delighting in pleasures arising from circumstances outside of ourselves like those who are ignorant, those who don't agree with us, or those who believe wrongly; but we mean that which neither pains the body nor troubles the mind. [132] For it is not an endless string of drinking parties and festivals, and not taking advantage of slaves and women, nor does an extravagant table of fish and other things bring forth a sweet life but self-controlled

reasoning and examining the cause of every choice and rejection and driving out the greatest number of opinions that take hold of the mind and bring confusion and trouble.

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### **Post by “DaveT” of October 28, 2025 at 10:42 AM**

[Don Patrikios](#) Well, what troubles me, is that quoting Epicurus, and his followers leaves the modern sensitivities at the mercy of modern language. For example: my point is that deep explanation of the word *pleasure* is a turn off to the newly exposed person. To have to point to Epicurus saying "we do not say" is taking up the language connotations of the "opposition" unnecessarily. The prevailing undercurrent of meaning, shamefulness, is fighting on the other side's home turf as it were. I like better [Patrikios](#) personal approach than the rote explanations for what Epicurean pleasure means and doesn't mean. And to repeat my intention in my earlier post; thinking that Epicurus celebrated life as a goal, per DeWitt, is the more satisfying explanation. As I was saying, my approach is not for the purpose of evangelizing this philosophy to the masses, it is for an alternate approach to answering the new inquirer's question of *what's it all about*, and explaining my own attraction, in casual conversation with friends, about of some of Epicurus's ethics that I try to adopt in my own life.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of October 28, 2025 at 11:49 AM**

You're raising lots of good points for discussion DaveT. At this point I'll insert these thoughts into the record as we take it further:

1. DeWitt's point as to the true goal being "life" in my personal opinion has a lot of merit, BUT, we have a lot of disagreement here about whether that is in fact the case, and I would myself say that this formulation suffers from much the same problem as other formulations. The whole issue is that the way people think about life and pleasure is too narrow and/or erroneous, and whatever words you end up focusing on have their own problems to unwind. Clearly the word "life" itself is insufficient standing on its own, because Epicurus makes clear that we sometimes give our lives for our friends, and even more generally, we will "leave the theatre when the play ceases to please us," as I think probably Epicurus and certainly Atticus and probably others chose to do to accelerate their impending deaths. So "Life Alone" isn't logically sufficient, and you'd have to explain that what you mean is "a life in which you can expect to experience more

pleasure than pain" to be more precise. This point number one i am writing here is one of many separate issues that's involved in the discussion you are raising.

2. As for this ...

[Quote from DaveT](#)

not for the purpose of evangelizing this philosophy to the masses, it is for an alternate approach to answering the new inquirer's question of what's it all about,

... I see your distinction and agree that it's valid, though the issues do bleed together. Both "the masses" and "the new inquirer" need clarity as quickly as possible, but I think you are right that "the inquirer" probably comes to the discussion with a more positive and open mind than does "the masses."

3. This seems to be ultimately the concern that a lot of people have:

[Quote from DaveT](#)

his followers leaves the modern sensitivities at the mercy of modern language.

And that seems to me almost EXACTLY what Cicero's own complaint was -- that Epicurus was doing violence to common language.

And yes I'd say that that is true - Epicurus made the decision as Don / Joshua quoted above that he would prefer to be misunderstood rather than not speak the precise truth. I'd say that there is room for lots of different approaches, and that we should encourage people to develop alternative websites, or (given to whom i am speaking) write alternative books, produce alternative arguments, etc., to explore new ways to cut across the existing mental barriers. All I can say for what I think "this" website needs to be is a place where the people who are most dedicated to exploring Epicurus can speak about it in most clear and precise terms regardless of what the rest of the world likes to hear. But as you can tell, I hope, I am all in favor of producing videos and other forms of messaging that explore new ways to get the message across.

It's my own observation that most of the "compromisers" however don't accomplish very much. Even going back to Gassendi and others who tried to mash together Epicurus and Christianity or Deism, I don't think they really got very far. All those efforts probably helped to preserve some mention of Epicurus during very hostile periods, but in the end I personally think they just added to the confusion rather than resolving it.

Right now we have what may be a brief period in history where at least we in the USA, and to some degree other countries, can speak more freely than usual to a wider audience than usual,

and we can choose from being extremely direct on the one hand or be "diplomatic" on the other. I don't want to see us on this forum discourage anyone from taking initiatives in new ways, but the flip side of that is that while some of us explore certain ways of arguments I don't want to let those ways squelch others who like different approaches.

My hopes for this forum is that we will always focus on accuracy, clarity, and directness, so we can provide a place for the most "hard-core" of Epicureans to collaborate together. But at the same time I want to see us encourage in every way we can other approaches. It's likely going to be appropriate that the different approaches keep some distance from each other to maximize their respective chances of success, but I don't see a problem with that, and it actually seems to me to be more consistent with the "atomistic" nature of the universe.

I'd particularly cite @Eikadistes as an example of someone who's doing exactly what in my own personal view they should be doing. He (and others including some here on the forum but I won't go down a list) are putting a lot of time and effort into their own websites/blogs/etc while still collaborating here, and I think that's really the optimum approach.

I'll wrap this up by referring back to your DeWitt comment. I think what we're talking about here now is what DeWitt himself did. He broke from the pack and cut his own path. Some of it was more successful than others, but if he had not broken from the path I'd probably never have gotten as interested in Epicurus as I became, and this website wouldn't be here. I don't like that he spent so much time drawing parallels with Christianity, and some of his formulations are probably too speculative, but many of Dewitt's insights, even the "life is the goal" formulation, I think are definitely in the right direction. And to the extent that DeWitt made some mistakes, some of them ( e.g. life as the goal) were because *he didn't carry his ideas far enough*.

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## Post by “Don” of October 28, 2025 at 11:54 AM

### [Quote from Patrikios](#)

Could this use of KAPA be describing a whole-body-mind feeling of pleasure that occurs when a vivid mental recollection of a past significant joyous event, causes the mind to trigger the brain/body to release of the pleasure chemicals (endorphins)? Is this one of those nuances? 😊

Sure.  $\chi\alpha\rho\alpha$  (khara) has a wide semantic spectrum it would appear from its LSJ entry: <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...057:entry=xara/>

When you recollect something joyful from your past, you feel it throughout your body. I wouldn't get into the endorphins, etc., since that's anachronistic to Epicurus' time, but experiencing a remembered sunset or delicious meal gets "felt" throughout body and mind.

I found this citation interesting from Xenophon:

[Quote from Xenophon](#)

[25] οὕτω μέντοι, ἔφη ὁ Ἰέρων, καὶ τῶν σίτων ὁ μὲν ἔχων παντοδαπὰ ἀεὶ οὐδὲν μετὰ πόθου αὐτῶν λαμβάνει· ὁ δὲ σπανίσας τινός, οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ μετὰ χαρᾶς πιμπλάμενος, ὅταν αὐτῷ προφανῆ τι.

“Quite so, and we may add that he who has all sorts of food at all times has no stomach for any sort. Offer a man a dish that he seldom tastes, and he eats a bellyful *with gusto* .”

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**Post by “Don” of October 28, 2025 at 12:03 PM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

to accelerate their impending deaths

This is clearly a side issue for this thread, but I'm still not convinced the "leave the theatre" saying means "taking steps to accelerate." I much rather prefer to interpret that as not fighting against the inevitable, doing nothing to prolong life if the "end is in sight" so to speak and one is in pain. Life has a limit, and if one is in the throes of a terminal disease, one should take steps to be comfortable but avoid "extraordinary measures" to prolong suffering/pain. Granted, what we take as normal procedures (ex., CPR, vaccinations, organ transplant, etc.) would be seen as "extraordinary measures" in Ancient Greece so I am NOT, for example, advocating for foregoing CPR \*unless\* it is the clearly elucidated wishes of the patient.

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**Post by “Eikadistes” of October 28, 2025 at 12:37 PM**

[Quote from DaveT](#)

De Witt, in [Philosophy for the Millions](#), says: "In spite of this teaching it was not the doctrine of Epicurus that pleasure was the greatest good. To his thinking the *greatest good was life itself*."

De Witt is a phenomenal and reliable resource, and I think he is one of the best resources to new students of Epicurean Philosophy, overall, synoptically ... but he *does* take a few liberties. This is one example of a case where he makes a proposition that stands in contrast to the original texts.

Epíkouros writes in his *Epistle to Menoikeus* that "of all of these things, the original and the greatest good [is] prudence" or **φρόνησις** (*phrónēsis*, "practical wisdom" 132). Here, he uses the phrase **τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν** (*tò mégiston ágathòn* or "the greatest good"). Note, in this context, "a **g**ood" (lowercase "g") refers to an *instrumental good*, or a *virtue*, employed in the service of pleasure. We often distinguish "a good" (*tò ágathòn*) versus "The Good" (*Tágathòn*), a subtle, but important distinction, exemplifying the relationship between the **τέλος** (*télos*) or "goal" of life, and the means but which that goal is attained. Nonetheless, according to Epíkouros, "**practical wisdom**" is the **greatest good**, among other instrumental goods that support the goal of pleasure.

It's subtle, but, If you'll tolerate the play on words, I'd express it as follows: pleasure is *The Good*, and practical wisdom is *the greatest good*. *The greatest good* helps us achieve *The Good*.

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## Post by "Don" of October 28, 2025 at 12:51 PM

### [Quote from DaveT](#)

Well, what troubles me, is that quoting Epicurus, and his followers leaves the modern sensitivities at the mercy of modern language.

I find it interesting that this was *exactly* the same problem the ancient Epicureans were having. The *ancient* sensitivities were the reason that Cicero could rail against *voluptas* vs *virtus* (pleasure vs virtue). ἡδονή / *voluptas* / pleasure had the same negative connotations back then among segments of society as it does today. *Plus ça change*, and all that. And the "modern sensitivities" deriving (in my opinion) from Christian prejudices primarily, especially in the US, are directly in line with the Bible. Using Strong's Concordance for ἡδονή (The word doesn't appear too many times in the New Testament, and only twice in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible)) I freely admit this digression is primarily for my amusement in looking up the citations 😊 :

2 Peter 2:13: And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it *pleasure* to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you;

Luke 8:13: And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and *pleasures* of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.

Titus 3:3: For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and *pleasures*, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.

James 4:3: When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your *pleasures*.

Proverbs 17:1 seems to be the only positive use but that gets buried in translations:

κρείσσων ψωμὸς μεθ' ἡδονῆς ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἢ οἶκος πλήρης πολλῶν ἀγαθῶν καὶ ἀδίκων θυμάτων μετὰ μάχης usually translated as "Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife." (RSV) but more literally "Better is a morsel *with pleasure* in peace, than a house full of many good things and unjust sacrifices, with strife." (BES)

To paraphrase Horton (of Who-hearing fame): Epicurus meant what he said and said what he meant: Pleasure's the Good, 100%.

Epicurus had other words at his disposal, but he decided the feelings were cut into two parts: ἡδονή ("pleasure") and ἀλγηδών/ἄλγος (he uses several words for "pain"). "Negative and positive feelings" doesn't have the same *oomph*. "Good and evil" without the context of pleasure and pain doesn't mean anything. There is no absolute ideal to point to. What is evil/bad? Epicurus says it is that which is painful. If you want modern neuroscience terminology, you have negative and positive affect with low and high activation: <https://positivepsychology.com/positive-and-n...schedule-panas/> or the circumplex: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2367156/> but then you're going into the weeds in a different way.

I get the feeling Epicurus wanted to be provocative, to make people question their common wisdom, their acculturation, which is what using pleasure / ἡδονη / voluptas obviously did.

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## Post by "Cassius" of October 28, 2025 at 12:58 PM

That last post from Don sounds like a chapter out of a work by DeWitt himself 😊

And yes I think this is exactly right -

### [Quote from Don](#)

I get the feeling Epicurus wanted to be provocative, to make people question their common wisdom, their acculturation, which is what using pleasure / ηδονη / voluptas obviously did.

Along the same lines as saying that the sun - or anything else - is what it "appears" to be. Because if "appearance" is taken to mean a reference to the senses, anticipations, and feelings, then yes \*everything\* is understandable to us only from "appearances" - and that is a point well worth being a provocateur over.

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### **Post by “Don” of October 28, 2025 at 2:04 PM**

[DaveT](#) I fear we may be talking past each other, and I got caught up in historical precedents and citations.

Let me see if I can summarize your position, and you let me know where I misinterpret or get it right before I dive headlong into another lengthy post. As I understand, you feel that:

- The word "pleasure" is seen by the majority of people nowadays as conveying a negative activity or at the very least a self-indulgent - maybe even destructive - activity.
- Explaining Epicurus' expansive re-definition of "pleasure" (ΗΔΟΝΗ) distracts from the deeper meaning and potential application of his philosophy to modern life.
- Trying to get people to accept/understand that Epicurean re-definition in light of their modern sensitivities to the word "pleasure" is counterproductive.
- It would be more productive to explain Epicureanism to newcomers without resorting to using the word "pleasure" or using phrases like "The goal of life is pleasure."
- You would advocate for using terms more in line with "Life Itself is the Greatest Good" and avoiding using "pleasure" until, maybe, much further down the road when it is encountered in the ancient texts.

Would that be a fair summary?

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of October 28, 2025 at 2:26 PM**

All living beings by nature move toward pleasure and away from pain. The word pleasure, understood as a broad category rather than as any one specific object of feeling, is the telos that arises out of nature.

We call the greatest pleasure that which is without pain - when pleasure can't be increased to any higher level.

Virtues and practical wisdom are tools that help us to move toward pleasure and to live a pleasant life.

Because we humans are social animals and can reason through choices to find that which brings the best outcome, we must have social contracts to neither harm nor be harmed - all humans equally recoil from pain.

And [PD17](#): "The just man is most free from trouble; the unjust most full of trouble." And so it is for the sake of pleasure that we act justly.

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of October 28, 2025 at 2:31 PM**

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

And [PD17](#): "The just man is most free from trouble; the unjust most full of trouble." And so it is for the sake of pleasure that we act justly.

Also, taking it a step further...if I understand my own nature with regard to pleasure and pain, then it can give me pleasure when I know that I am helping someone else escape from pain...and thus also I don't intentionally cause pain to anyone.

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of October 28, 2025 at 2:37 PM**

fyi...this thread:

Post

[Let's explore and reclaim pleasure](#)

This article might be a start for those of us who are in need of reclaiming all aspects of pleasure...and hope to hear from others on any further thoughts and ideas.

I myself am stuck on pleasure = food ... and hope to move beyond that.

Article title: "When did pleasure become a dirty word?"

Excerpt:

"Why is pleasure so valued in other parts of the world, but not here, not in the U.S.?"

On the heels of [International Happiness Day](#), which has been celebrated internationally on March 20 since 2012,...



Kalosyni

September 26, 2021 at 12:27 PM

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### **Post by “DaveT” of October 28, 2025 at 4:12 PM**

Thinking about this further, I believe Epicurus' focus on understanding nature as the foundation for his belief system is parallel to the modern focus of science. And this includes physics, which wants to understand and apply natural laws. To paraphrase physicist Brian Greene's statement: he is content to know that he is composed of particles of matter formed by natural processes from star formation. Since matter can only be converted to energy and vice versa, his atoms exist forever. Can't be more Epicurean than that!

This seems to me to fit into the parallel concept I'm examining. Within the lifetime greatest goal of focusing on nurturing your life, there exists the means to that goal. The means are by increasing/decreasing pleasure and pain. The two are related to each other, like matter and energy; one can be converted to the other, but neither can be escaped from or done away with.

Life as the goal does not suffer from the truly rare exceptions of giving up one's life for a friend or to avoid pain by suicide. Rather, it gains with the understanding of the means of nurturing life with pleasure that is totally within your personal control.

But back to explaining Epicureanism and focusing on a belief that life is the greatest good. That it can be a better *conceptual declaration* of what is the goal of life for the modern Western mind might bear out. (Again, only as a preliminary statement to anyone inquiring about it.)

Perhaps the above introduction should be accompanied with an explanation of the Epicurean awareness that *when you are dead, you're dead*, which clarify the discussion to the goal of life *is life while you have it*.

And then, perhaps Epicurus' observations in his Ethics might become less abstract, and clearer when expressed as: So enjoy your pleasurable thoughts and your well considered pleasurable activities. Your life deserves the best you can offer it.

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## Post by "Don" of October 28, 2025 at 4:42 PM

### [Quote from DaveT](#)

the goal of life is life while you have it.

This seems to me to set up a tautology. One of my biggest problems with "Life is the Greatest Good" direction is that it sets up a problem right from the beginning: The Greatest Good of Life is Life; The Goal of Life is Life.

The telos/Greatest Good/goal is defined as "that to which every action points" or "the reason for which every action is done." It is the final answer to the question "Why do you do that?" That's why answers like Pleasure and Virtue are argued about. If we say Life is the reason we do everything, that isn't a satisfactory answer to me. "So I can go on living" doesn't provide any additional information. How can we answer "Life" or even "Living" is the end to which all actions point. That's not really a "why" in my mind. On the other hand, "because it gives me pleasure" seems to be a better answer. If you ask questions, even of someone who answers it is because of Virtue that they do everything, if you press hard enough, they should admit that they pursue Virtue because it gives them pleasure to do so.

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## Post by "Cassius" of October 28, 2025 at 4:46 PM

I am still processing most of DaveT's post but I have to first comment on this part, because it may indicate a part of the reason I am still working on trying to know exactly where you are going DaveT.

Because when you say this ....

### [Quote from DaveT](#)

To paraphrase physicist Brian Greene's statement: he is content to know that he is composed of particles of matter formed by natural processes from star formation. Since matter can only be converted to energy and vice versa, his atoms exist forever. Can't be more Epicurean than that!

... I see an immediate warning flag. As far as "atoms existing forever" goes, both Democritus and Epicurus agreed on that, but you definitely CAN get "more Epicurean than that, because despite this common ground Epicurus diverged sharply from Democritus on skepticism and determinism and therefore presumably on many other ethical issues. I suspect that this observation plays into the problem we're confronting about terminology. I have no clue about any other aspects of Brian Greene's thinking or who he is, but I would not generally conclude say that anyone "can't be more Epicurean than that" simply because he thinks things are ultimately made of atoms and void. The role of pleasure and pain in the canonical test of "truth" still remains to be resolved.

And maybe the reason I point this out is that for all we know Brian Greene or any average atomist may be completely against the ethical conclusions that Epicurus reached. Epicurus factors in many additional canonical and physics-based conclusions that are not yet resolved simply by saying that everything is composed of atoms and void. So we have sort of a parallel here in terms of the need to be very clear in our definitions of pleasure, life, virtue, gods, etc.

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### **Post by "DaveT" of October 30, 2025 at 10:00 AM**

[Don](#) Your comment is fair on the weakness of the statement "the goal of life is life while you have it" Perhaps a deeper dive like: *The greatest good, is to live out your life as Nature intends.* sits a little better? Not that anyone should interpret Epicurus in that fashion, but it does resonate better with me.

[Cassius](#) And perhaps clarifying my reference to Brian Greene: it was for his view that he doesn't worry about an afterlife, knowing that he is fulfilling Nature's laws that upon death, he will return to the stuff of the stars, the stuff he is made of while living. Not that he is an Epicurean, but that his sentiment on Nature is Epicurean.

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### **Post by "Robert" of November 2, 2025 at 10:18 AM**

Sorry to jump in late here--many insightful points have been made already. In reflecting on the topic during the week, I had another look at the essays by Annas ("Epicurus on Pleasure and Happiness") and Sedley ("Epicurean vs. Cyreniac Happiness"). I also spent some quality time with Gassendi's "[Happiness](#)," in which he set out to present Epicurean hedonism to a 17th-century (Christian) audience.

All three of these writers relate Epicureanism to the broader philosophical topic of "eudaimonia." I like Annas's formulation:

"Epicurus is telling us that we will be happy, have the best overall life, by having pleasure as our final aim, and that we shall achieve this by living according to the Virtues." [We could add some other elements here, such as the tetrapharmakon, understanding of nature, etc.]

Gassendi begins his essay by explaining the relationship between eudaimonia and the summum bonum:

"Although happiness is properly the same thing as the enjoyment of the chief good, and therefore the best experience which may be desired, nevertheless because this state of enjoyment includes the chief good, happiness itself was made to be called the chief good. It is called the "chief of goods," "the ultimate good," "the end of the ends," and "the end *par excellence*," because all other things are desired and sought after for its sake, while happiness itself is ultimately desired for its own sake."

He subsequently builds the argument that pleasure is a valid "chief good." In doing so, he draws on the idea of pleasure as a broad category, as [Kalosyni](#) has done earlier in the thread.

I'm wondering, then, if the "branding" issue might be addressed simply by contextualizing the term--as these authors have done--and also explaining its relationship to Epicurean materialism, and to nature. While [DaveT](#) rightly expresses concerns about over-complexity, we could look to examples like Annas's above in order to see how to express things more pithily. If there are only two sensations (pain/pleasure), and Epicurean philosophy is about lived experience (that is, experience characterized by sensation), then it seems to follow that *any* summum bonum would necessarily revert to pleasure.

I haven't had a chance to re-read DeWitt, but am wondering if "life itself" might be a somewhat loose way of referring to *eudaimonia*. Since life happens regardless of philosophy, it might make sense to specify "the good life" or "the well-lived life" or even "the pursuit of happiness" as a more precise goal.

Looking forward to today's discussion!

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**Post by "Patrikios" of November 2, 2025 at 12:31 PM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4783-sunday-november-2-2025-zoom-discussion-12-30-pm-est-continuation-of-discussion-o/>

### [Quote from Don](#)

You would advocate for using terms more in line with "Life Itself is the Greatest Good" and avoiding using "pleasure" until, maybe, much further down the road when it is encountered in the ancient texts.

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

All living beings by nature move toward pleasure and away from pain. The word pleasure, understood as a broad category rather than as any one specific object of feeling, is the telos that arises out of nature.

[Don](#) , [Kalosyni](#) ,

If Divine Nature gave us "pleasure" as the guide (the Good) for human beings to operate normally (within our "design" specifications) in order to live optimally (as "designed"/"built"), then pain (in body, mind or spirit) is Divine Nature's way of reminding us that our being (body, mind, soul) is not operating normally (as "built" to operate). So, the "Divine Physician of the Soul" (Epicurus) wrote out a framework for optimal living to achieve the "Greatest Good" of a life of wellbeing, each day we are alive.

So, yes, I do think that Epicurus was trying to teach a level of understanding of how the human body operates according to basic principles found in nature for all living beings, with our feelings (pain/pleasure) as the guide.

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## Post by “Raphael Raul” of November 8, 2025 at 10:56 PM

Relating to [PD03](#)

**The Experience of living in the Complete Absence of Pain is the Highest Point or Limit...of Pleasure..**

...For me, in my experience, when there is **Aponia, Ataraxia, and Contemplative activity** (of body, mind & spirit), whether philosophical or artistic, a person achieves a state of pleasure unknown to most humans, belabored by ceaseless work



<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4783-sunday-november-3-2025-zoom-discussion-12-30-pm-est-continuation-of-discussion/>

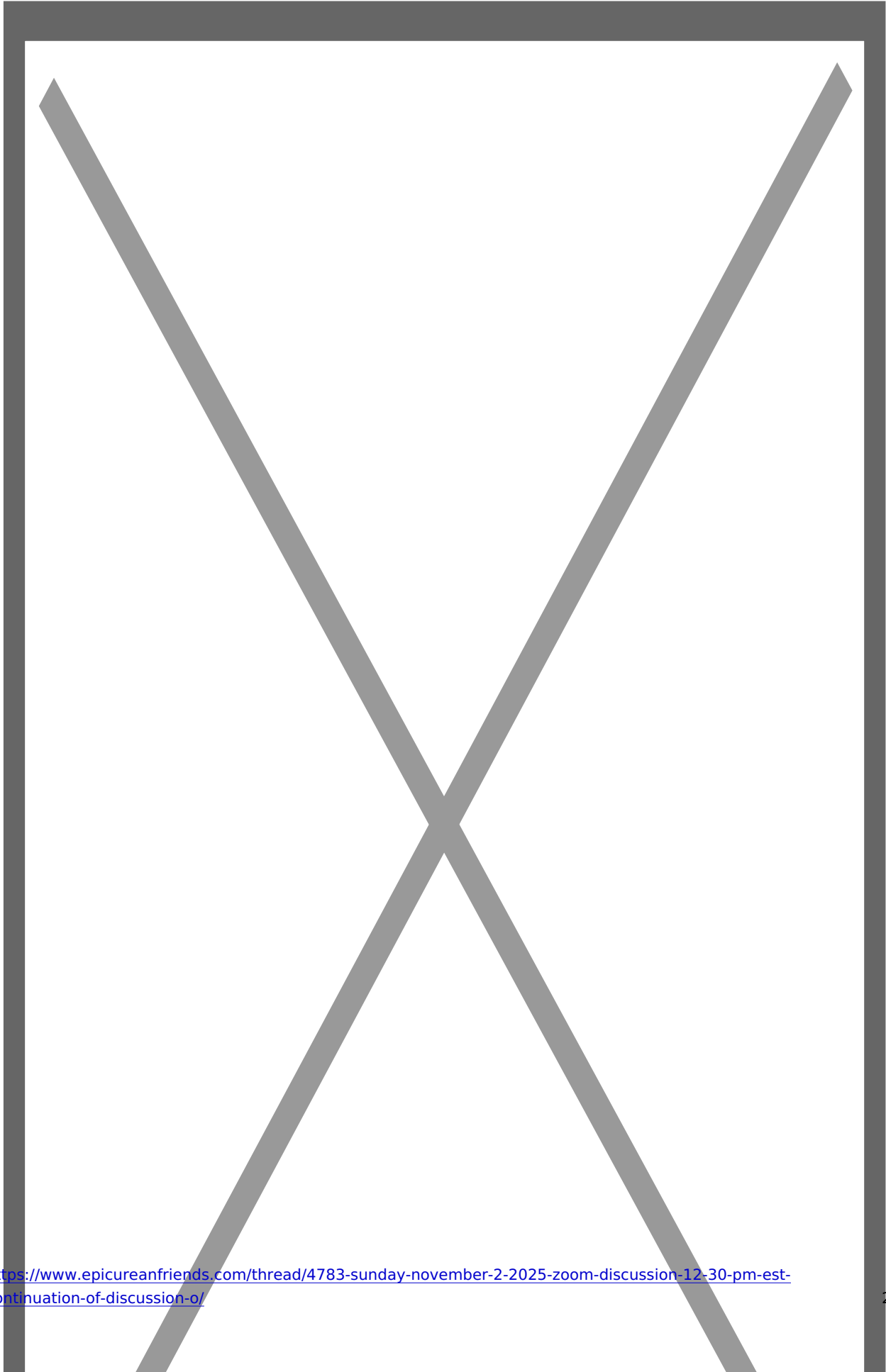
and the constant anxiety to meet the expectations of this world. This pleasure is tantamount to the joy that the Gods relish, those Gods in bliss that Epicurus, I believe, metaphorically wrote of. ...Principal Doctrine 3 states: **"The limit of pleasure is the removal of all that pains. Wherever this state is present, there is neither bodily pain nor mental distress, and one is at the fullness of pleasure."** ...I should also mention, **Prudence**, **"practical wisdom"**, **Phrónésis**, **the greatest good**, which, when applied to the body, leads to health, Aponia. When applied to the mind, Ataraxia, which allows our spirit, that which animates the body and the mind, like electricity powers a car, to enjoy the pleasure of living. In my pastel illustration above, I have tried to convey Epicurus in this state of contemplative pleasure, writing his thoughts in his beautiful garden that his followers also enjoyed. As you can see, Epicurus writes with a slight smile, as Kalosyni once suggested he should have in an image she created....Yes, for me, a smile of satisfaction, of enjoyment, **of Pleasure**.  
..So, for me, **Prudence, Aponia, Ataraxia, and Contemplative Activity** have been a guide to a **pleasant and creative life**.  
...Enjoy! 😊

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**Post by "Don" of November 9, 2025 at 5:34 AM**

[Raphael Raul](#) 's post above immediately brought to mind the mental state of *flow* described in positive psychology:

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<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4783-sunday-november-2-2025-zoom-discussion-12-30-pm-est-continuation-of-discussion-o/>

### **Post by “TauPhi” of November 9, 2025 at 3:14 PM**

Every picture you care to share here makes me bigger and bigger admirer of your work. This one is my favourite so far. Please keep it going, [Raphael Raul](#).

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### **Post by “Raphael Raul” of November 10, 2025 at 10:51 PM**

Thank you, Tau Phi, for your kind comments on my illustration of the Principle Doctrine #3. The fact that this is your favorite is inspiring!...Yes, I will create more illustrations.

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### **Post by “Raphael Raul” of November 14, 2025 at 9:04 PM**

Thank you, Don, for the link to Flow.

...This is an experience I have often had in drawing and painting: when I start a piece, time passes to my astonishment afterwards. Also, my art students, after two and a half hours of learning and work, say "Already!" when I tell them to stop, and we will present what we have done through the session. Also, many of my art students have mentioned an increase in their ability to concentrate and focus after months of training the eye to see and the hand to render what is seen.

I found this quote below to be to the point.

But I have not experienced the phenomenon of not needing to eat, drink, or sleep.

...[Mihaly Csikszentmihályi](#) and others began researching flow after he became fascinated by artists who would essentially get lost in their work.<sup>[8]</sup> Artists, especially painters, got so immersed in their work that they would disregard their need for food, water, and even sleep. The theory of flow emerged when Csikszentmihályi sought to understand the phenomenon experienced by these artists.