

# Episode 308 - TD36 - Tracing Epicurus' Key Ideas From the Principal Doctrines To The Tetrapharmakon To Cicero's Epicurean Speakers

Post by "Cassius" of November 12, 2025 at 4:01 PM

Welcome to Episode 308 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the most complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world. Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at [EpicureanFriends.com](http://EpicureanFriends.com), where we discuss this and all of our podcast episodes.

This week we continue covering Cicero's "Tusculan Disputations" from an Epicurean perspective. Today we continue our discussion with the second half of [section 10 of Part 5](#) where Cicero criticizes Metrodorus and Epicurus for allegedly making high-sounding statements by being inconsistent for involving pleasure and pain in them.

As we discussed last week, Cicero identifies this question of whether and how the wise man can always be happy as one of the most important - perhaps the most important - in philosophy.

Today we will look at the four points that are summarized all-too-briefly in the "Tetrapharmakon," and we will expand on the meaning of each branch by referring to the full text of the first four [Principal Doctrines](#), supporting statements in the letters and fragments of Epicurus, and to where Cicero has Torquatus reference them in Book One of On Ends, including:

## Quote

XIX. At the same time this Stoic doctrine can be stated in a form which we do not object to, and indeed ourselves endorse. For Epicurus thus presents his Wise Man who is always happy: (3) his desires are kept within bounds; (2) death he disregards; (1) he has a true conception, untainted by fear, of the Divine nature; (4) he does not hesitate to depart from life, if that would better his condition. Thus equipped he enjoys perpetual pleasure, for there is no moment when the pleasures he experiences do not outbalance the pains; since he remembers the past with gratitude, grasps the present with a full realization of its pleasantness, and does not rely upon the future; he looks forward to it, but finds his true enjoyment in the present.

## Quote

XII. Again, the truth that pleasure is the supreme good can be most easily apprehended from the following consideration. (3) Let us imagine an individual in the enjoyment of pleasures great, numerous and constant, both mental and bodily, with no pain to thwart or threaten them; I ask what circumstances can we describe as more excellent than these or more desirable? A man whose circumstances are such must needs possess, as well as other things, a robust mind subject to no fear of death or pain, because (2) death is apart from sensation, and (4) pain when lasting is usually slight, when oppressive is of short duration, so that its temporariness reconciles us to its intensity, and its slightness to its continuance. When in addition we suppose that such a man is (1) in no awe of the influence of the gods, and does not allow his past pleasures to slip away, but takes delight in constantly recalling them, what circumstance is it possible to add to these, to make his condition better?

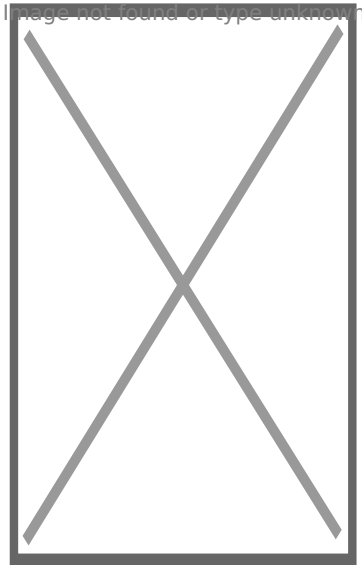
[media]<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/68684769/media>

---

## **Post by “Cassius” of November 13, 2025 at 6:37 AM**

We will probably find useful material in the Bernier/Gassendi Three Discourses material, because on page 13 Epicurus' view of happiness is summarized, citing several particulars which are of prime importance, followed by a well-developed explanation of each. But these are not the four, but the following:

- 1 - The Knowledge and Fear of God ("the right ideas we are to entertain") (p.14)
- 2 - That Death is not an Evil (p. 15)
- 3 - Do Not End Your Life Prematurely ( ...Relates to the abominable opinion of the Stoics that men in some cases have liberty to commit suicide.) (p.25) On page 28 B/G argues that Epicurus did \*not\* hasten his own death. B/G seems to be ignoring what is said in the letter to Menoeceus and B/G seems to \*endorse\* the idea that it would be better never to have been born (?!)
- 4 - Do Not Be Impatient For Or Despair Of The Future. The proper attitude toward the future is neither to be impatient for it nor to despair (p.34)
- 5 - Focus on the present and do not defer happiness (p 35)
- 6 - Proper Attitude Toward Natural and Necessary Desires (p 39)
- 7 - The Call to Study Philosophy (p39)



[Three discourses of happiness, virtue and liberty. 1699 : Gassendi, Pierre. : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

Three discourses of happiness, virtue and liberty. 1699..Digitized from IA40313015-80.Previous issue:...

archive.org

#### Quote

As to Epicurus we shall speak more at large, that he makes Happiness to consist in the Ease of the Body, and the Tranquility of the Mind, teaching at the same time, and maintaining, That the efficient Causes of this Felicity, are neither the delicious Wines, nor the delicate Meats, nor any such thing; but a sound, just and enlightened Reason assisted by Virtue, from which it is not to be separated, and which duly weighs and examines the Causes and Motives that induce us, either to embrace or shun any thing. Therefore designing to treat afterwards of Happiness, he earnestly exhorts, to consider thoroughly of the things that conduce to it; and because amongst those things the chief is, That the Mind may be disengaged from certain Mistakes, which cause continual Disturbances and vain Fears, he mentions several Particulars, which he believes to be of that Importance, that when well examined, will settle the Mind, and procure to it a real and solid Happiness.

---

**Post by “Cassius” of November 19, 2025 at 10:52 AM**

I'll be adding some notes as I make while editing this episode. This first note also relates to recent comments about natural and necessary desires and how one of the key aspects of the unnatural / unnecessary category is that they CANNOT be satisfied.

I probably did not emphasize the "limit" issue enough in comparing PD3 to what Cicero is saying. I think there's definitely a parallel between PD3 and what Torquatus says:

#### Quote

PD03. The limit of quantity in pleasures is the removal of all that is painful. Wherever pleasure is present, as long as it is there, there is neither pain of body, nor of mind, nor of both at once.

Torquatus in On Ends Part 1 - XII. Again, the truth that pleasure is the supreme good can be most easily apprehended from the following consideration. (3) Let us imagine an individual in the enjoyment of pleasures great, numerous and constant, both mental and bodily, with no pain to thwart or threaten them; I ask what circumstances can we describe as more excellent than these or more desirable? A man whose circumstances are such must needs possess, as well as other things, a robust mind subject to no fear of death or pain, because (2) death is apart from sensation, and (4) pain when lasting is usually slight, when oppressive is of short duration, so that its temporariness reconciles us to its intensity, and its slightness to its continuance. When in addition we suppose that such a man is (1) in no awe of the influence of the gods, and does not allow his past pleasures to slip away, but takes delight in constantly recalling them, what circumstance is it possible to add to these, to make his condition better?

Both of these underlined sections from Torquatus are making the point that after you reach the desired status then it cannot be made "better" or "more excellent."

As I think about it now that's probably the best way to understand the "limit of quantity" reference in PD03, and how it relates to the "variety" issue. Certainly longer time allows for more pleasure in terms of time, and someone could argue that more time allows for more "quantity" of pleasure.

The ultimate point seems to be that the definition of the "best" feeling of pleasure is when pleasure is not accompanied by any pain. That fits nicely with the additional point no extra amount of time allows for pleasure that is "better" or "more excellent" than the pleasure we can experience here and now. And it's a target or a theoretical goal as much as anything else, because we can still be "happy" even if we don't always or even ever reach the point of eliminating all pain. As evidence for that we have Epicurus saying that he happy even during his final sickness and Diogenes Laertius and Cicero saying that Epicurus held that the wise man

can be "happy" even under torture.

if indeed this is Torquatus' way of expressing [PD03](#), and I think it probably is, then I'd say that this is a much more understandable-to-modern-ears way of saying it.

---

## **Post by “Cassius” of November 21, 2025 at 11:22 AM**

This podcast will be released later today. In the meantime another note:

In discussing the tetrapharmakon i make the comment around 28 minutes in that people often have a problem with the use of the term "easy" as it applies to the good being easy to get and the bad being easy to endure.

In connection with other points being made in recent episodes, I am going to explore over time this possibility that i have not ordinarily stressed:

(1) it is clear that Epicurus saw the need to address the challenge made in [Philebus](#) and other places that the highest good must "have a limit" as stated also in [PD03](#).

(2) I have previously taken the position that Epicurus was meeting that challenge by stating that when all pain is eliminated that is by definition or theory the limit of pleasure, and I do continue to think that makes sense.

(3) In the past however I have dismissed this argument as having further implications and therefore did not apply it further, and that led me to the tendency to dismiss the argument as having any real merit on its own.

(4) However on thinking further I now begin to believe that Epicurus did not mean to diminish the importance of the argument, and that he in fact embraced it himself in his own presentation.

(5) By now in this list my direction is probably clear: of course this tetrapharmakos wording was not as far as we know from Epicurus himself, so the "easy" is what is suspicious. I now want to explore the possibility that the real meaning of what is captured here is not that what is good is necessarily "easy" to get, but that what is good (pleasure) is "attainable" because in fact it is graspable in full, it "has a limit" that enables it to be grasped.

(6) the same will go for pain in the fourth leg. The point would not be that the terrible is "easy" to avoid or endure, but that it is in fact "attainable" to endure it because it too has a limit - it

cannot remain forever because death will terminate even the worst pain.

Epicurus never says in [PD03](#) or [PD04](#) that what is good or bad is "easy" to reach. That's an overlay of the tendency of some people to focus on "absence of pain" as being akin to nothingness and therefore "easy" to obtain. The argument Epicurus is addressing, and then picking up for his own use is clearly different from that. The point is more likely to be that what is truly good and bad in life is not some fantasy of idealistic divine perfection, or evil in the sense of a supernatural force or eternal punishment in hell. What is true is instead that the good (pleasure) is attainable, and the bad (pain) is avoidable, because they "have a limit" which cannot be exceeded.

This line of thinking would parallel other recent comments I have made that, as Torquatus is stressing, the key to the understanding of the natural and necessary desire analysis is that it helps to analyze whether the goal of the desire is in fact attainable, and therefore reasonable to pursue, or in fact unattainable, and therefore unreasonable by definition to pursue.

The fact that most people fail miserably in achieving happiness and avoiding disaster is proof that none of this is "easy," and I don't think Epicurus would have agreed with that kind of phrasing. I doubt Epicurus considered at the end of his life that all of his efforts to build his school had been "easy" at all, and in fact I think he would have resented the implication.

---

### **Post by “Cassius” of November 21, 2025 at 12:37 PM**

A reference from this podcast for those who don't know it. I am amazed that in a quick look for "how sweet it is" with Jackie Gleason this is the only one I find. I know there must be hundreds more:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vw0TaZhvKes>

---

### **Post by “Cassius” of November 21, 2025 at 3:41 PM**

Episode 308 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. This week our episode is entitled: "Tracing Four Key Ideas From the [Principal Doctrines](#) to the Tetracharmakon To Cicero's Epicureans"

[media]<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/68684769/media>

## Post by "Cassius" of November 21, 2025 at 3:46 PM

I've now posted the episode and in finalizing the title I realized that the proper name is tracing these four ideas from the [Principal Doctrines](#) to the Tetracharmakon to Cicero's Epicurean SpeakerS" - but we only mentioned Torquatus. For those reading this thread in the future a complete treatment of this as to [PD01](#) and the correct view of the gods would necessarily include what Velleius had to say in Cicero's "On The Nature of the Gods."

---

## Post by "Don" of November 21, 2025 at 5:59 PM

At risk of being a broken record, is important to remember that the first two lines are \*not\* commands. They're not in the imperative: "Don't do this." They are statements of fact:

God causes no fear.

Death causes no need for anxiety.

---

## Post by "Cassius" of November 21, 2025 at 6:51 PM

### [Quote from Don](#)

At risk of being a broken record, is important to remember that the first two lines are \*not\* commands. They're not in the imperative: "Don't do this." They are statements of fact:

You're not a broken record on this at all.

This part let me be clear I don't say sarcastically at all --- I just look forward to the day that your translation prevails over Wikipedia consensus!

This is a large part of what we are up against!

As expressed by Philodemus, and preserved in a Herculaneum Papyrus (1005, 5.9–14), the *Isotaphicus* reads:<sup>77</sup>

Don't fear god,	ἆραβον ὁ θεός,
Don't worry about death,	ἀνίστεται ὁ θάνατος
What is good is easy to get,	καὶ τὸγαθὸν μὲν εὐκταίον,
What is terrible is easy to endure	τὸ δὲ θανάσιον εὐκαταβέβητον

Don also what about the "easy" part -- do you agree with Wikipedia that "easy" is a fair translation, or would you modify that as well?

---

## Post by “Don” of November 21, 2025 at 10:34 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Don also what about the "easy" part -- do you agree with Wikipedia that "easy" is a fair translation, or would you modify that as well?

εὐκτητός , ον, honestly acquired, ex., “πλοῦτος” (wealth); easily gotten

εὐεκ-καρτέρητος , ον, easy to endure; written for εὐεγκ.

From

εὐ- had a wide semantic spectrum: easily but also honorably; well, thoroughly, competently;

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

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

- ably idem, page 2.
- adroitly idem, page 13.
- advantageously idem, page 14.
- arrange idem, page 41.
- capably idem, page 111.
- capitally idem, page 112.
- commendably idem, page 147.
- commodiously idem, page 148.
- creditably idem, page 183.
- estimably idem, page 283.
- excellently idem, page 288.

- fairly idem, page 302.
- finely idem, page 321.
- flourish idem, page 329.
- fortunately idem, page 340.
- gallantly idem, page 352.
- handsomely idem, page 383.
- happily idem, page 384.
- hopefully idem, page 405.
- impress idem, page 423.
- keep idem, page 467.
- laudably idem, page 478.
- luckily idem, page 503.
- meritoriously idem, page 526.
- nicely idem, page 557.
- off idem, page 569.
- profitably idem, page 653.
- propitiously idem, page 653.
- prosper idem, page 653.
- prosperously idem, page 653.
- reconcile idem, page 680.
- reputably idem, page 699.
- richly idem, page 712.
- righteously idem, page 715.
- rightly idem, page 715.
- satisfactorily idem, page 734.
- settle idem, page 758.
- skilfully idem, page 780.
- successfully idem, page 834.
- thrive idem, page 870.
- virtuously idem, page 954.
- well idem, page 973.

## PLUS

--ἐγκαρτερῶ , persevere or persist in a thing, τινί v.l. in X.Mem.2.6.22; “ἐγκαρτερεῖν [τούτοις] ἃ ἔγνωτε” Th.2.61; “πρὸς δίψαν” Plu.2.987e: c. inf., “μὴ φιληθῆναι” Id.Ages.11.

2. c. acc., await steadfastly, “θάνατον” E.HF1351, Andr.262.

3. abs., hold out, remain firm under, c. dat., “ταῖς πληγαῖς” Plu.Pomp.79; “τοῖς δεινοῖς” Luc.Anach.38: abs., Plu.Lyc.18, PAmh.2.78 (ii A. D.).

So, it doesn't have to be "easily endured." That's the LSJ definition, but it's not a widely attested word, so I'm going to leave my jury out.

---

## Post by “Don” of November 21, 2025 at 10:38 PM

FWIW, Emily Austin's translation:

Drawing upon, among other things, a passage from the *Letter to Menoeceus* and a smattering of *Principal Doctrines*, they produced “The Fourfold Remedy” (the “tetrapharmakos”).<sup>1</sup> From Philodemus:

God presents no fears, death no worries; the good is easy to get, the bad easy to endure.

---

## Post by “Cassius” of November 22, 2025 at 3:24 AM

Good list of various translations - thank you! In this case I'd lean toward one of the latter. Each of them would or could have more consistent implications for being Epicurus' version of explaining how virtue and happiness go hand in hand and how the wise man can always be happy. I could see that especially when you consider how the very next doctrine is a reference to how virtue is essential to happy living.

One way of looking at the first four, leading up to five, is that these are the virtuous way to always be happy, and that this is the true virtuous path to happiness rather than a disreputable one.

εὐ- had a wide semantic spectrum: easily but also honorably; well, thoroughly, competently;

I especially think of how Epicurus explains in the letter to Menoeceus explains that it is the Epicurean who has a holy opinion of the gods and is not impious. It's the Epicurean who really understands the virtuous / honorable position on these issues.

Cicero may be right in Tusculan Disputations in asserting that the question of whether virtue is sufficient for the happy life / how the wise man is always happy is \_the\_ central question of philosophy. If so this would not be something Cicero himself came up with but he's simply carrying that opinion down from his heroes Pythagorus - Socrates - Aristotle.

If this was in fact seen as the central question in Epicurus' time too, then the framework of the PDs would be to illustrate the virtuous position on these issues (gods, death, pleasure, pain). The virtuous person has these correctly-understood approaches to the central questions and can always be happy through this understanding.

That would lead to the preference for the translation being NOT that these views of pleasure and pain are "easy," but that they are "honorable," "competent," or "thorough" in the sense of thoroughly attainable .

---

### **Post by “Kalosyni” of November 22, 2025 at 7:07 AM**

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

It's the Epicurean who really understands the virtuous / honorable position on these issues.

Could the word "wise" be used here instead? ...It's the Epicurean who really (or correctly) understands the wise position on these issues.

---

### **Post by “Cassius” of November 22, 2025 at 7:17 AM**

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

Could the word "wise" be used here instead?

Clearly wisdom is the presumption here, but the grammar and the historical usage that Don has cited probably requires something else.

---

### **Post by “Don” of November 22, 2025 at 9:22 AM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4804-episode-308-td36-tracing-epicurus-key-ideas-from-the-principal-doctrines-to-the/>

I'm getting the sense of, instead of "easy" which to me implies a level of dismissiveness, a better idea would be "without effort or struggle." To illustrate this point, here are some of the other words in the same area of the LSJ dictionary:

- εὐείσβολος , ον, easily invaded
- εὐέκ-βα^τος , ον, easy to get out of
- εὐέκ-κάθαρος [κα^], ον, easily cleared up
- εὐέκ-καρτέρητος , ον, easy to endure
- εὐέκ-καυτος , ον, easily flaring up, Gal.11.405
- εὐέκ-κρι^τος , ον, of food, easy to excrete
- εὐέκ-νιπτος , ον, easy to wash out, of a colour
- εὐέκ-πλήρωτος , ον, easily fulfilled or realized
- εὐέκ-ποίητος , ον, easy to turn to account, i.e. assimilate, of food
- εὐέκ-πόρθητος , ον, easily sacked
- εὐέκ-πύρωτος [υ^], ον, easily heated (The soil is dry and easily reduced to powder - ἄλμυρίδων καὶ εὐεκπύρωτός ἐστι - [Strabo, Geography](#))
- εὐέκ-ρυπτος , ον, easy to wash out

So, I don't necessarily like the "easy" or "easily" connotations in English, but I could easily (pun intended) see the εὐ- and εὐέκ- conveying whatever action is implied by the rest of the word, that it involved no effort, no struggle.

In relation to the tetrapharmakos:

Pleasure really is attainable without effort, it's always readily available if we look for it.

Pain is endurable without struggle in the sense of adding suffering on top of pain. Pain is inevitable but suffering, adding an additional layer to pain, is not necessary. ex. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/meditation-is-optional>

That's my take this morning.

---

## Post by “Don” of November 22, 2025 at 12:37 PM

I'm light of my last post, I'll propose:

Ἄφοβον ὁ θεός, - God causes no fear

ἀνύποπτον ὁ θάνατος - Death causes no worry

καὶ τὰγαθὸν μὲν εὐκτῆτον, - and so there's no effort need to acquire The Good (pleasure);  
τὸ δὲ δεινὸν εὐεκκαρτέρητον - and The Terrible (pain) can be endured without struggle.

---

### **Post by “Cassius” of November 22, 2025 at 4:47 PM**

Whenever we have this discussion I for one always need to remember U469 from the Strobeus anthology (which I gather is not citable back to where the fragment itself comes (?)):

[ U469 ]

Johannes Stobaeus, Anthology, XVII.23: "Thanks be to blessed Nature because she has made what is necessary easy to supply, and what is not easy unnecessary."

it seems highly likely that this is related if not the very same thought differently expressed.

---

### **Post by “Don” of November 23, 2025 at 5:12 AM**

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

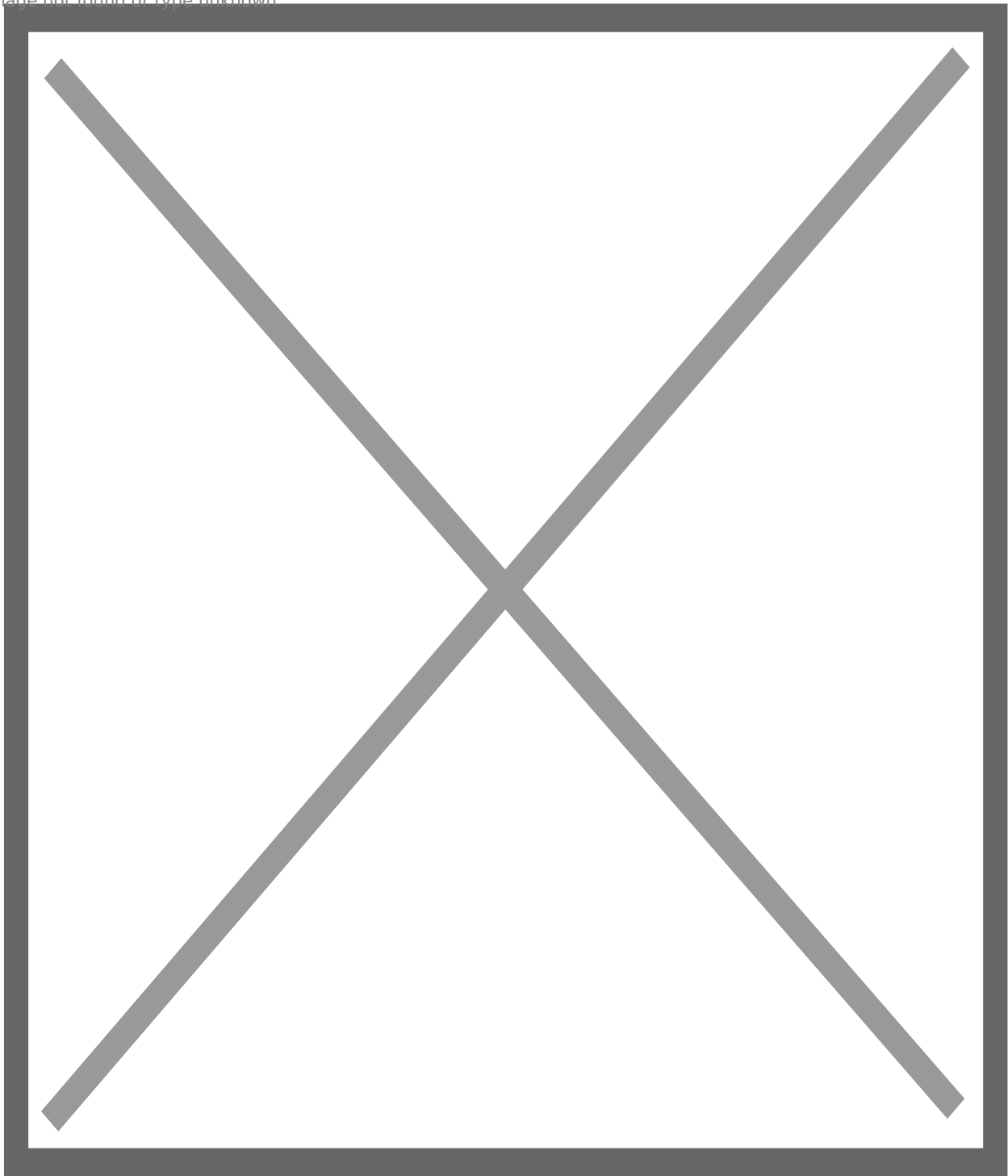
Whenever we have this discussion I for one always need to remember U469 from the Strobeus anthology (which I gather is not citable back to where the fragment itself comes (?)):

[ U469 ]

Johannes Stobaeus, Anthology, XVII.23: "Thanks be to blessed Nature because she has made what is necessary easy to supply, and what is not easy unnecessary."

Stobaeus attributes the quote to Epicurus in the section "On Self-Control"

Image not found or type unknown



[John Stobaeus: Anthology \(translated into English\)](http://www.cameronhuff.com)

[www.cameronhuff.com](http://www.cameronhuff.com)

(Sorry for the crappy reference. Working on a better one. This is the only Stobaeus I could find on the fly in English. This link explicitly said "Below is a text version of Anthology, as his book is

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4804-episode-308-td36-tracing-epicurus-key-ideas-from-the-principal-doctrines-to-the/>

now known, translated using Google Gemini Flash 2.5 in July of 2025." ☐)

ABOUT SELF-CONTROL. Chapter 17.

23. From Epicurus.

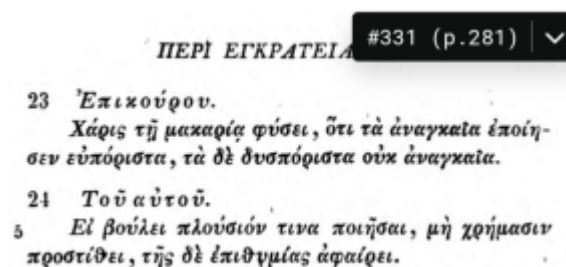
Thanks to blessed nature, that it has made what is necessary easily available, but what is difficult to obtain, not necessary.

24. From the same.

If you wish to make someone rich, do not add to his money, but subtract from his desires.

Here at least they are in Greek:

<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/njp.32101020151518?urlappend=%3Bseq=331%3Bownerid=270215977687666349>



I find it interesting that "blessed nature" "makariai physei" uses the exact word in PD1 Τὸ **μακάριον** καὶ ἄφθαρτον... (makarion ...)

---

## Post by "Patrikios" of November 24, 2025 at 4:28 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

[ U469 ]

Johannes Stobaeus, Anthology, XVII.23: "Thanks be to blessed Nature because she has made what is necessary easy to supply, and what is not easy unnecessary."

it seems highly likely that this is related if not the very same thought differently expressed.

[Cassius](#) ,

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4804-episode-308-td36-tracing-epicurus-key-ideas-from-the-principal-doctrines-to-the/>

From my reading in the *Oxford Handbook of Epicurus and Epicureanism, Chapter 7 Hedonism*, by Voula Tsouna, the phrase describing pleasure as “nature congenial to us”, that indicates that the pleasure state is our body’s natural state. Pain (both mental or physical) is Nature’s way to inform us that we are not operating in our most natural state.

#### Quote

According to Epicurus, then, pleasure has priority over every other good. This does not only, or not necessarily, mean that it is the first thing that we encounter in our lives. According to Torquatus, who says that he remains faithful to Epicurus’s way of teaching (Fin. 1.29), Epicurus designated pleasure as the telos, supreme or sovereign good, in the sense in which all philosophers agree that something is a telos: namely, all other goods must refer to it, whereas it does not refer to anything else. Epicurus’s further claim that pleasure is **akin** (syngenikon) and **connatural** (symphyton) points to its **special affinity to our own nature**. Because it has a **nature congenial to us** (cf. physin oikeian, Ep. Men. 129), every pleasure is in itself a good. Moreover, by virtue of that affinity, pleasure is closely related to physical and mental health (e.g. Ep. Men. 128). The opposite holds for pain: it is most alien to our nature and, therefore, every pain in itself is an evil and tends to destroy our constitution.

Since pleasure is our natural state, it is attainable as part of our nature.

---

### Post by “Cassius” of November 24, 2025 at 4:59 PM

What say you guys as to possible relation between this and 3 and 4 of Tetracharmakon?