

How can writing a will be justified in Epicureanism?

Post by “wbernys” of February 5, 2026 at 4:28 AM

A strong objection to Epicurus found in Cicero and discovered in Warren (2001): *Epicurus' Dying Wishes* is that writing a will, and providing for people after die, such as Diogene of Oenoanda stone writings cannot be justified with Epicurus claim that "[death is nothing to us](#)".

In particular Warren objects to the notion that we can derive pleasure from thinking that our loved ones will be okay after we die since this would arguably also admit that we can anticipate pain about things after we die which Epicurus seems to call groundless saying in letter to Menoeceus saying "For something that causes no trouble when present causes only a groundless pain when merely expected."

My own response would probably be that it is in fact groundless, agreeing with the criticism, but saying that if writing a will delivers pleasure and alleviates the natural pain of worry about loved ones after death, offering no pain to living and requiring little effort than why not? Just as we know sex, entertainment, and other natural and unnessecary desires don't alleviate any more pain after sastifying all the natural and nessecary desires but if we still want them and are easy to get and cause no pain than why not? The reason we get rid of post-mortem fears is because they pain us while alive, but if post-mortem hopes please us than it's fine to have it and it passes the hedonistic calculus despite being metaphysically groundless like the natural and unnecessary desires.

Curious to see any thoughts on this.

Post by “Cassius” of February 5, 2026 at 7:50 AM

I agree with your concern Wbernys. I strongly object to Cicero's analysis and my objection applies to Warren too. Getting rid of the fear of our own state in "being dead" is the issue I think Epicurus is addressing. There are many other aspects of issues that arise from the fact that we die that are entirely appropriate to think about and plan for. Clearly as you say thinking about things that will happen in he future can bring us pleasure or pain, and therefore steps should be taken to manage the future to the extent that we can. That's just common sense.

What you're citing here is probably a reason I have found in the past that Warren is not at all my favorite writer on Epicurus. He certainly can bring together good citations and I don't mean

to be overly critical. But I've found that there are writers I almost always find to be insightful, such as David Sedley, and then here are others who aren't. And the full spectrum from good to bad (in my view) can be found in the British writers on Epicurus.

So this analysis by Warren I would just reject. Of course Epicurus says we can derive pleasure now from thinking about the future, and of course it's reasonable to realize that something bad may happen in the future and therefore plan to avert it if possible.

[Quote from wbernys](#)

In particular Warren objects to the notion that we can derive pleasure from thinking that our loved ones will be okay after we die since this would arguably also admit that we can anticipate pain about things after we die which Epicurus seems to call groundless saying in letter to Menoeceus saying "For something that causes no trouble when present causes only a groundless pain when merely expected."

The idea that you would knowingly fail to take an action, and as a result you would know that things you know to be undesirable will happen to someone close to you, *just because you yourself will not be there to see it*, strikes me as the height of irresponsibility and the mark of a truly small person. I see nothing in Epicurus that would endorse such thinking, and I have to wonder what is going on with Warren that he would even entertain such an idea.

Post by “wbernys” of February 5, 2026 at 11:49 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

But I've found that there are writers I almost always find to be insightful, such as David Sedley, and then here are others who aren't.

Agreed, I feel like a common thread to the less insightful commentators is ignoring Epicurus aim of being a moral reformer and therapist as DeWitt explains. Emily Austin also i feel understands this point of Epicurus mission. I think philosophers like Warren get too caught up in the mental image of Epicurus as a secluded grouch who's only concerned is with internal logic ignoring his main stated goal of ensuring people live pleasantly.

On the past for example he both encourages extreme gratitude for past goods and shuns being tormented by past evils, which sounds inconsistent, but only if you ignore his concern of pleasure as the chief good, not absolute internal logic like a dialectic. I feel like death is the same, his concern is fear, not absolute consistent logic.

Post by “wbernys” of February 5, 2026 at 2:59 PM

As is typical I find a good article after making a post.

If anyone else is interested in this question I found a good article by Bill Wringe called "*Epicurean Wills, Empty Hopes, and the Problem of Post Mortem Concern*" which responds directly to Warren and defends Epicureanism. I think it rightly points that difference that only harmful empty beliefs are to be removed but hopeful ones not so much.

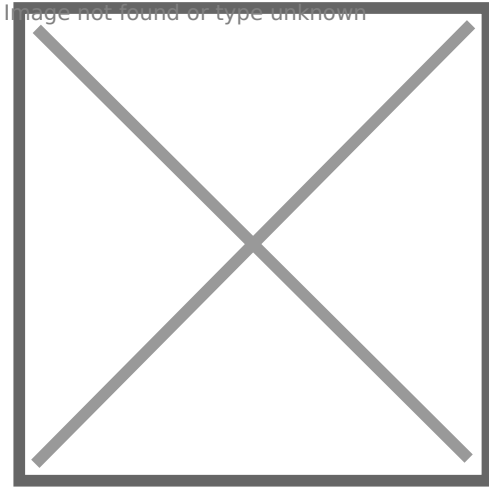
"I shall claim that although an Epicurean should regard fears about post mortem events as 'empty', it is reasonable for him or her to have a different attitude to hopes about post mortem events. It is rational to try to get rid of empty fears, since such fears are disturbing. By contrast, it is not necessarily rational to try to rid ourselves of hopes relating to post mortem events."

Post by “Cassius” of February 5, 2026 at 4:05 PM

I presume we can find on Academia but could you possibly a link?

Post by “wbernys” of February 5, 2026 at 4:13 PM

Here's a link

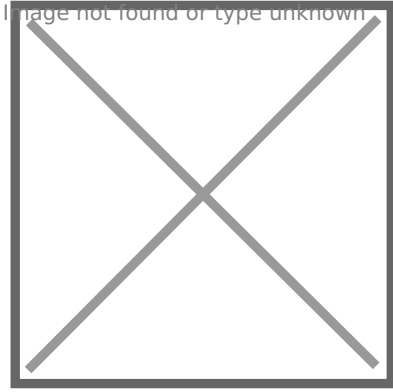


[Bill Wringe, Epicurean Wills, Empty Hopes, and the Problem of Post Mortem Concern - PhilArchive](#)
philarchive.org

Post by “wbernys” of April 5, 2026 at 1:37 AM

Wanted to share a great article other users may like by Orestis Karatzoglou, he makes a particularly strong point how will writing is so easily justified by the main principles of Epicurean Friendship and allows to feel more secure, in other words showing to friends that we care enough about them that we will take efforts to care for them after we pass enhances the core trust that is required by friendship, the author explains the Epicureans saying "It is more pleasant to give than to receive". Society as well will also generally give us good will and esteem as well if we act in a way to ensure well being to future generations. In my view, this also explains caring for unborn and foreigners and can generally be put under Epicurean honor and philanthropy. Since this enhances the trust of friendship and our security to life's pleasure in society, so essential for a pleasant life.

Felt other might really like, a rather intelligent argument. The best I've come across. And easily refutes Warren and any questions (as i myself shamefully asked) about how Epicurean Diogenes of Oenoanda was.



[Can Epicurus Write a Will](#)

Cicero criticizes Epicurus for writing a will and thus acting inconsistently with one of the basic tenets of his theory, namely that death is not an evil (De...

www.academia.edu