

PD 25 meaning? by Woolf (2004)

Post by “wbernys” of May 10, 2026 at 6:20 PM

Hi all. Principal Doctrine 25 is a notoriously hard doctrine to understand. This is really only the Principal Doctrine i have trouble understanding and as a good Epicurean i want to understand it.

Cooper (1999) thinks it is evidence that Epicurus is not a psychologist hedonist, however there is Woolf's (2004) idea that this is actually an affirmation of psychological Hedonism, which i find convincing and wanted to share.

He translates it as follows: "If you shall not on every occasion ascribe [or: refer, ἐπανοίσεις] each of your actions to the goal (τέλος;) of nature, but tum prematurely (προκαταστρέψεις)29 when making pursuit or avoidance to some other [goal] (εἰς ἄλλο τι), your actions will not correspond with your words". (Pg.17)

He explains this by saying. "What Principal Doctrine XXV teaches is that, **never mind what you say your goals are**, and that your words indicate a turning away from nature's goal to some other: **your actions will belie your words. You will still be acting in such a way as to maximise your freedom from pain and distress nonetheless.** Reference to any other motive than this on a given occasion is premature. Of the agent who turns aside, Epicurus says literally "your deeds will not follow your words" (οὐκ ἔσσονται σοι τοῖς λόγοις αἱ πράξεις ἀκόλουθοι.). Your words, that is, may have switched allegiance; but your deeds will not accompany them. You will remain, in your actions, a seeker after nature's goal" (Pg. 19)

Basically it says that "no matter how much the Stoics like to talk about virtue in of itself", there actions are still ultimately motivated by a fear of pain and desire to remove mental disturbance, even if they don't admit it. Kind of like how the Skeptic says that nothing can be known and those who deny free will say all choices are predetermined but does not actually live like this, their actions do not follow their words. Curious if others agree with this.

Post by “Cassius” of May 10, 2026 at 7:50 PM

[Quote from wbernys](#)

Cooper (1999) thinks it is evidence that Epicurus is not a psychologist hedonist,

Do you have a link to what you are referring to here? I would like to see the argument he is advocating.

[Quote from wbernys](#)

Basically it says that "no matter how much the Stoics like to talk about virtue in of itself", there actions are still ultimately motivated by a fear of pain and desire to remove mental disturbance, even if they don't admit it.

I generally come down on the other side of this question because I think there is a major issue of determinism to consider here. I would expect Epicurus' focus would be on "free will" and he would not advocate a doctrine that would not allow for people to "be wrong" and to in fact pursue something that they recognized was not in their best interest.

I know that we have seen opinions on this forum before on both sides of the issue, so this is a good opportunity to discuss it again, especially because I see both positives and negatives in the use of the argument that "everyone is really a hedonist." if I recall correctly this is in Emily Austin's "Living For Pleasure," but I don't like using that approach myself. Maybe someone can persuade me to see it differently if we identify and articulate both sides of the question.

Post by “Cassius” of May 10, 2026 at 7:51 PM

Ha - I see this earlier thread from you on the same subject --- one thing I do agree with is that this is an interesting issue to flesh out

epicureanfriends.com/thread/4770/

Post by “Don” of May 10, 2026 at 7:55 PM

[PD25](#) If at all critical times you do not connect each of your actions to the natural goal of life, but instead turn too soon to some other kind of goal in thinking whether to avoid or pursue something, then your thoughts and your actions will not be in harmony.

εἰ μὴ παρὰ πάντα καιρὸν ἐπανοίσεις ἕκαστον τῶν πραττομένων ἐπὶ τὸ τέλος τῆς φύσεως, ἀλλὰ προκαταστρέψεις εἴτε φυγὴν εἴτε δίωξιν ποιούμενος εἰς ἄλλο τι, οὐκ ἔσσονται σοι τοῖς λόγοις αἱ πράξεις ἀκόλουθοι.

[PD25](#) literally uses εἴτε φυγὴν εἴτε δίωξις which are the antonyms of each other mentioned above: flee/escape from and pursue/chase. Saint-Andre chooses to use the traditional "avoid" but that doesn't translate the dichotomy of φυγὴν and δίωξις.

Post by “Cassius” of May 10, 2026 at 8:11 PM

Yeah the very fact that you are fleeing/escaping or pursuing/chasing indicates to me that what you're doing is exercising free will, and I don't see how that is compatible with implying that everything everyone does is "necessarily" because they see it as leading to greater pleasure for them.

We don't need to take every question and submit it to AI engines for their response so I'll hold off from that and I suggest others do too at least for a while. Exploring the issue is genuinely useful for our own development, and I think we're going to find that the issue is definitely worth talking about and thinking through to taking a position.

Post by “wbernys” of May 10, 2026 at 8:56 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Do you have a link to what you are referring to here? I would like to see the argument he is advocating.

Sure this comes from Cooper's 1999 book called *Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology* and is in the chapter on Pleasure and Desire in Epicurus.

Unfortunately i was able to access it only as a student through my school's library and can't share it. But i'll share a relevant portion.

"This *Principal Doctrine* (25) is warning Epicureans to beware of drifting off in their day-by-day practical thinking into the snares of these other—rationalist— philosophers' ethical doctrines. Epicurus is insisting strongly that the whole range of ideas about nobility of action and about the supreme value of simply having a mind constituted in a certain way which produces actions in accord with itself, which lie at the center of this philosophical tradition in ethics, is totally at odds with the "empiricist" approach to human life for which Epicureanism stands. And of course, in insisting on this, he is presupposing that it is psychologically possible for a human

being, even an educated and committed Epicurean, to act in pursuit of other goals than pleasure as the ultimate object of their action—goals other than any pleasure, goals other than pleasure according to any construal of the form or circumstance of pleasure that is the right one to take as one's ultimate guide in life. This shows that Epicurus cannot, consistently with this Doctrine, at any rate, have been a hedonist in the psychological theory of human decision and action" Pg. 491

Woolf directly responds to these in his article "What kind of Hedonist was Epicurus" (2004), you can get a Jstor (i think free with 100 article a month) account to read it.

Post by "wbernys" of May 10, 2026 at 9:15 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

[PD25](#): If at all critical times you do not connect each of your actions to the natural goal of life, but instead turn too soon to some other kind of goal in thinking whether to avoid or pursue something, then your thoughts and your actions will not be in harmony.

The main with this translation (and interpretation) that Woolf points out, and i find convincing, is that the Greek apparently says "our words" (λόγοις), and under this interpretation why would "your thoughts and your actions will not be harmony. After all if we can choose to have a different principles aside from pleasure, like virtue, or sensual pleasure, why would their be a lack of harmony between actions and our words?

As Woolf says in Pg. 18.

"Certainly, there is something quite puzzling about what Epicurus seems to envisage here. Given that he is speaking of someone who turns aside from one goal to another, **why should there be any issue at all about conflict between deeds and words?...**

"A short answer will emphasize that it is indeed nature's goal that one is turning aside from. Under this description, it might seem more plausible that at some level it will continue to exert its grip even as one wrenches oneself away from it. **Exert its grip on what, though? Surely not on what we say (our logoi). There is nothing to prevent us from averring, when asked, that our goal is now virtue, or maximisation of intense felt pleasure (or whatever it may be). But these will be mere words (so that it is somewhat misleading to translate *logoi* as "principles")** (Commentary: Cooper does this). Given that Epicurus elsewhere (Letter to Herodotus, 37-8) shows an aversion to "empty words" and a preference for "the things that "underlie them", it would be very much in his spirit to be disparaging *logoi* here, and (in a case of conflict) taking what one actually does as the true

measure of one's motivations"

Post by “wbernys” of May 10, 2026 at 9:23 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Yeah the very fact that you are fleeing/escaping or pursuing/chasing indicates to me that what you're doing is exercising free will, and I don't see how that is compatible with implying that everything everyone does is "necessarily" because they see it as leading to greater pleasure for them.

Epicurus does explicitly say that "some things happen by necessity", and i think a necessary aversion to pain or pursuit of pleasure might just be a necessary thing for Epicurus. This was part of his "cradle argument" is that we, by nature, delight in pleasure and hate pain, it is therefore something of necessity, like not controlling who our parents are.

I think this is overall compatible with Epicurus defense of free will. We can have free will to believe absurd things, like the mythic gods or death being an evil, we have freedom to make extreme miscalculations, but not maybe not in deciding that we like pleasure and dislike pain, and that this always play a role in our decisions.

Post by “Don” of May 10, 2026 at 10:13 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I don't see how that is compatible with implying that everything everyone does is "necessarily" because they see it as leading to greater pleasure for them.

I don't think people need to consciously see all their actions as "leading to greater pleasure for them." It's a fact, as far as I'm concerned. Pleasure is the telos, summum bonum, the end to which all actions and decisions ultimately end. This PD is asking us to acknowledge that fact. It's not like we need to subject every miniscule decision to a hedonic calculus. We can lie to ourselves and try to convince ourselves that "I'm doing this to be virtuous / wise / altruistic / etc." but we're always always trying to lead our lives to greater pleasure for ourselves and away from pain. We can have ideas that lead is astray that try to convince ourselves we're

leading our life to greater pleasure, but it's still a lie.

I'm also seeing other translations use reasoning and rationalization even creed: *"If at any time you fail to refer each of your acts to nature's standard, and turn off instead in some other direction when making a choice to avoid or pursue, your actions will not be consistent with your creed."* Strodach (2012)

That seems more in line with my interpretation.

Post by "wbernys" of May 10, 2026 at 10:19 PM

[Don](#) just to be clear. Do you and i agree on this inerpreation. I thought you disagreed but now it seems like you and have the same idea. Just wanna be sure.

Post by "Don" of May 10, 2026 at 10:25 PM

[Quote from wbernys](#)

[Don](#) just to be clear. Do you and i agree on this inerpreation. I thought you disagreed but now it seems like you and have the same idea. Just wanna be sure.

I think I'm becoming confused (the "joys" of posting vs having a conversation).

Could you say one more time what is "this interpretation"?

Post by "wbernys" of May 10, 2026 at 10:31 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

Could you say one more time what is "this interpretation"?

The interpretation of [PD25](#) is what I'm referring to.

I think it's an affirmation of psychological hedonism, that you will always pursue nature's end, freedom from pain and pleasure, and if you say your doing something different, your words and your actions will be in conflict, like the actions of the skeptic's daily life conflicting his words that he knows nothing.

You can say you are not turning to nature's goal of pleasure, but your actions say otherwise.

Post by “Don” of May 10, 2026 at 10:34 PM

Yes. I agree with that.

Post by “wbernys” of May 10, 2026 at 10:43 PM

[Don](#) Good to know.

Hmm..It seems my senses were all true by interpretation was wrong and i thought we disagreed.

Someone should really make an epistemology about a distinction between senses and opinion.

Post by “Godfrey” of May 11, 2026 at 12:21 AM

Although I'm not saying that [PD25](#) states this, at the moment I don't agree that everyone pursues nature's end. I for one spent years pursuing my "duty", and all it gave me was a life of misery. I would say that the consequences of using reason to override nature's end in all likelihood will be an abundance of pain. Being unaware of nature's end may lead to the same result.

To me, Epicurus is saying to "walk the talk."

Post by “Don” of May 11, 2026 at 7:12 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

everyone pursues nature's end

I would argue that everyone pursues what they believe will bring them pleasure, will provide happiness. It's just that sometimes - often - we fool ourselves into pursuing those things that will not in reality bring pleasure in the long run.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

I for one spent years pursuing my "duty", and all it gave me was a life of misery.

In reference to this, why did you pursue "duty"? If you really drill down honestly, I would suggest that if you keep asking yourself "why did I do that?" and keep asking it at every step, you may eventually get to something like "because if I didn't do it, it would have caused me pain. If I *hadn't* 'done my duty' I would have felt guilt and other painful feelings."

I do not want this to seem combative. I've done this to decisions of my own and have come to similar conclusions.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

I would say that the consequences of using reason to override nature's end in all likelihood will be an abundance of pain.

That is very well said, and I agree with that! It strikes me as almost a textbook definition of following an empty desire.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Being unaware of nature's end may lead to the same result.

I think we as humans can rationalize almost any action, but we can't escape that we pursue pleasure and flee pain. The problem is few of us pursue pleasure well or that we try to fool ourselves into what the best path to pleasure and well-being is.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

To me, Epicurus is saying to "walk the talk."

I don't disagree with that. The talk is going to reinforce the walk, and vice versa.

Post by "Cassius" of May 11, 2026 at 7:54 AM

[Quote from wbernys](#)

We can have free will to believe absurd things, like the mythic gods or death being an evil, we have freedom to make extreme miscalculations, but not maybe not in deciding that we like pleasure and dislike pain, and that this always play a role in our decisions.

This is exactly what I think is *not* the case in terms of end result. Now I do agree that the feelings of pleasure and pain are largely "hard-wired" as we are born finding some things painful and other things pleasurable. Perhaps some modifications can be made in that over time and with training but they are relatively minor. And in that sense I do think there is a large element of necessity.

And that's the point. "Psychologically" in our mind we can tell ourselves to pursue some other goal than pleasure. We have the free will to do that as Godfrey makes the point and Don has observed the same thing. This is absolutely obvious when we consider all the different views in real life as in philosophy as to what goals we should pursue in order to maximizes "happiness."

And talking about "happiness" is another way of making the same point. Most everyone seems to "want to be happy" (a point that would support "psychological hedonism" but we can change our minds or have different opinions about what happiness means to us an infinie number of times.

So when Don says this I agree:

[Quote from Don](#)

I would argue that everyone pursues what they believe will bring them pleasure, will provide happiness. It's just that sometimes - often - we fool ourselves into pursuing those things that will not in reality bring pleasure in the long run.

But I don't see how that makes any kind of profound point. It's like saying "People do what they want to do" or "People do what they think they have to do" and those points may or may not be true in a given situation.

But the whole project of pursuing Epicurean philosophy is that your mind can choose what to pursue and to avoid, and that you should affirmatively and consciously seek to align your goals at every moment with the goal nature has given you to pursue, which is pleasure. And this statement presupposes that you have the power to choose another goal other than pleasure.

And in this context part of the point could be that everyone (even Stoics and Religionists) say that they are pursuing "happiness" but if you pursue happiness by pursuing anything other than pleasure (nature's goal) then your actions (pursuit of virtue or piety or duty, for examples) will not be consistent with your avowed goal (happiness)

As another comment from another direction, if in fact the best translation is one of "your" then I would not rule out the possibility that this statement was pulled out of a specific letter or some other specific context which would provide additional background to those who were aware of it. And that's another reason I would be reluctant to adopt any construction of its means that would seem to undercut the entire project of emphasizing our power through reason to align our actions with reasonable conduct so as to achieve a life of happiness which is a life of pleasure.

Post by “Cassius” of May 11, 2026 at 8:04 AM

But maybe it would help me understand where you are coming from wbernyis if I understood:

What do you think it gains someone to make the point "Epicurus was a psychological hedonist" ?

That's the point I really don't understand. I feel like someone is thinking that this is a profound insight that leads to some really important conclusions or living a better life, but I just don't see the direction or the benefit in arguing for the label.

It seems to me that [PD25](#) can be read perfectly logically as a call to make sure your goals and actions truly align, because it's very possible to be mistaken about whether you are pursuing your goals and actions consistently.

What benefit comes from saying "[PD25](#) tells us that Epicurus was a psychological hedonist?"

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 11, 2026 at 8:31 AM

[PD25](#). "If on each occasion, instead of referring your actions to the end of nature, you turn to some other, nearer, standard, when you are making a choice or an avoidance, your actions will not be consistent with your principles."

Here is my interpretation:

If on each occasion, instead of referring your actions to the natural pursuit of a life of happiness (as guided by pleasure and pain) if you turn too quickly to a simplistic standard such as skepticism (suspension of Judgment (Epoché)), when you are making a choice or an avoidance, your actions will not be consistent with achieving the best life.

[Cassius](#) [wbernys](#) [Don](#) [Godfrey](#)

and [Bryan](#)

Post by “wbernys” of May 11, 2026 at 8:54 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

But maybe it would help me understand where you are coming from wbernys if I understood:

What do you think it gains someone to make the point "Epicurus was a psychological hedonist" ?

That's the point I really don't understand. I feel like someone is thinking that this is a profound insight that leads to some really important conclusions or living a better life, but I just don't see the direction or the benefit in arguing for the label.

Great question, let me say a few things then!

First off, Psychological Hedonism is not exactly a huge issue to me, i certainly don't think it needs to be on any pamphlets as a major point or something. However, i think it may be helpful for two reasons.

Secondly, If this is Epicurus' position (which i believe it is) than it is important to know how to defend it from others like the Stoics and Religious who will say that this an evil doctrine, taught by a nihilistic and crude man, and both he and we are just projecting our own vile natures onto good people (something I've seen a few times). Like Paul says, we should be "**not ashamed of the gospel**" (**Romans 1:16**) of our sage and an important part of that is sticking with Epicurus when he says something, and knowing how to defend it, as the ancient Epicureans all did, or at least defending him from the charges of idiocy if he made a small error. **Being unafraid to defend Epicurus himself as a model i consider an essential part of the Epicurean**

mission. Main reason i like you guys so much, even when i think you overdo it.

Thirdly, similarly to how people underestimate how important the gods were to Epicurean therapy i think the therapeutic element of Psychological Hedonism is something you may overlook in it's importance in Epicureanism.

A lack of clear end goal of all human behavior, i worry makes ethical discussion veer into something like the kind of skepticism i think Epicurus really despised as so vile, where the main goal humans should pursue is an ever elusive and unclear question, since people can just choose different goals with different criteria and come to different answers. Whereas if we push deep and realize nature's goal binds everyone, whether they admit it or not, we can both help them realize they are actually pursuing nature's goal (removing the stigma around pleasure and pain as vile, impious, or effeminate) and help them better achieve it.

Post by “wbernys” of May 11, 2026 at 8:58 AM

I always like this passage from Frances Wright as a good example of how seeing humans having a shared goal can be an important thereuptic element.

“My sons! do you seek pleasure? I seek her also. Let us make the search together. You have tried wine, you have tried love; you have sought amusement in revelling, and forgetfulness in indolence. You tell me you are disappointed: that your passions grew, even while you gratified them; your weariness increased even while you slept. Let us try again. Let us quiet our passions, not by gratifying, but subduing them; let us conquer our weariness, not by rest, but by exertion.’ Thus do I win their ears and their confidence. Step by step I lead them on. I lay open the mysteries of science; I expose the beauties of art; I call the graces and the muses to my aid; the song, the lyre, and the dance. Temperance presides at the repast; innocence, at the festival; disgust is changed to satisfaction; listlessness, to curiosity; brutality, to elegance; lust gives place to love; Bacchanalian hilarity to friendship.”

Post by “Cassius” of May 11, 2026 at 9:15 AM

[Quote from wbernys](#)

Secondly, If this is Epicurus' position (which i believe it is) than it is important to know how to defend it from others like the Stoics and Religious who will say that this an evil doctrine, taught by a nihilistic and crude man, and both he and we are just projecting our own vile natures onto good people (something I've seen a few times).

OK here in this sentence, it is the "this" I am questioning (I added the underline).

I would say that Epicurus would hold that "pleasure" is nature's guide and that happiness is a life of pleasure and that is what we should pursue, and that we see that this is nature's goal by observing the young of all species.

Are you suggesting that instead of saying it that way, it is more persuasive to say "Epicurus was a psychological hedonist, meaning that we all pursue what we believe we will find pleasurable whether we do so consciously or not."

If you are suggesting that saying "Epicurus was a psychological hedonist" is more persuasive, I don't understand why that would be the case, because then going on to defend the position that "everyone is doing it whether they do so consciously or not" in my view just then shifts the playing field over onto the question of whether people are conscious of their actions and reasoning or not. I don't personally find arguing that position particularly productive of anything because it sounds like the topic of debate has become some form of determinism.

Apparently there's some disconnect in what you're seeing and what I am seeing. I am by no means saying you are wrong (as I think Don agrees with you) but I am still missing the point of shifting the discussion of the pursuit of pleasure over to the field of "whether you are conscious of it or not."

Help me understand why it seems attractive to talk about "psychological hedonism" rather than just "hedonism."

Is it because "psychological hedonism" implies you can't help it so you are defending hedonism on the grounds that "you can't help it"?

Post by “Cassius” of May 11, 2026 at 9:32 AM

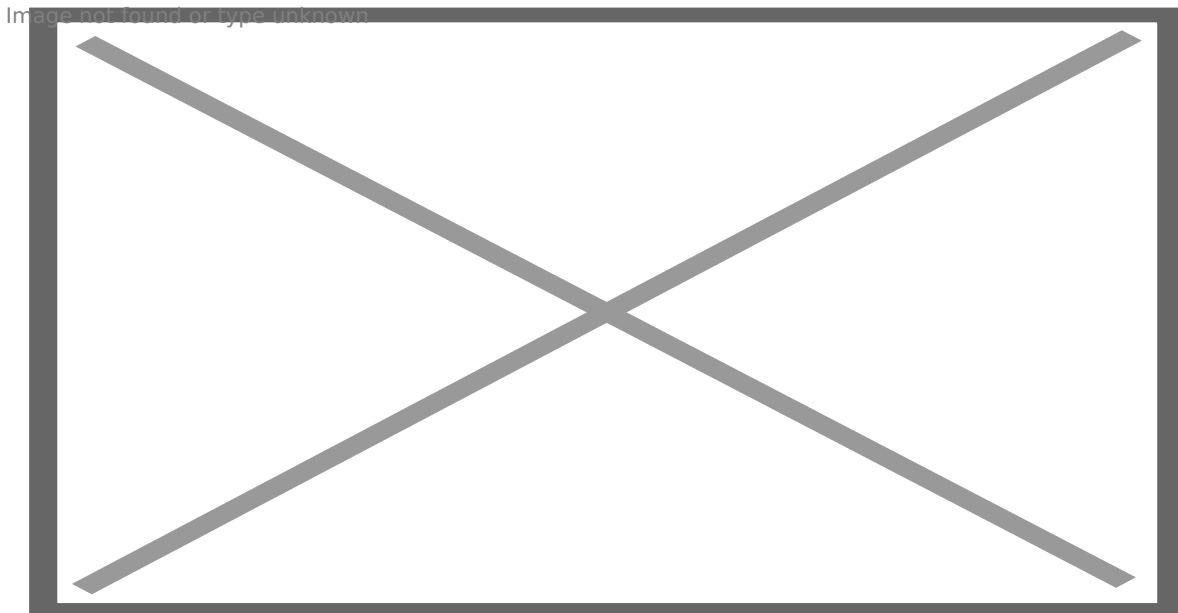
I see this and I can see where it supports where you are coming from wberny's. What I am not convinced of is that talking in terms of "psychology" is helpful to a philosophical discussion, as I see much potential damage in it for the reasons we are discussing. Is focusing on "psychological hedonism" not just a method of "apologizing for" hedonism?

I would say that Epicurus is not advocating the pursuit of pleasure because we "have to" pursue pleasure, he is advocating for it because Nature prescribes it, we have the ability to ignore Nature's prescription, and we will live better if we follow Nature rather than substituting our own goals. Do you see that part differently?

Quote

psychological hedonism, in philosophical [psychology](#), the view that all human action is ultimately motivated by desires for [pleasure](#) and the avoidance of [pain](#). It has been espoused by a variety of distinguished thinkers, including [Epicurus](#), [Jeremy Bentham](#), and [John Stuart Mill](#), and important discussions of it can also be found in works by [Plato](#), [Aristotle](#), [Joseph Butler](#), [G.E. Moore](#), and [Henry Sidgwick](#).

Because its defenders generally assume that agents are motivated only by the prospect of their own pleasures and pains, psychological hedonism is a form of psychological [egoism](#). Psychological egoism is a broader notion, however, since one can hold that human actions are exclusively self-interested without insisting that self-interest always reduces to matters of pleasure and pain. As an [empirical](#) thesis about human [motivation](#), psychological [hedonism](#) is logically distinct from claims about the value of desires. It is thus distinct from axiological or normative hedonism, the view that only pleasure has [intrinsic value](#), and from [ethical](#) hedonism, the view that pleasure-producing actions are morally right.



[Psychological hedonism | Pleasure, Pain & Motivation | Britannica](#)

Psychological hedonism, in philosophical psychology, the view that all human action is ultimately motivated by desires for pleasure and the avoidance of pain....

Post by “wbernys” of May 11, 2026 at 9:35 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Help me understand why it seems attractive to talk about "psychological hedonism" rather than just "hedonism."

Is it because "psychological hedonism" implies you can't help it so you are defending hedonism on the grounds that "you can't help it"?

Mostly, though I would rephrase it, a main problem I see with a lack of psychological hedonism is that without it, you get groundless ideas that you can "rise above pleasure", as if pleasure, because it's natural and for animals means it's something to rise above, and be "greater than your base nature", this is why just saying pleasure is the goal of nature isn't sufficient in my view since people can just vainly respond that they "rise above nature" to which an effective counter is "No you don't, you're just delusional"

This is similar to how Cicero argued against hedonism. This is also why Nietzsche called Epicurus a decadent, since he thought we had to rise above pleasure, despite occasional praise.

Psychological hedonism helps to dispel this vanity, there is no rising above pleasure or pain, there are only correct and incorrect views on how to achieve it. So it helps to both "knock down our opponents who say they are mighty and rise above pleasure, generally removes stigma around hedonism, and offers a therapy that we all pursue the same goal, so let's find out how to achieve it.

Post by “Cassius” of May 11, 2026 at 10:08 AM

[Quote from wbernys](#)

Psychological hedonism helps to dispel this vanity, there is no rising above pleasure or pain, there are only correct and incorrect views on how to achieve it. So it helps to both "knock down our opponents who say they are mighty and rise above pleasure,

generally removes stigma around hedonism, and offers a therapy that we all pursue the same goal, so let's find out how to achieve it.

Ok yes then this is just where we have a disagreement as to the best and most accurate way of describing what Epicurus is doing.

It's the same problem I have with this sentence from Britannica:

psychological hedonism, in philosophical [psychology](#), the view that all human action is ultimately motivated by desires for [pleasure](#) and the avoidance of [pain](#). It has been espoused by a variety of distinguished thinkers, including [Epicurus](#), [Jeremy Bentham](#), and [John Stuart Mill](#), and important discussions of it can also be found in works by [Plato](#), [Aristotle](#), [Joseph Butler](#), [G.E. Moore](#), and [Henry Sidgwick](#).

In my view, nothing was added of value to the world or to the human race by those two sentences, ESPECIALLY as to the result them being to imply that Epicurus held the same views as Bentham or Mill, or even similar views to Plato, Aristotle, Butler, Moore, or Sidgwick.

Our friend Elli here I think makes a similar point when she refuses to discuss Epicurean philosophy as "Epicureanism." Grouping things together overbroadly creates major problems in the understanding of ordinary people. No doubt specialists in psychology and psychiatry may find such groupings helpful, in the same way that the term "American" can apply to someone who lives in Portland Oregon or San Francisco CA or New York NY or Mobile Alabama. They all live in the same continent, but to suggest for very long that we can generalize much about their psychology from that fact would be to make a major mistake.

This conversation really solidifies why I find it unhelpful to talk not only about "psychological hedonism" but to "hedonism" in general. There are so many ways of looking at these issues that to imply that there are other commonalities beyond the term "pleasure" being centrally involved is to create more confusion than clarity.

So probably as this conversation dies down we'll all go back to our separate observations as to when and where it is appropriate to talk about "hedonism" or "psychological hedonism," and this will be a "to each his own" issue of applying whatever terminology works best for a particular situation. And I can see the merits in that approach, even if I have to grit my teeth when the term comes up and think to myself "that person*** is trying to *apologize* for pleasure." 😊😊

*** Not a reference to Webernys or anyone here!

Post by “wbernys” of May 11, 2026 at 10:18 AM

Yeah. We're just agree to disagree I guess. Nice conversation though. This is an interesting topic I wanted a thread on.

Post by “Cassius” of May 11, 2026 at 11:04 AM

I see this discussion as extremely helpful as well on the question of how best to convey Epicurean philosophy to others.

Here's another example of a similar issue, this from the blurb on "Martin the Epicurean" at Amazon:



I would draw attention to the last phrase of the last sentence. I don't mean to be criticizing anyone in particular here, and I haven't traced back to see if that is a quotation from the book itself or an addition by an Amazon or other book representative. I see the blurb is written as if it were not written by MFS himself.

But regardless of who wrote it, when I see that I can't help but think that 95% of people are going to take that as meaning either one of two things -- (1) Pleasure doesn't include sex drugs and rock-n-roll, it ONLY includes "absence of pain in the body and absence of trouble in the mind" or (2) Sex drugs and rock-n-roll may be pleasures, but the ULTIMATE pleasures are "absence of pain in the body and absence of trouble in the mind."

I am here of course using "sex drugs and rock-n-roll" as a stand-in for all of the normal and ordinary active pleasures of body and mind, specifically including "joy and delight."

And I don't think it's true, or helpful to imply even if it sounds good to some people, that either (1) or (2) are what Epicurus taught.

Edit: I'm also not entirely comfortable with the statement that Epicurus "regarded scientific knowledge as *subservient* to the moral end." Not as much of a problem there as in the explanation of pleasure, but I'd be concerned about confusion there as well. Epicurus didn't start out complaining that his teachers didn't tell him how to live happily, he started out

questioning their scientific rigor as to chaos.

Post by “wbernys” of May 11, 2026 at 11:19 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

And I don't think it's true, or helpful to imply even if it sounds good to some people, that either (1) or (2) are what Epicurus taught.

I do agree that 1 is indefensible and needlessly astatic. I don't mind 2 as much but I sympathize with your points. I definitely think Epicurus thought removal of pain was centrally important, because we can't experience the height of pleasure while in pain, and oftentimes pain doesn't allow pleasure as the two are opposites, so I don't mind commentators emphasizing that with caveats.

I mainly think the main point to be made is that Joy or Delight from sex, fine dining, or theme parks are not "baser" or inferior pleasures to tranquility or absence of pain. My reading of Epicurus is that he thinks they're all equal, as all pleasure is a unity and naturally good. Joy and Delight being an equal value variation of tranquility, not a "baser" pleasure/version, like John Stuart Mill may think. I think Epicurus explicitly rejected that as the talk of Plato's academy taling about geometry and musical theory being higher pleasures.

Agree?

Post by “Cassius” of May 11, 2026 at 11:36 AM

[Quote from wbernys](#)

because we can't experience the height of pleasure while in pain, and oftentimes pain doesn't allow pleasure as the two are opposites, so I don't mind commentators emphasizing that with caveats.

And yet on the last day of his life Epicurus considered himself happy / and/or considered it to be among his happiest days despite his excruciating pain.

How would you reconcile that with what you just wrote as quoted there?

Post by “wbernys” of May 11, 2026 at 11:46 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

And yet on the last day of his life Epicurus considered himself happy / and/or considered it to be among his happiest days despite his excruciating pain.

How would you reconcile that?

He never says it is among the happiest days of his life, he simply says it's a blissful/happy day and that he sets gladness of the mind towards past conversations, this allows him to have more pleasure than pain with the mind offsetting the pains of the flesh.

The lesson is that he has joy more often than not despite the pain, whereas others would be constitutently miserable the entire time, not that he's in the best possible state he could be in and always experiences joy.

Post by “Cassius” of May 11, 2026 at 12:16 PM

Well he's certainly not in the best condition he could possibly be, as no one would voluntarily choose kidney disease. But the general point is the happiness and predominance of pleasure do require total absence of pain, so it is perilous to summarize the philosophy as the removal of all pain rather than focusing on the value of Pleasure as allowing happiness even when some pains are present.

And I do see our conversation as being about "the best ways of explaining Epicurus to normal people" rather than that we are trying to nitpick against particular people or expressions.

Edit - thanks to Wbernys for pointing out that my second sentence should be do NOT require...!

Post by “wbernys” of May 11, 2026 at 12:34 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

But the general point is the happiness and predominance of pleasure do require total absence of pain,

Are you missing a "does not" in the middle here?

Gonna be honest, I don't really see how we disagree, now I'm just kinda confused and want the conversation to be over, since I worry we're just talking past each other.

Final post on topic. Then I'm done.

My understanding is Epicurus thought removal of pain was important since it didn't allow height of pleasure, BUT even if you didn't reach the height of pleasure (no pain in mind or body) you could still have predominance of pleasure over pain thanks to mental pleasures understanding limits of pain and gratitude for past goods, etc. Especially as mental pleasures are more important than physical ones.

As far as the whole explain Epicurus to normal people thing, I would broadly stress how to enjoy as much pleasure with as little pain as possible as the goal of life by his philosophy by understanding nature needs little, but doesn't shun more as long as they are not outweighed by pains, and that limits of pain make physical pain negligible to our happiness, with the mind being completely within our own control and more important, with the mind alone we can have more pleasure than pain at any moment, but we should still get rid of or avoid pain in the flesh, if able, as it is still bad and prevents the height of pleasure, like those of the gods.

Post by "Cassius" of May 11, 2026 at 12:44 PM

Yep you are right as usual my typing is awful! Missed the NOT there!

Post by "Cassius" of May 11, 2026 at 12:47 PM

[Quote from wbernys](#)

My understanding is Epicurus thought removal of pain was important since it didn't allow height of pleasure, BUT even if you didn't reach the height of pleasure (no pain in mind or body) you could still have predominance of pleasure over pain thanks to mental pleasures understanding limits of pain and gratitude for past goods, etc. Especially as mental pleasures are more important than physical ones

I agree with everything in that paragraph. The extra twist I would say rather than "important" I would say "the theoretical goal."

And that gets to the issue - for humans we are not going to be able to eliminate all pain if we want the most happiness possible to us. So to stress "absence of pain" as if the prime directive is to always avoid all pain is going to result in a far less happy life than if one understands that we sometimes choose pain in order to obtain greater pleasure in full.

Post by “Don” of May 11, 2026 at 1:05 PM

Y'all have been active! I need to catch up on my lunch hour!

Post by “Cassius” of May 11, 2026 at 1:22 PM

Please do Don as I don't want Wberny's to think I am singling him out! 😊

This is one of my most long-running issues with how Epicurean philosophy is presented. Saying that "the goal is absence of pain" can be explained in a perfectly logical way. However taken in isolation the slogan is apt to be misinterpreted by people who do not understand that there are only two feelings, that if you are not experiencing the one then you are experiencing the other, and that saying you want "absence of pain" means you want pleasure in the full sense of the word, including the active pleasures of joy and delight, rather than just a feeling of "nothingness."

But til my dying day I will remain convinced that a very large number of people in today's world are not interpreting the full meaning in that way. They don't read Torquatus arguing with Cicero about it, and they don't read David Sedley's "Inferential basis of Epicurean Ethics" explaining how Epicurus can apply the same logic he applies to atoms and void to pleasure and pain, and

as a result they are apt to say "Epicurus is saying the same thing as the Buddhists! Epicurus is saying get rid of all ups and downs of life just like the Stoics! We're all just one big happy family trying to rise above the siren calls of the body to achieve a blessed state of absolute spirit contemplating absolute wisdom! (Or some variation of the above.)

So I am all in favor of saying "the sun is the size it appears to be" and "pleasure is the absence of pain" and "[death is nothing to us](#)." But I want to be sure that my audience has a full explanation of why I say that, and if I'm pretty sure they don't understand it, then explanation is necessary or else you can cause more harm than good. I don't want anyone thinking I am flat-earth idiot who thinks that the sun is the size of a basketball, i don't want anyone thinking I am advocating the life of a hermit in a cave on bread and water, and I don't want anyone to think I am advocating suicide because I don't care about life.

Post by "Bryan" of May 11, 2026 at 1:30 PM

We are all aware, but it is good to keep in mind that Epicurus distinguishes between *bodily pain* and *mental pain*.

Bodily pain can often be mitigated by a prudent lifestyle -- but only mental pain can be fully eliminated through a prudent application of philosophy.

τὸ ἀλγοῦν τὰ ἀλγοῦντα	what causes pain	ΑΛΓΟΥΝ <i>pain</i>
τὸ λυπούμενον τὰ λυπούμενα	what distresses	ΛΥΠΟΥΜΕΝΟΝ <i>vexation</i>

Post by "Cassius" of May 11, 2026 at 1:38 PM

I agree that the distinction between bodily and mental pain is very important.

[Quote from Bryan](#)

Bodily pain can often be mitigated by a prudent lifestyle -- but only mental pain can be fully eliminated through a prudent application of philosophy.

But I am not sure we have discussed this before: Can even mental pain be totally eliminated / extinguished? What texts might you cite for that position that the mental pain of loss for a loved one (for instance) can be fully extinguished. I think of that example in part because I see wbernys earlier quoted Frances Wright (which I just now saw) and this always reminds me of her paragraph here from [chapter 10](#):

[Quote from A Few Days In Athens Chapter 10](#)

But there is yet a pain, which the wisest and the best of men cannot escape; that all of us, my sons, have felt, or have to feel. Do not your hearts whisper it? Do you not tell me, that in death there is yet a sting? That ere he aim at us, he may level the beloved of our soul? The father, whose tender care hath reared our infant minds — the brother, whom the same breast hath nourished, and the same roof sheltered, with whom, side by side, we have grown like two plants by a river, sucking life from the same fountain and strength from the same sun — the child whose gay prattle delights our ears, or whose opening understanding fixes our hopes — the friend of our choice, with whom we have exchanged hearts, and shared all our pains and pleasures, whose eye hath reflected the tear of sympathy, whose hand hath smoothed the couch of sickness. Ah! my sons, here indeed is a pain — a pain that cuts into the soul. There are masters that will tell you otherwise; who will tell you that it is unworthy of a man to mourn even here. But such, my sons, speak not the truth of experience or philosophy, but the subtleties of sophistry and pride. He who feels not the loss, hath never felt the possession. He who knows not the grief, hath never known the joy. See the price of a friend in the duties we render him, and the sacrifices we make to him, and which, in making, we count not sacrifices, but pleasures. We sorrow for his sorrow; we supply his wants, or, if we cannot, we share them. We follow him to exile. We close ourselves in his prison; we soothe him in sickness; we strengthen him in death: nay, if it be possible, we throw down our life for his. Oh! What a treasure is that for which we do so much! And is it forbidden to us to mourn its loss? If it be, the power is not with us to obey.

Should we, then, to avoid the evil, forego the good? Shall we shut love from our hearts, that we may not feel the pain of his departure? No; happiness forbids it. Experience

forbids it. Let him who hath laid on the pyre the dearest of his soul, who hath washed the urn with the bitterest tears of grief — let him say if his heart hath ever formed the wish that it had never shrined within it him whom he now deplores. Let him say if the pleasures of the sweet communion of his former days doth not still live in his remembrance. If he love not to recall the image of the departed, the tones of his voice, the words of his discourse, the deeds of his kindness, the amiable virtues of his life. If, while he weeps the loss of his friend, he smiles not to think that he once possessed him. He who knows not friendship, knows not the purest pleasure of earth. Yet if fate deprive us of it, though we grieve, we do not sink; Philosophy is still at hand, and she upholds us with fortitude. And think, my sons, perhaps in the very evil we dread, there is a good; perhaps the very uncertainty of the tenure gives it value in our eyes; perhaps all our pleasures take their zest from the known possibility of their interruption. What were the glories of the sun, if we knew not the gloom of darkness? What the refreshing breezes of morning and evening, if we felt not the fervors of noon? Should we value the lovely-flower, if it bloomed eternally; or the luscious fruit, if it hung always on the bough? Are not the smiles of the heavens more beautiful in contrast with their frowns, and the delights of the seasons more grateful from their vicissitudes? Let us then be slow to blame nature, for perhaps in her apparent errors there is hidden a wisdom. Let us not quarrel with fate, for perhaps in our evils lie the seeds of our good. Were our body never subject to sickness, we might be insensible to the joy of health. Were our life eternal, our tranquillity might sink into inaction. Were our friendship not threatened with interruption, it might want much of its tenderness. This, then, my sons, is our duty, for this is our interest and our happiness; to seek our pleasures from the hands of the virtues, and for the pain which may befall us, to submit to it with patience, or bear up against it with fortitude. *To walk, in short, through life innocently and tranquilly; and to look on death as its gentle termination, which it becomes us to meet with ready minds, neither regretting the past, nor anxious for the future.*"

Post by “Bryan” of May 11, 2026 at 1:48 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Can even mental pain be totally eliminated / extinguished?

I'll start with this quote of Epicurus (Lives 10.135b):

"...therefore, study these things and the things akin to them (by yourself, day and night, and

with one similar to yourself) and you will never be thoroughly disturbed, neither in wakefulness nor in a dream..."

It is true that here Epicurus uses "διαταράττειν (to thoroughly disturb)" instead of "ταράττειν (to disturb)"

Post by “Cassius” of May 11, 2026 at 1:48 PM

That second paragraph there from Frances Wright is in my view a good argument for why treating "Absence of pain" as the prime directive has to be explained very carefully.

I know from the moment I first shake hands with a new friend that he may well die before I do, and the closer we get the more the mental pain of his loss will hurt. The only way to avoid that will be for me to die first, which is hardly a more attractive alternative.

BUT I PURSUE THAT FRIENDSHIP ANYWAY because my goal in life is the greatest happiness through pleasure possible for me, not the avoidance of each and every and all pain.

I gladly and willingly accept the cost in pain that will be exacted in exchange for that pleasure, which greatly outweighs the pain.

Post by “Don” of May 11, 2026 at 2:39 PM

I've only caught up reading part way but I'll wade in here.

I really don't care whether we talk about psychological hedonism or hedonism or whatever.

What I come back to is that Epicurus said living creatures pursue pleasure and flee from pain. Stop.

That's why pleasure is the telos. It is the thing to which all our actions and decisions terminate. Ask enough questions, drill deep enough, and everyone should/has to admit that the reason they did something was it thought it would make them feel good, it would bring pleasure. One can obfuscate, use fancy virtue-laden rhetoric, lie to oneself and others consciously or subconsciously. The result is the same. Epicurus calls us to pursue pleasure consciously and deliberately and to question our decisions in light of this guide that Nature has provided.

Culture and society provide innumerable avenues that claim to provide us with pleasure or dictate what we "should" do. Epicurus calls us to question our culture's "that's the way things are done."

Post by "DaveT" of May 11, 2026 at 3:28 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Can even mental pain be totally eliminated / extinguished? What texts might you cite for that position that the mental pain of loss for a loved one (for instance) can be fully extinguished. I think of that example in part because I see wbernys earlier quoted Frances Wright (which I just now saw) and this always reminds me of her paragraph here from chapter 10:

This discussion is very interesting to me since it goes to the practicality of living in a reality of what you can sense, what you have experienced in the past, and our feelings of pleasure and pain. What challenges me, and perhaps all of us is the short term and the long term of living one's life. Taking the latter first, the long term might be measured by comparing all the pleasures we've luckily experienced vs. all the pains we've experienced and deciding retrospectively: "I have lived a satisfying, happy life." That exercise can give pleasure even as we engage in it.

It's the short term that is more challenging, though. The knowledge that my intimate partner may die before me, or my friendship must endure even though my friend is terminally ill are mental issues that dwell in our conscious thoughts and short term memories (and frightfully might endure there for a long time, if not forever).

I think solace can be found in persisting in the Epicurean pursuits, along with what modern science is showing how our plastic brains can be "managed" if you will. By conscious decisions to associate bad times that come to mind with the good times we've also had with a person, or a place, we can return to the pleasure of that relationship.

Post by "Cassius" of May 11, 2026 at 3:46 PM

[Quote from DaveT](#)

What challenges me, and perhaps all of us is the short term and the long term of living one's life.

I think I know what you mean and i agree. However i personally try to avoid focusing the greater than / lesser than analysis purely in terms of "time," even in comparing the short term to the long term. It's probable that it's better to find a way to juxtapose "some of the consequences" against "all of the consequences" so that we don't run afoul of the idea that "longer" is always "better." Sometimes a pleasure that lasts for a shorter period of time can be more important to us than a longer period of time. And for that I would cite the letter to Menoeceus:

Quote

[126] But the many at one moment shun death as the greatest of evils, at another (yearn for it) as a respite from the (evils) in life. (But the wise man neither seeks to escape life) nor fears the cessation of life, for neither does life offend him nor does the absence of life seem to be any evil. And just as with food he does not seek simply the larger share and nothing else, but rather the most pleasant, so he seeks to enjoy not the longest period of time, but the most pleasant.

I constantly have to remind myself of this because it is very easy to fall into the idea of taking things in isolation and thinking longer is always better, but even in terms of lifespan that isn't necessarily so. There are many factors to consider, and Godfrey has planted in my mind that PDO9 points us not only to "duration" but also to "intensity" and "part of the body (presumably including mind) affected."

Post by “DaveT” of May 11, 2026 at 4:42 PM

[Cassius](#) I see your point. Certainly thinking about the longer scale of times past does little good for living in the present. You know, there is no really "better or worse" in this context. And focusing "purely in terms of time", I agree, makes no sense at all. The longer term view I presented first, was in light of the temptation I've seen among older people to suffer when bad old memories, the negatives, and the painfulness of past experiences arise. At 78 years of age, I spend little time looking back over the long term but the temptations do arise from time to time. At younger ages I spent almost no time on it at all!

Post by “Don” of May 11, 2026 at 8:18 PM

[Quote from wbernys](#)

[Quote from Cassius](#)

And yet on the last day of his life Epicurus considered himself happy / and/or considered it to be among his happiest days despite his excruciating pain.

How would you reconcile that?

He never says it is among the happiest days of his life, he simply says it's a blissful/happy day and that he sets gladness of the mind towards past conversations, this allows him to have more pleasure than pain with the mind offsetting the pains of the flesh.

Exactly. Τὴν μακαρίαν... καὶ ἄμα τελευταίαν ἡμέραν τοῦ βίου "The blissful land at the same time last day of my life"

Post by “Bryan” of May 11, 2026 at 8:26 PM

Don, I agree with you that is the correct interpretation. It seems the confusion comes from the the superlative as translated by Seneca in Letters to Lucilius, 92.25, which uses "beātissimum"

atquī haec Vōx in ipsā officīnā voluptātis audīta est "beātissimum" inquit "hunc et: hunc diem Agō" Epicūrus - cum Illum hinc ūrīnae Difficultās torquēret, hinc īnsānābilis exulcerātī Dolor ventris

and yet this statement was heard in the very workshop of pleasure "most blessed" Epicurus said "is this indeed: this day I am living" - even while on one side difficulty of urination was tormenting him, and on the other side the incurable Pain of an ulcerated stomach

But I have not seen this in Greek, so I think the superlative can be ignored as just rhetorical from Seneca.

Post by “Cassius” of May 11, 2026 at 8:47 PM

Thanks for that clarification. Presuming that it is possible for one day to be happier than another, and that "happy" here doesn't imply a superlative state, then I sure would be happier without kidney disease than with it!

But back to the more basic and at the same time more urgent point to be clear about: Happiness, which is what Epicurus says we do everything to obtain, does not require complete absence of pain.

Are we agreed on that?

Post by “Don” of May 11, 2026 at 9:40 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

But back to the more basic and at the same time more urgent point to be clear about: Happiness, which is what Epicurus says we do everything to obtain, does not require complete absence of pain.

Are we agreed on that?

Agreed, because as mortal beings we can *never* be *completely* free from *every* pain, mental or physical.

Post by “wbernys” of May 11, 2026 at 9:47 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

But back to the more basic and at the same time more urgent point to be clear about: Happiness, which is what Epicurus says we do everything to obtain, does not require complete absence of pain.

Are we agreed on that?

Seems right to me. I think Epicurus might think (personal conjecture) happiness may require absence of pain or joy in the mind, since the feelings of the mind are so intense, but i certainly

think one can be "happy" even with pain in the flesh, as with the mind being cleared up, he has more pleasures than pain.

As Torquatus says the wise man is always happy because "Thus equipped he enjoys perpetual pleasure, for there is no moment when the pleasures he experiences do not outbalance the pains"

But we certainly would be happier and have more pleasures with pains in the flesh being removed or replaced by a pleasure. So removal of pain does remain a goal even if we can be "happy" without it, since we want to be even happier and have more pleasures to achieve complete happiness where nothing torments us and we can enjoy pleasures undiluted.

Post by "wbernys" of May 11, 2026 at 9:52 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

Agreed, because as mortal beings we can never be completely free from every pain, mental or physical.

I worry this may be too strong. I think Epicurus would say that it is both possible to be completely free from pain and we in fact are completely free from pain quite often, i think he would just say the mortality means we sometimes can't and sometimes have a few anxieties and pains that affect even the wisest person from reaching complete absence of pain. Unlike the Gods, who never have to deal with that.

Post by "Don" of May 11, 2026 at 9:56 PM

The discussion about mental and physical pain brings us right back around to ataraxia and aponia all over again.

As time has gone on, I have come to a (semi-firm) belief that ataraxia is not about rooting out every single disturbing fear and anxiety of every variety. To me, ataraxia is about rooting out the existential dread of fear of the gods, of death, of post-death punishment, and similar unfounded fears and anxieties. Ripping out these fears and anxieties leaves behind a rock solid foundation of calm tranquility when it comes to the big questions of life, and once that foundation is laid, it is permanent -- IF you've truly internalized it! If it's merely an intellectual

acknowledgement like "yeah yeah no need to fear gods. Death is nothing. We all get that. Okay, got it" it could come back in times of stress and hardship. You have to KNOW IT, in your bones, when waking and sleeping.

It's a similar case for aponia, but I'm still working out the details of that. I don't think it means what we usually think it means. But I'll get back to you on the specifics.

Post by “wbernys” of May 11, 2026 at 10:08 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

As time has gone on, I have come to a (semi-firm) belief that ataraxia is not about rooting out every single disturbing fear and anxiety of every variety. To me, ataraxia is about rooting out the existential dread of fear of the gods, of death, of post-death punishment, and similar unfounded fears and anxieties.

You know the Greek better than i do but i tend to think it's the opposite. I think Epicurus' idea is that those existential dreads you mentioned is what's mainly holding humanity (even good and benevolent people) back from attaining Ataraxia (complete absence of every fear and anxiety of every variety). But we can still have fears that are grounded in reality if we are not good and benevolent, this is why he thinks we should not be unjust, remain friendless, or have obsessive love of fame or power since that would prevent ataraxia, even though those are not big existential or unfounded fears of the universe or anything.

Side note: I kind of agree with [Cassius](#) that Epicurus didn't consider Ataraxia a major term in his philosophy or anything. He only used it a few times and i don't think we should imagine them as the most important terms in his philosophy.

Post by “Don” of May 11, 2026 at 10:09 PM

[Quote from wbernys](#)

we in fact are completely free from pain quite often,

LOL I know that *I'm* never completely free from pain. Maybe I'm overgeneralizing though. There's always a twinge, ache, etc, somewhere in my body or mind. Now, if I try, I can ignore them for a bit. If I'm engrossed in a task or engaged in an activity that keeps my attention focused, I suppose I can feel like I'm pain free.... and is that the same of "completely free from pain" if I'm not consciously aware of any pain? I suppose, may be.

I need to check -- and if someone has the citations, please share -- does Epicurus use "freedom from pain" or rather "complete freedom from pain"? I honestly can't remember.

NOTE: I added the post below from me in 2023 to provide context and citations. I thought I remembered doing something like that and found it.

Post by “Cassius” of May 11, 2026 at 10:17 PM

[Quote from wbernys](#)

So removal of pain does remain a goal even if we can be "happy" without it, since we want to be even happier and have more pleasures to achieve complete happiness where nothing torments us and we can enjoy pleasures undiluted.

I agree firmly with the idea that getting completely rid of bodily and mental pain constitutes the goal, and that having such a goal serves a very real purpose as identifying an organizing principal, and as I think that you mentioned earlier this is part of the "gods" analysis - the gods serve as a way of thinking about shooting for the highest possible goal.

All of these concepts have details about them that help us use them as targets that we'd like to approximate as closely as possible.

Probably the real practical problem is that as humans we can't practically speaking avoid all pain (and I know you are very young wbernys so speaking as someone whose a lot closer to his end than to his beginning the pains really begin to stack up the older you get!).

I think the struggle occurs because many people would like to have a firm set of Do's and Don'ts -- Ten commandments so to speak - that would prioritize for us exactly when some pleasure is going to cost more than its worth. The natural/necessary categories help with that, but even there we don't have a rigid set of rules like the religions tend to offer.

And in the absence of set rules, people struggle with whether they should "avoid pain at all cost." I think the friendship example, or lesser questions such as "Should I get a dog even though he'll only live maximum ten years and then I'll be heartbroken when he dies." helps

crystalize that yes, we DO choose things that we know will cause us pain when the pleasure we get outweighs the cost in pain.

Just brainstorming here but it would be very helpful to come up with other illustrations of the same principle (examples of discretionary actions where we clearly choose to accept some pain). We often use the examples of "going to the dentist" or "getting surgery" and those are useful, but to really dramatize the point it would be good to point to examples where we could walk away from the situation without pain, but we choose to go forward anyway (friendship, pets, etc.....)

Post by “Don” of May 11, 2026 at 10:28 PM

[Quote from wbernys](#)

Side note: I kind of agree with Cassius that Epicurus didn't consider Ataraxia a major term in his philosophy or anything. He only used it a few times and i don't think we should imagine them as the most important terms in his philosophy.

There may not be many instances of the word ataraxia but terms similar to or derived from it show up in numerous places in the extant texts:

From a [post of mine from 2023](#):

I am starting this thread to compile a list of every time the words Ataraxia, Eudaemonia, and Tranquillitas appear in a core Epicurean text...

February 19, 2023

ΑΤΑΡΑΞΙΑ (Ataraxia and related terms: Note that αταραξια is literally "ataraksia" even though the usual English spelling is "ataraxia." Therefore, words that have atarak- are directly related.

From ἀ- (a-, "not") + ταραάσσω (tarássō, "trouble, disturb") + -ῖα (-iā); Antonyms: ταραχῆς (tarakhé)

Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, ἀτα^ρ-αξία

[PD17](#) One who acts aright is **utterly steady and serene**, whereas one who goes astray is full of **trouble and confusion**. (Peter Saint-Andre)

ὁ δίκαιος **ἀταρακτότατος**, ὁ δ' ἄδικος πλείστης **ταραχῆς** γήμων.

NOTE: ἀταρακτότατος means "utterly without disturbance" and by extension steady or serene, whereas πλείστης παραχῆς means full of trouble, disorder, or tumult (expanded here to "full of trouble and confusion"; see also [PD22](#))

VS79 He who is as **peace** within himself also causes no trouble for others. (Peter Saint-Andre)

ὁ **ἀτάραχος** ἑαυτῷ καὶ ἑτέρῳ ἀόχλητος.

Fragment 519. The greatest fruit of justice is **serenity**.

δικαιοσύνης καρπὸς μέγιστος **ἀταραξία**.

Epicurus, Letter to Herodotus (DL 10.53; Hicks via Perseus): "Again, we must believe that smelling,⁸¹ like hearing, would produce no sensation, were there not particles conveyed from the object which are of the proper sort for exciting the organ of smelling, some of one sort, some of another, some exciting it confusedly and strangely, others **quietly** and agreeably.

"Καὶ μὴν καὶ τὴν ὁσμὴν νομιστέον, ὥσπερ καὶ τὴν ἀκοὴν οὐκ ἄν ποτε οὐθὲν πάθος ἐργάσασθαι, εἰ μὴ ὄγκοι τινὲς ἦσαν ἀπὸ τοῦ πράγματος ἀποφερόμενοι σύμμετροι πρὸς τοῦτο τὸ αἰσθητήριον κινεῖν, οἱ μὲν τοῖσι τεταραγμένως καὶ ἀλλοτρίως, οἱ δὲ τοῖσι **ἀταράχως** καὶ οἰκείως ἔχοντες.

Epicurus, Letter to Herodotus (DL 10.80; Hicks via Perseus): [80] we must not suppose that our treatment of these matters fails of accuracy, so far as it is needful to ensure our **tranquillity** and happiness (Don Note: lit. blessedness "makarion" - same word used for the gods). When, therefore, we investigate the causes of celestial and atmospheric phenomena, as of all that is unknown, we must take into account the variety of ways in which analogous occurrences happen within our experience ; while as for those who do not recognize the difference between what is or comes about from a single cause and that which may be the effect of any one of several causes, overlooking the fact that the objects are only seen at a distance, and are moreover ignorant of the conditions that render, or do not render, **peace of mind** impossible -- all such persons we must treat with contempt. If then we think that an event could happen in one or other particular way out of several, **we shall be as tranquil** when we recognize that it actually comes about in more ways than one as if we knew that it happens in this particular way.

[80] οὐ δεῖ νομίζειν τὴν ὑπὲρ τούτων χρεῖαν ἀκρίβειαν μὴ ἀπειληφέναι, ὅση πρὸς τὸ **ἀτάραχον** καὶ μακάριον ἡμῶν συντείνει. ὥστε παραθεωροῦντας ποσαχῶς παρ' ἡμῖν τὸ ὅμοιον γίνεται,

αἰτιολογητέον ὑπὲρ τε τῶν μετεώρων καὶ παντὸς τοῦ ἀδήλου, καταφρονοῦντας τῶν οὔτε τὸ μοναχῶς ἔχον ἢ γινόμενον γνωριζόντων οὔτε τὸ πλεοναχῶς συμβαίνον, τὴν ἐκ τῶν ἀποστημάτων φαντασίαν παριδόντων,¹²¹ ἔτι τε ἀγνοοῦντων καὶ ἐν ποίοις οὐκ ἐστὶν **ἀταρακτῆσαι** <καὶ ἐν ποίοις ὁμοίως ἀταρακτῆσαι.>¹²² ἂν οὖν οἰώμεθα καὶ ὡδί πως ἐνδεχόμενον αὐτὸ γίνεσθαι, αὐτὸ τὸ ὅτι πλεοναχῶς γίνεται γνωρίζοντες, ὡσπερ κἂν ὅτι ὡδί πως γίνεται εἶδωμεν, **ἀταρακτῆσομεν**.

Epicurus, Letter to Herodotus (DL 10.82; Hicks via Perseus): [82] But **mental tranquillity** means being released from all these troubles and cherishing a continual remembrance of the highest and most important truths.

[82] ἡ δὲ **ἀταραξία** τὸ τούτων πάντων ἀπολελύσθαι καὶ συνεχῆ μνήμην ἔχειν τῶν ὅλων καὶ κυριωτάτων.

Epicurus, Letter to Pythocles (DL 10.85; Hicks via Perseus): "In the first place, remember that, like everything else, knowledge of celestial phenomena, whether taken along with other things or in isolation, has no other end in view than **peace of mind** and firm conviction.

"Πρῶτον μὲν οὖν μὴ ἄλλο τι τέλος ἐκ τῆς περὶ μετεώρων γνώσεως εἶτε κατὰ συναφὴν λεγομένων εἶτε αὐτοτελῶς νομίζειν εἶναι ἢ περὶ **ἀταραξίαν** καὶ πίστιν βέβαιον, καθάπερ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν λοιπῶν.

Epicurus, Letter to Pythocles (DL 10.96; Hicks via Perseus): [96] For in all the celestial phenomena such a line of research is not to be abandoned ; for, if you fight against clear evidence, you never can enjoy genuine **peace of mind**.

[96] ἐπὶ πάντων γὰρ τῶν μετεώρων τὴν τοιαύτην ἵχνευσιν¹⁵² οὐ προετέον. ἦν γὰρ τις ἢ μαχόμενος τοῖς ἐναργήμασιν, οὐδέποτε δυνησεται **ἀταραξίας** γνησίου μεταλαβεῖν.

Epicurus, On Choices and Avoidances (DL10.136; Hicks revised slightly by Don to be more literal, via Perseus): And Epicurus in his work On Choice states in this manner: "**Peace of mind** and freedom from pain are pleasures which imply a state of rest ; joy and delight are seen to consist in motion and activity."

ὁ δ' Ἐπίκουρος ἐν τῷ Περὶ αἰρέσεων οὕτω λέγει: "ἡ μὲν γὰρ **ἀταραξία** καὶ ἀπονία καταστηματικά ἐῖσιν ἡδοναί: ἡ δὲ χαρὰ καὶ ἡ εὐφροσύνη κατὰ κίνησιν ἐνεργεῖα βλέπονται."

Epicurus, Letter to Menoikeus 128 (Don translation):

[128] The steady contemplation of these things equips one to know how to decide all choice and rejection for the health of the body and for the **tranquility of the mind*** since this is the goal of a blessed life.

[128] τούτων γὰρ ἀπλανῆς θεωρία πᾶσαν αἴρεσιν καὶ φυγὴν ἐπανάγειν οἶδεν ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ σώματος ὑγίειαν καὶ τὴν <τῆς ψυχῆς> **ἀταραξίαν**, ἐπεὶ τοῦτο τοῦ μακαρίως ζῆν ἔστι τέλος.

*NOTE: I added the parenthetical phrase "that is for our physical and our mental existence," at this point in my translation to clarify and paraphrase the previous phrases.

I would also include citations to **γαληνίζω** (galēnizō) and related terms as synonyms for ataraxia:

Epicurus, Letter to Herodotus (DL 10.37): [37] "Hence, since such a course is of service to all who take up natural science, I, who devote to the subject my continuous energy and reap the **calm enjoyment** of a life like this"

37] "Ὅθεν δὴ πᾶσι χρησίμησ' οὔσης τοῖς ὠκειωμένοις φυσιολογία τῆς τοιαύτης ὁδοῦ, παρεγγυῶν τὸ συνεχὲς ἐνέργημα ἐν φυσιολογία καὶ τοιούτῳ μάλιστα **ἐγγαληνίζων** τῷ βίῳ ἐποίησά σοι ...

ἐγγαληνίζω τῷ βίῳ, "spend life calmly" from γαληνίζω

A.calm, still, esp. waves or winds, Hp.Vict.3.71, E.Fr.1079.

2. intr., become calm, prob. in Hp. Morb.Sacr.13; to be calm or tranquil, Alex.178.6, Ph.1.354; "τὸ γαληνίζον τῆς θαλάττης" Arist.Pr.936a5:—so in Med., Xenocr. ap. Orib.2.58.98.

Epicurus, Letter to Herodotus (DL 10.83, last line of the letter):

"It is of such a sort that those who are already tolerably, or even perfectly, well acquainted with the details can, by analysis of what they know into such elementary perceptions as these, best prosecute their researches in physical science as a whole ; while those, on the other hand, who are not altogether entitled to rank as mature students can in silent fashion and as quick as thought run over the doctrines most important for their **peace of mind**."

"Τοιαῦτα γὰρ ἔστιν, ὥστε καὶ τοὺς κατὰ μέρος ἤδη ἐξακριβοῦντας ἱκανῶς ἢ καὶ τελείως, εἰς τὰς τοιαύτας ἀναλύοντας ἐπιβολάς, τὰς πλείστας τῶν περιοδειῶν ὑπὲρ τῆς ὅλης φύσεως ποιεῖσθαι: ὅσοι δὲ μὴ παντελῶς τῶν ἀποτελουμένων εἰσίν, ἐκ τούτων καὶ κατὰ τὸν ἄνευ φθόγγων τρόπον τὴν ἅμα νοήματι περίοδον τῶν κυριωτάτων πρὸς **γαληνισμόν** ποιοῦνται."

Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, γα^λην-ισμός

It would also be instructive to include variations on the word ταραχή (tarakhē; "trouble", "disorder", or "tumult") since that forms the root of ataraxia ("no trouble", "no disorder", or "no tumult")

Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, τα^ρα^χή

Epicurus, Letter to Herodotus. (DL 10.77): [77] For troubles and anxieties and feelings of anger and partiality do not accord with bliss, but always imply weakness and fear and dependence upon one's neighbours. Nor, again, must we hold that things which are no more than globular masses of fire, being at the same time endowed with bliss, assume these motions at will. Nay, in every term we use we must hold fast to all the majesty which attaches to such notions as bliss and immortality, lest the terms should generate opinions inconsistent with this majesty. Otherwise such inconsistency will of itself suffice to produce the worst **disturbance** in our minds. Hence, where we find phenomena invariably recurring, the invariableness of the recurrence must be ascribed to the original interception and conglomeration of atoms whereby the world was formed.

[77] ἀφθαρσίας ὅου γὰρ συμφωνοῦσιν πραγματεῖαι καὶ φροντίδες καὶ ὀργαὶ καὶ χάριτες μακαριότητι, ἀλλ' ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ καὶ φόβῳ καὶ προσδεήσει τῶν πλησίον ταῦτα γίγνεται, μήτε αὖ πυρὸς ἀνάμματα συνεστραμμένου τὴν μακαριότητα κεκτημένα κατὰ βούλησιν τὰς κινήσεις ταύτας λαμβάνειν: ἀλλὰ πᾶν τὸ σέμνωμα τηρεῖν, κατὰ πάντα ὀνόματα φερόμενον ἐπὶ τὰς τοιαύτας ἐννοίας, ἵνα μηδ' ὑπεναντίαι ἐξ αὐτῶν <γένωνται> τῷ σεμνώματι δόξαι: εἰ δὲ μή, τὸν μέγιστον **τάραχον** ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς αὐτῆ ἢ ὑπεναντιότης παρασκευάσει. ὅθεν δὴ κατὰ τὰς ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἐναπολήψεις τῶν συστροφῶν τούτων ἐν τῇ τοῦ κόσμου γενέσει δεῖ δοξάζειν καὶ τὴν ἀνάγκην ταύτην καὶ περίοδον συντελεῖσθαι.

Epicurus, Letter to Herodotus. (DL 10.78):

"Ἔτι τε οὐ τὸ πλεοναχῶς ἐν τοῖς τοιούτοις εἶναι καὶ τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον καὶ ἄλλως πως ἔχειν, ἀλλ' ἀπλῶς μὴ εἶναι ἐν ἀφθάρτῳ καὶ μακαρίᾳ φύσει τῶν διάκρισιν ὑποβαλλόντων ἢ **τάραχον** μηθέν: καὶ τοῦτο καταλαβεῖν τῇ διανοίᾳ ἔστιν ἀπλῶς εἶναι.

"Further, we must recognize on such points as this no plurality of causes or contingency, but must hold that nothing suggestive of conflict or **disquiet** is compatible with an immortal and blessed nature. And the mind can grasp the absolute truth of this.

Epicurus, Letter to Herodotus. (DL 10.81): [81] "There is yet one more point to seize, namely, that the **greatest anxiety** of the human mind arises through the belief that the heavenly bodies are blessed and indestructible, and that at the same time they have volitions and actions and causality inconsistent with this belief ; and through expecting or apprehending some everlasting evil, either because of the myths, or because we are in dread of the mere insensibility of death, as if it had to do with us ; and through being reduced to this state not by conviction but by a certain irrational perversity, so that, if men do not set bounds to their terror, they endure as much or even more intense **anxiety** than the man whose views on these matters are quite vague.

[81] "Ἐπὶ δὲ τούτοις ὅλως ἅπασιν ἐκεῖνο δεῖ κατανοεῖν, ὅτι **τάραχος** ὁ κυριώτατος ταῖς ἀνθρωπίναις ψυχαῖς γίνεται ἐν τῷ ταῦτά τε μακάρια δοξάζειν <εἶναι> καὶ ἄφθαρτα, καὶ ὑπεναντίας ἔχειν τούτῳ βουλήσεις ἅμα καὶ πράξεις καὶ αἰτίας, καὶ ἐν τῷ αἰώνιον τι δεινὸν αἰεὶ προσδοκᾶν ἢ ὑποπτεύειν κατὰ τοὺς μύθους εἶ τε καὶ αὐτὴν τὴν ἀναισθησίαν τὴν ἐν τῷ τεθάναι φοβουμένους ὡσπερ οὔσαν κατ' αὐτούς, καὶ ἐν τῷ μὴ δόξαις ταῦτα πάσχειν ἀλλ' ἀλόγῳ γέ τιτι παραστάσει, ὅθεν μὴ ὀρίζοντας τὸ δεινὸν τὴν ἴσην ἢ καὶ ἐπιτεταμένην **ταραχὴν** λαμβάνειν τῷ εἰκαίως δοξάζοντι ταῦτα:

(NOTE: This directly precedes section DL 10.82 cited above and below.)

Epicurus, Letter to Herodotus. (DL 10.82): For by studying them we shall rightly trace to its cause and banish the source of **disturbance** and dread, accounting for celestial phenomena and for all other things which from time to time befall us and cause the utmost alarm to the rest of mankind.

ἂν γὰρ τούτοις προσέχωμεν, τὸ ὅθεν ὁ **τάραχος** καὶ ὁ φόβος ἐγίνετο ἐξαιτιολογήσομεν ὀρθῶς καὶ ἀπολύσομεν, ὑπὲρ τε μετεώρων αἰτιολογοῦντες καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν τῶν αἰεὶ παρεμπιπτόντων, ὅσα φοβεῖ τοὺς λοιποὺς ἐσχάτως.

Epicurus, Letter to Menoikeus, (DL 10.131, Don translation):

Therefore, whenever we say repeatedly that "pleasure is the τέλος," we do not say the pleasure of those who are prodigal 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.

Ὅταν οὖν λέγωμεν ἡδονὴν τέλος ὑπάρχειν, οὐ τὰς τῶν ἀσώτων ἡδονὰς καὶ τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας λέγομεν, ὡς τινες ἀγνοοῦντες καὶ οὐχ ὁμολογοῦντες ἢ κακῶς ἐκδεχόμενοι νομίζουσιν, ἀλλὰ τὸ μήτε ἀλγεῖν κατὰ σῶμα μήτε **ταράττεσθαι** κατὰ ψυχὴν.

[PD22](#) (Peter Saint-Andre) You must reflect on the fundamental goal and everything that is clear, to which opinions are referred; if you do not, all will be full of trouble and **confusion**.

τὸ ὑφεστηκὸς δεῖ τέλος ἐπιλογίζεσθαι καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν ἐνάργειαν, ἐφ' ἣν τὰ δοξαζόμενα ἀνάγομεν· εἰ δὲ μὴ πάντα ἀκρισίας καὶ **ταραχῆς** ἔσται μεστά.

NOTE: Here the translated phrase "trouble and confusion" reflects the Greek words ἀκρισία (literally "indistinctness") and ταραχή (literally "trouble", "disorder", or "tumult"); see also Principal Doctrine #17 and the note thereto.

NOTE: This is not necessarily an exhaustive list as the writings of Philodemus and Metrodorus may yield more citations, but they are not as readily searched as the sources above.

Post by “wbernys” of May 11, 2026 at 10:44 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

We often use the examples of "going to the dentist" or "getting surgery" and those are useful, but to really dramatize the point it would be good to point to examples where we could walk away from the situation without pain,

I see what you mean, especialli with the pet example, got a little void at home i would be lonely without. But that is the point to me, we engage in those joys which may have heartbreak because we want the pleasent memories and feelings of attachment that help offset the pains of life. So i may disute your whole (we could away without any pain) because to me, i couldn't, i need that sense of engagment to couneract the loneliness and stresses of life. So it is still avoidance of pain which is my goal, but it's through recollection and prudent choices of engaging with the joys of life and appreciating them, even if they may cause pain at some point. See what i mean?

BTW, another perk of having a cat is getting to share cute pics of her.



Post by “wbernys” of May 11, 2026 at 10:46 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

There may not be many instances of the word ataraxia but terms similar to or derived from it show up in numerous places in the extant texts:

Way to make me feel unlearned lol. It seems it is a bigger deal than i let on.

Post by “Don” of May 11, 2026 at 10:51 PM

[Quote from wbernys](#)

[Quote from Don](#)

There may not be many instances of the word ataraxia but terms similar to or derived from it show up in numerous places in the extant texts:

Way to make me feel unlearned lol. It seems it is a bigger deal than i let on.

Don't sweat it. That was a labor of love delving into the Greek. Translation masks a number of similar words that are there in the original.

Post by “Don” of May 12, 2026 at 7:03 AM

Going back to the original purpose of this thread: the meaning of [PD25](#):

As I've said ad nauseum in the past, the [Principal Doctrines](#) were not originally "versified" into separate Doctrines. It was one text, granted covering a number of topics but not in distinct #1, #2, etc. This being the case, we can't necessarily read "[PD25](#)" in isolation. I will contend that we could read the whole way from "[PD16](#)" through "[PD26](#)" as a whole and each section builds in the other (Saint-Andre translation with some edits, ex. S-A "joy" = ἡδονὴν hēdonēn "pleasure". I've made that change below). For example, the idea of using reason and not relying on chance comes up several times. Thoughts?

Chance steals only a bit into the life of a wise person: for throughout the complete span of his life the greatest and most important matters have been, are, and will be directed by the power of reason. One who acts aright is utterly steady and serene, whereas one who goes astray is full of trouble and confusion. As soon as the pain produced by the lack of something is removed, pleasure in the flesh is not increased but only embellished. Yet the limit of enjoyment in the mind is produced by thinking through these very things and similar things, which once provoked the greatest fears in the mind. Finite time and infinite time contain the same amount of pleasure, if its limits are measured out through reasoning. The flesh assumes that the limits of pleasure are infinite, and that infinite pleasure can be produced only through infinite time. But the mind, thinking through the goal and limits of the flesh and dissolving fears about eternity, produces a complete way of life (τὸν παντελεῆ βίον) and therefore has no need of infinite time; yet the mind does not flee from pleasure, nor when events cause it to exit from life does it look back as if it has missed any aspect of the best life. One who perceives the limits of life knows how easy it is to expel the pain produced by a lack of something and to make one's entire life complete (τὸ τὸν ὅλον βίον παντελεῆ) ; so that there is no need for the things that are achieved through struggle. You must reflect on the fundamental goal and everything that is clear, to which opinions are referred; if you do not, all will be full of trouble and confusion. If you fight against all your perceptions, you will have nothing to refer to in judging those which you declare to be false. If you reject a perception outright and do not distinguish between your opinion about what will happen after, what came before, your feelings, and all the layers of imagination involved in your thoughts, then you will throw your other perceptions into confusion because of your trifling opinions; as a result, you will reject the very criterion of truth. And if when forming concepts from your opinions you treat as confirmed everything that will happen and what you do not witness thereafter, then you will not avoid what is false, so that you will remove all argument and all judgment about what is and is not correct. If at all critical times you do not connect each of your actions to the natural goal of life, but instead turn too soon to some other kind of goal in thinking whether to avoid or pursue something, then

your thoughts and your actions will not be in harmony. The desires that do not bring pain when they go unfulfilled are not necessary; indeed they are easy to reject if they are hard to achieve or if they seem to produce harm.

(NOTE: It's not necessarily the most fluid prose, and I would bet the text has been through numerous hands on its way to us; but I still contend it hangs together.)

Post by “Cassius” of May 12, 2026 at 7:10 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

As I've said ad nauseum in the past, the [Principal Doctrines](#) were not originally verified.

Far be it for me to question anyone's typing but perhaps you meant a word other than "verified"?

Post by “Don” of May 12, 2026 at 7:20 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

[Quote from Don](#)

As I've said ad nauseum in the past, the [Principal Doctrines](#) were not originally verified.

Far be it for me to question anyone's typing but perhaps you meant a word other than "verified"?

Thanks! Fixed.

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 13, 2026 at 8:44 AM

[Don](#) Regarding the formatting of the [Principal Doctrines](#), I just looked that up and found this (Al Google):

Modern translators and classical scholars determine where one doctrine ends and the next begins by evaluating four primary lines of evidence: **grammatical shifts, thematic unity, historical manuscript markers, and 19th-century precedent.** [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#)]

Because ancient Greek text lacked clear punctuation and numbering, separating the continuous script into 40 distinct *Kyriai Doxai* relies on specific linguistic and contextual clues: [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#)]

1. Grammatical Transitions and Connecting Particles

Ancient Greek relies heavily on transitional particles to indicate a shift in thought. Translators watch for specific word cues that naturally reset a sentence: [[1](#)]

- **The Particle De (δέ):** Often meaning "but" or "and," this frequently signals the start of a fresh, separate statement.
- **The Particle Gar (γάρ):** Meaning "for" or "because," this indicates a clause is an explanation of the *previous* sentence, meaning it belongs within the same doctrine rather than starting a new one.
- **Independent Clauses:** Sentences that begin with a strong, self-contained subject and verb (such as "Death is..." or "Justice is...") usually mark the boundaries of a new maxim. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#)]

2. Micro-Spaces and Scribal Punctuation

While the manuscripts do not contain numbers, medieval scribes did leave subtle visual hints while copying the text: [[1](#), [2](#)]

- **Paragraphoi:** Scribes frequently drew small horizontal strokes or dashes (*paragraphoi*) in the margins to note a change in speaker or statement.
- **High Dots (Ektheis):** Scribes used ink dots placed high above the text baseline like a modern period to signal a complete thought.
- **Spacial Gaps:** In manuscripts like the *Codex Borbonicus*, a tiny physical gap or blank ink space was left between certain words to indicate where one logical unit of text ended. [[1](#), [2](#)]

3. Structural and Thematic Shifts

Translators look at the internal logic of the philosophy to find natural conceptual boundaries: [[1](#), [2](#)]

- **Thematic Clusters:** Epicurus often grouped ideas together. Doctrines 1 through 4 handle divine fear, death, pleasure, and pain (the *Tetrapharmakos*). A translator knows a doctrine has ended when the text shifts completely from one of these core topics to an

entirely new one, like social status (Doctrine 6) or natural science (Doctrine 11).

- **Aphoristic Length:** The *Kyriai Doxai* were specifically designed as short, punchy summaries meant to be easily memorized by followers. If a block of text grows too dense or covers multiple unrelated insights, it is a strong indicator that it contains more than one individual doctrine. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#)]

Post by “Don” of May 13, 2026 at 5:31 PM

I fully realize that this is going to come off as harsh, but I was off work today with sinus issues, sneezes, aches, and coughs and maybe my inhibitions are a little less than usual. Please take that as context, but with that said...

I'm sorry, but this is a prime example of the reason I *despise* AI summaries. It looks all authoritative with words like aphoristic length and presented in a bulleted list, but it's all an LLM predicting what word comes next and extruding it out for human consumption.

The "references" include posts **I've** made on this very forum that don't really say what the AI summary is trying to make them say: [Presenting the Principal Doctrines in Narrative Form](#)

The references also include papers/articles on Bible versification, which is not exactly a direct comparison. And Bible verses are also notorious for breaking across chapter lines or breaking up a thought:

<https://thebiblebistro.com/episode/breaking-bad-paragraphs/>

Purpose: Chapters and verses were added to make referencing easier (e.g., John 3:16), but they can sometimes disrupt the text's flow.

The AI summary also makes mention of the 40 doctrines, and I've personally found (at my referenced post) both 40 and earlier 44 "doctrines" that break in very different places:

Post

[RE: Presenting the Principal Doctrines in Narrative Form](#)

https://archive.org/details/bub_gb...ge/465/mode/1up

German, 1806, with 44 [Principal Doctrines](#) ?



Don

June 21, 2023 at 8:22 PM

Post

RE: Presenting the Principal Doctrines in Narrative Form

Okay, this was VERY interesting. I used the 1739 Greek with Latin translation to compare with the text at Perseus Digital Library:

1739: <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nnc1.0021...7768674761-1400>

Perseus Greek (DL, Book 10): <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...0%3Achapter%3D1>

Perseus English (DL, Book 10): <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...0%3Achapter%3D1>

I used the Greek text to compare with each other since 1739 had 44 [Principal Doctrines](#) and Perseus (i.e., Hicks, 1972) had the...



Don

June 22, 2023 at 12:06 AM

So, it's a game of "Spot the Doctrine" with different results with, in my opinion, neither being right or wrong. It's overlaid on the text.

I can see Epicurus or whoever wrote *Kyriai Doxai* writing in smaller digestible chunks for easier memorization. I gladly admit that there are short sections that are apparent when reading the topics covered, but there is *nothing* to the best of my knowledge that confirms there are meant to be 40 separate doctrines in the book.

In my further opinion, reading them in conversation with each other within a particular topic rather than in isolation, provides additional context leading to a fuller picture of what's being conveyed. Trying to puzzle out things like "What does *this* Principal Doctrine mean?" is fraught with unnecessary difficulty if only one reads a few before or a few after or both.

PS. I need to add that I remain open to research on where the "breaks" happen to be in [Principal Doctrines](#). But the arbitrary 40 isn't really helpful in that quest in my opinion.

Post by "Cassius" of May 13, 2026 at 5:40 PM

I don't think that's overly harsh. Of course when the Terminators take over they may not agree



This is like living through the industrial revolution and radio and tv and internet all in one - or more.

The points it picked up from you are good for it to pick up so the world is better that you wrote them.

I have no idea where all this leads. In the meantime I guess we do the best we can.

Post by “Don” of May 13, 2026 at 5:46 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Of course when the Terminators take over they may not agree 😊



Post by “Godfrey” of May 13, 2026 at 8:00 PM

[Don](#) you can be gratified that you're now established as an expert source! 😄

Post by “Patrikios” of May 24, 2026 at 9:52 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

And in this context part of the point could be that everyone (even Stoics and Religionists) say that they are pursuing "happiness" but if you pursue happiness by pursuing anything other than pleasure (nature's goal) then your actions (pursuit of virtue or piety or duty, for examples) will not be consistent with your avowed goal (happiness)

[Cassius](#) ,

In all this discussion about [PD25](#), I find your summary most in line with my understanding of that principle. As we pursue virtues to lead a pleasant life (following PD5), we just need to be sure we do so by following natural principles and treating others as a blessed wise person would do (not bringing trouble to others).