


Discussion of Blog Article

Post by "Cassius" of May 20, 2026 at 10:56 AM

This thread is for discussion of: "**Why It Is Incorrect to Say Epicurean Philosophy Is Primarily About 'Absence of Pain'**"

A man with a dark beard and hair, wearing a white tunic, is shown in profile, looking towards a large, ornate scroll. The scroll is decorated with a gold sunburst at the top and a laurel wreath on the left side. The background is a warm, golden light, suggesting an outdoor setting with trees.

“For this reason we call pleasure the beginning and end of the blessed life. For we recognize pleasure as the first good innate in us, and from pleasure we begin every act of choice and avoidance, and to pleasure we return again, using the feeling as the standard by which we judge every good.”

— Epicurus, Letter to Menoecus

Blog Article

[Why It Is Incorrect to Say Epicurean Philosophy Is Primarily About 'Absence of Pain'](#)

The Claim and Why It Matters

The claim that Epicurean philosophy is “primarily about the absence of pain” — that the Epicurean goal is a passive, featureless neutral state free from disturbance — is one of the most consequential misreadings in the history of philosophy. It transforms a vigorous, life-affirming system into something that looks, in practice, indistinguishable from the Stoic, Buddhist, or ascetic counsels that Epicurus directly opposed.

The arguments against this reading are...



Cassius

May 20, 2026 at 10:54 AM

Post by “Cassius” of May 20, 2026 at 11:03 AM

It is gratifying to have a generally appreciative comment on this post from Greg Sadler, whose videos I have frequently watched, and who views I very much respect.



Post by “Todd” of May 20, 2026 at 1:59 PM

[Cassius](#), I came across this old post of yours:

Quote from Cassius

According to Wikipedia, Hieronymus of Rhodes lived from c. 290 – c. 230 BC, while Epicurus lived from 341–270 BC. That means that Hieronymus lived after Epicurus, and had Epicurus' works to reference, but Epicurus was no longer around to respond to Hieronymus. If indeed Epicurus had taken the position that "absence of pain" is a correct and full statement of the goal of life, why would Hieronymus have had to deviate from Epicurus, and why would Cicero have had to set them up as opposites?

To me, this is a strong argument against the absence of pain view. I'm not sure if others would find this as persuasive, or if it would fit well in the article though. There is also this quote from Cicero in the course of the discussion you're referring to:

Quote from Cicero, De Finibus, 2.6.18

[Epicurus] might have confined the name of pleasure to this state of freedom from pain, and despised pleasure as Aristippus understands it; or else, if he approved of both sorts of pleasure, ***as in fact he does...***

The quotes you have from Cicero are good too, but you can't get much more clear than this.

Also a minor nitpick:

Quote from Blog article

It transforms a vigorous, life-affirming system into something that looks, in practice, indistinguishable from the Stoic, Buddhist, or ascetic counsels that Epicurus directly opposed.

Obviously it is the *counsels* that Epicurus opposed. But it could also be read as Epicurus opposing those schools, which is not true. Especially that word "directly". I would suggest re-wording this somehow.

Post by “Cassius” of May 20, 2026 at 2:05 PM

great comments thank you!

Post by “Cassius” of May 20, 2026 at 2:56 PM

Again, Todd, thank you very much for the suggestion. The new section below has been added.

Argument 6: The Ancient World Already Had a Name for “Absence of Pain” as the Goal — and It Was Not “Epicurean”

This argument cuts to the heart of the historical record in a way that cannot be dismissed as a matter of interpretation.

The ancient philosophical world was perfectly aware that someone had proposed “absence of pain” — freedom from all annoyance — as the ultimate goal of life. They did not attribute this position to Epicurus. They attributed it to **Hieronymus of Rhodes**, a Peripatetic philosopher who lived approximately 290–230 BC, after Epicurus, and who had Epicurus’s works available to him when he formulated his own position.

The ancient sources are explicit. Clement of Alexandria, in his [Stromateis](#) (Book II, Chapter 21, sections 127–128), records the ancient division of philosophical schools by their stated goals, explicitly placing Epicurus in the category of those who proposed pleasure as the end, and Hieronymus of Rhodes in the separate category of those who proposed absence of pain as the end. Cicero reports the same division independently in multiple works. In *Academic Questions*, he states it directly:

Quote

“Hieronymus placed it [the chief good] in being free from all annoyance.”

And in *On Ends*, Cicero stages a direct debate in which Hieronymus is explicitly named as the philosopher who held that “freedom from pain” and “pleasure” are two different things — and that “freedom from pain” is the true chief good — while Torquatus, the Epicurean spokesman, argues that pleasure is the goal and that freedom from pain is simply another name for the same condition, not a separate or superior alternative.

Several points follow from this with force:

- **Epicurus and Hieronymus are listed as distinct positions by the ancient sources.** No ancient commentator collapses them. The difference between “pleasure is the goal” and “absence of pain is the goal” was understood in antiquity as the difference between two different philosophers holding two genuinely different views — not as two formulations of the same philosophy.

- **Hieronymus came after Epicurus and chose deliberately to differ.** He had access to Epicurus’s texts. He was not confused about what Epicurus taught. He disagreed — and the ancient world recorded the disagreement as a matter of philosophical fact.
- **Epicurus would have been fully aware of the “absence of pain” option and chose not to adopt it.** The position was available to him. He defined pleasure — not mere freedom from pain — as the goal, the beginning, and the end of the blessed life. This was not an oversight; it was a deliberate choice between two positions that the ancient world clearly distinguished.
- **The person who today attributes “absence of pain” to Epicurus is not reporting Epicurean philosophy.** They are reporting Hieronymian philosophy and attaching Epicurus’s name to it in error. The ancient world would have recognized this immediately — not because the texts are ambiguous, but because the distinction between the two positions was the kind of thing that philosophers in antiquity took pains to establish and record precisely.

The practical implication is direct: if you maintain that “absence of pain” rather than pleasure is the true goal of life, you are not an Epicurean. You are a Hieronymian. The irony is precise: Hieronymus of Rhodes deliberately rejected Epicurus’s position — pleasure as the goal — and substituted his own: absence of pain. That substitution is what the ancient world recorded and attributed to Hieronymus. Today, Hieronymus is forgotten and Epicurus’s name endures — but the “absence of pain” position that Hieronymus invented as a departure from Epicurus has been wrongly reattached to Epicurus himself. Epicurus has been tagged with his own successor’s rejection of his own teaching. The confusion should be corrected wherever it appears.

Post by “Todd” of May 20, 2026 at 4:23 PM

Nice.

Post by “Cassius” of May 20, 2026 at 5:12 PM

[Quote from Todd](#)

Obviously it is the counsels that Epicurus opposed. But it could also be read as Epicurus opposing those schools, which is not true. Especially that word "directly". I would suggest re-wording this somehow.

I'm going to get to this in a future rewrite as well.