

# Diving Deep Into The History of The Tetrpharmakon / Tetrpharmakos

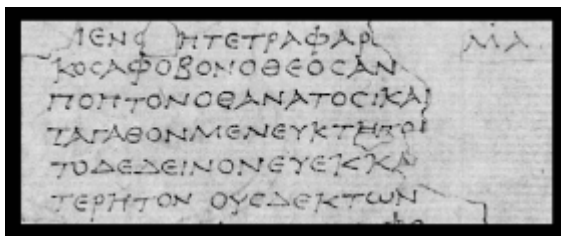
Post by "Cassius" of February 2, 2019 at 10:27 AM

I frequently repeat my reservations and criticisms of the "Tetrpharmakon," for the reasons I stated in my 2015 post "[Why I Think Epicurus Would Have Hated the Tetrpharmakon.](#)" Unfortunately from my point of view, this truncated passage is frequently pushed as a comprehensive summary of what is important to know about Epicurus. As a further effort to demonstrate that this text should not be treated as Epicurean gospel, I want to pull together in this thread everything I can find about where the passage comes from, who wrote it, the context in which it was found, etc.

As of 5/14/25, the [Wikipedia page](#) has the tetrpharmakon as: As expressed by [Philodemus](#), and preserved in a [Herculaneum Papyrus](#) (1005, 5.9-14), the *tetrpharmakos* reads: <sup>[7]</sup>

Don't fear god,	Ἄφοβον ὁ θεός,
Don't worry about death;	ἀνύποπτον ὁ θάνατος
What is good is easy to get,	καὶ τὰγαθὸν μὲν εὐκτῆτον,
What is terrible is easy to endure	τὸ δὲ δεινὸν εὐεκκαρτέρητον

[Wikipedia has the following graphic](#), which I presume to be in the handwriting of a researcher, rather than being a photo of the surviving scroll. As a start in this examination I would ask these questions: (1) Where is the original scroll? (2) Who transcribed these excerpts? (4) Is this text absolutely clear in the original, or as is frequently the case with the Herculaneum material, is some of the text "reconstructed?" (5) What if anything do we know about the text before and after this excerpt?



it appears that this text can be [found labeled as follows at this link](#), which is page at the University of Oxford Faculty of Classics Papyrological Imaging Project :

search authors sites dates genres papyrus nos. other IDs

**P.Herc. 1005 col. 5**  
fol.  
A. Aspell

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Alternative ID: MS Gr class. c. 2 0454  
Publication date: 1908  
Author: Philodemus  
Document date: 100 B.C.  
Provenance: Hieracium  
Location: Bodleian Library, Oxford  
Genre: Philosophical treatise  
Format: Roll  
Description: Apograph of papyrus by Giuseppe (T) Casanova

Images

Low resolution      High resolution



ed hi-res image is here:

[This link](#) provides a full list of the plates available for this scroll.

P.Herc.      papyrus nos.

search authors sites dates genres papyrus nos. other IDs

**MS P.Herc.**

- ☐ P.Herc. 1005
- ☐ fol.
- ☐ P.Herc. 1005 col. 13
- ☐ fol.
- ☐ P.Herc. 1005 col. 14
- ☐ fol.
- ☐ P.Herc. 1005 col. 15
- ☐ fol.
- ☐ P.Herc. 1005 col. 16
- ☐ fol.
- ☐ P.Herc. 1005 col. 17
- ☐ fol.
- ☐ P.Herc. 1005 col. 18
- ☐ fol.
- ☐ P.Herc. 1005 col. 19
- ☐ fol.
- ☐ P.Herc. 1005 col. 2
- ☐ fol.
- ☐ P.Herc. 1005 col. 20
- ☐ fol.
- ☐ P.Herc. 1005 Fr. 116
- ☐ fol.
- ☐ P.Herc. 1005 Fr. 117
- ☐ fol.
- ☐ P.Herc. 1005 Fr. 14 Fr. 12
- ☐ fol.
- ☐ P.Herc. 1005 Fr. 68
- ☐ fol.
- ☐ P.Herc. 1005 Fr. 33
- ☐ fol.
- ☐ P.Herc. 1005 Fr. 86
- ☐ fol.
- ☐ P.Herc. 1005 Subscriptio
- ☐ fol.
- ☐ P.Herc. 1005 col. 30
- ☐ fol.
- ☐ P.Herc. 1005 col. 31
- ☐ fol.
- ☐ P.Herc. 1005 col. 32



So the place to start in analyzing the material before and after this text [appears to be this page](#)

As of 2/2/19, Wikipedia offers this translation of the text:



According to Wikipedia, citing Pamela Gordon: "The "["tetrapharmakos"](#) was originally a compound of four drugs ([wax](#), [tallow](#), [pitch](#) and [resin](#)); the word has been used metaphorically by Roman-era Epicureans. [to refer to the four remedies for healing the soul.](#)"

The Wikipedia footnote for this statement is:

The name cannot be traced further back than [Cicero](#) and [Philodemus](#). Pamela Gordon, *Epicurus in Lycia: The Second-century World of Diogenes of Oenoanda*, University of Michigan Press (1996), p. 61, fn 85, citing A. Angeli, "Compendi, eklogai, tetrapharmakos" (1986), p. 65.

Here is a [post I made on NewEpicurean.com](#) back in 2012:

#### Quote

The "["tetrapharmakos"](#) is a four-line condensation of the first four key doctrines based on the deciphering of a scroll found at Herculaneum ([per Wikipedia](#)). The standard English translation found on the internet is:

Don't fear god,

Don't worry about death;

What is good is easy to get, and

What is terrible is easy to endure.

This version is sourced to the Epicurus Reader, page vi. In my copy of that work, the page shows the same text quoted above, with a cite to papyrus 1005, 4.9-14. An image of that papyrus can be found [here](#), and is shown below.

So far I have not found any discussion of the translation process in The Epicurus Reader, so it is not clear to me whether Inwood or Gerson (who are listed as translators) or Hutchinson (who did the intro) are responsible for the English summary.

In my last post (on Key Doctrine 6) I noted that the Epicurus Reader has a translation of Key Doctrine 6 that diverges significantly from that of other authorities. Thus I am curious about the context of this translation of the Tetrpharmakos.

We know that the editors state that the Greek original reads:

Ἄφοβον ὁ θεός,

ἀνύποπτον ὁ θάνατος

καὶ τάγαθὸν μὲν εὐκτητον,

τὸ δὲ δεινὸν εὐκαρτέρητον

The page from which this text comes is fragmentary, and part of a longer passage, as can be seen in this image:

[tetrapharmakos-parchment-300x272.jpg](#)

Clearly much is missing, but since I do not know Greek I cannot determine to what extent these lines are complete and to what extent they are conjecture. Likewise, I cannot determine the context in which they appear on the page.

The challenge that immediately arises is that we can quickly observe that while “Don’t Fear God” is certainly **one** meaning that can be derived from the full text of the first Doctrine, it is certainly not the **only** meaning, and it is arguably **not the most important**. I would argue that regardless of whether God is to be “feared,” it is at least as important for us to know that God does not concern himself with men’s affairs **at all**. As a result, regardless of whether we fear god or love him, god does not control or doom us to a particular “**fate**.”

I am informed that by a number of readers who know Greek that the translation is probably accurate, and at least as to these four lines (but not the context) we have the full text. Thus the question to keep in mind in researching this is largely the context in which it was written. There is probably much we could learn from Philodemus’ thought process if we knew the context in which he (or the writer from which he might be quoting) reduced the first four key doctrines to these brief lines.

Display More

My NewEpicurean Post: [Why I Think Epicurus Would Have Hated The Tetrpharmakon](#):

[Wikipedia](#) informs us that the [tetrapharmakon](#) comes down to us from a parchment found in the papyri of Herculaneum that it is attributed to Philodemus. Wikipedia also informs us of the following translation, which apparently comes from D.S. Hutchinson:

*Don't fear god,*

*Don't worry about death;*

*What is good is easy to get, and*

*What is terrible is easy to endure.*

What is missing from the record is any explanation or context in the papyri itself, so we cannot know what Philodemus intended to convey through or about these lines. What I will argue here, in brief, is that taken as they are today as a summary of key Epicurean doctrine, they are *\*absysmally\** bad.

(1) **“Don't fear god”** is a woefully incomplete summary of PD1, which reads in full: *“1. A blessed and indestructible being has no trouble himself and brings no trouble upon any other being; so he is free from anger and partiality, for all such things imply weakness.”* Far from simply not “fearing” the gods, PD1 tells us that we are equally not to look to them for reward (“partiality”) or any intervention from them whatsoever. To say simply that we should not “fear” gods is to omit the key foundation of Epicurean theology – that perfect beings bring no interference *\*\*of any kind\*\** to lesser beings. Gods do not create universes; gods do not destroy universes; and gods *ask nothing of us and offer nothing to us* whatsoever – certainly not a heaven or any reward whatsoever for our actions. “Fear” is only a small component of this key insight.

(2) **“Don't worry about death.”** Don't *\*worry\** about death? Epicurus stressed the importance of making the most of the present life, because he knew that there was no other. Quite the opposite of *not thinking about* the issue of death, Epicurus stressed the importance of spending time wisely, enjoying life to the fullest extent possible, and *thinking about death explicitly* as a way of savoring the present and preparing for the future. Seneca recorded *“Wait for me but a moment, and I will pay you from my own account. Meanwhile, Epicurus will oblige me with these words: “Think on death...”* And so what Epicurus emphasized was neither a “devil-may-care” attitude nor an attitude of benign neglect, but instead that we regularly remind ourselves that the shortness of life is in large part what makes life worth living: the fact that we only go around once and get no other chances encourages us to savor the time we do have. So thoughtful examination – the very *reverse* of the point superficially made in the tetrapharmakon, is what we are to derive from the facts clearly stated in PD2: *“[Death is nothing to us](#); for that which has been dissolved into its elements experiences no sensations, and that which has no sensation is nothing to us.”*

(3) **“What is good is easy to get”** is a superficial cliché that has turned more people off to Epicurean philosophy than any other (except for the next cliché in the tetrapharmakon, which follows immediately). Everyone knows how much effort is required to live happily, and how the slightest slip can lead to disaster. And when “everyone” knows something, that means Epicurus knew it too. And so when we check the text we find this clumsy cliché bears no resemblance

whatsoever to the full text of PD3: "3. *The magnitude of pleasure reaches its limit in the removal of all pain. When such pleasure is present, so long as it is uninterrupted, there is no pain either of body or of mind or of both together.*" Legions of stoics jump to the opportunity to argue that Epicurus held that "removal of all pain," and nothing more, is the complete definition of the good life. The trouble is that this interpretation ignores the philosophical background of why "limits" were held to be important. As Seneca recorded in discussing Epicurus, "*Natural desires are limited; but those which spring from false opinion can have no stopping point. The false has no limits.*" Epicurus knew this was a carryover from Plato (see [Philebus](#)), and that those who argued against pleasure held that pleasure could not be the guide of life because it had no limits, and thus could never be satisfied. With this context in mind the meaning of PD3 is clear - Pleasure DOES have a limit, and it is reached when we succeed in filling our lives so full of pleasure that no room is left for pain of any kind. Cicero expressed this Epicurean doctrine concisely, "*nothing [is] preferable to a life of tranquility crammed full of pleasures.*" PD3 has nothing to do with "good" being "easy to get." Stripped of its Stoic misinterpretations, PD3 can be seen to be of the same level of profundity as the discussion of gods and death: it is a statement that [PLEASURE is the guide of life](#), and that this guide of life can be achieved by those who follow pleasure intelligently.

(4) "**What's terrible is easy to endure**" is even more outrageously false than the third line of the tetrapharmakon, and no amount of dancing around the point is enough to convince an honest student that a man to whom such a doctrine was attributed could be wise. Epicurean texts are full of appreciation for the difficulties and pains of life, and for the tragedy of those "hearts in darkness" who live in fear and doubt. Yet some would have us believe that the same Lucretius, who was compassionate enough toward *animals* to describe at length described the pain felt by a cow on loss of her calf, would advocate a philosophy where the pains of *human* life are held to be "easy" to endure. Once again the fault is in the summary, and in its interpretation, and not in the doctrine of Epicurus. Doctrine four reads: "PD4. *Continuous bodily pain does not last long; instead, pain, if extreme, is present a very short time, and even that degree of pain which slightly exceeds bodily pleasure does not last for many days at once. Diseases of long duration allow an excess of bodily pleasure over pain.*" This statement has little or nothing to do with "what's terrible is easy to endure," and for good reason. The numbering of the Principle Doctrines was not introduced by the ancient Epicureans, and there has never been any reason to separate the intent of PD3 from PD4. Taken together, these two doctrines fit hand in glove to establish not only that Pleasure DOES have a limit (the essential structure necessary to defeat the Platonic anti-Pleasure argument), but also that Pain is not to be considered as something to be avoided at all costs. How many times today do we see fans of Epicurus act as if "avoidance of pain" is far more important than pursuing pleasure? If Epicurus had in fact taught such a doctrine, he would have emphasized the severity of pain and the overriding necessity of avoiding it. But Epicurus knew what tricks the ascetic other-worlders were up to - he had the texts of Plato himself from which to learn. Thus Epicurus elevated to nearly the top in importance the observation that pain is NOT to be dreaded, and NOT to be allowed to cause us to shrink back from pursuing pleasure. The meaning of PD4 is not that pain

is easy to endure, but that *pain is WORTH enduring compared to the reward of Pleasure.*

Perhaps one day more context will be readable from the papyri and we will know what Philodemus was thinking when he included these lines in his text. In the meantime, we know far too much about Philodemus to think that intended the Tetrpharmakon to be interpreted as it is today. The current text and interpretation does more harm than good, and creates more confusion than light, and as such would have been an abomination to Epicurus, the man who wrote *"In the first place, Herodotus, you must understand what it is that words denote, in order that by reference to this we may be in a position to test opinions, inquiries, or problems, so that our proofs may not run on untested ad infinitum, nor the terms we use be empty of meaning. For the primary signification of every term employed must be clearly seen, and ought to need no proving; this being necessary, if we are to have something to which the point at issue or the problem or the opinion before us can be referred."*

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Other posts I have made on this subject are:

[Research Projects: 2 - The Meaning of the "Tetrpharmakos" - NewEpicurean On The Subject of the Tetrpharmakon](#)

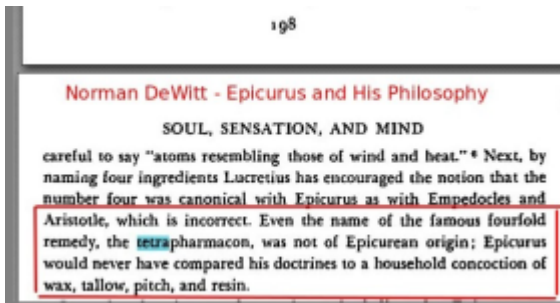
[Comparing Translations of the Tetrpharmakon](#)

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[Post I made on Facebook:](#)

It's my view that using the "tetrpharmakos" as a summary of Epicurean philosophy is a terrible idea. The phrasing is so truncated that it fails to convey Epicurus' original meaning and distorts the conclusions that many people will draw as to his intent. Further, the text does not come from Epicurus himself, nor does it come to us in an intact and reliable narrative by a recognized Epicurean authority. The flood of words devoted to the "tetrpharmakos" on the internet is all traceable to one source: a reconstructed fragmentary passage found in Herculaneum, written 200+ years after Epicurus, and attributed to Philodemus. It is my understanding that this four-fold summary is found in this form nowhere else in the ancient records left to us. Probably the best source from which to study the origin and condition of the text is at the Oxford University page linked in my post. On that page, images of **\*\*transcriptions\*\*** of the surviving pages from this scroll may be viewed. I would like to study this further so that I can revise my opinion, if warranted. If anyone who knows Greek has the time to look at these and comment, or anyone knows articles which have done this, please comment below.

## Post by "Cassius" of February 2, 2019 at 2:22 PM



## Post by "Cassius" of February 2, 2019 at 2:29 PM

In Bailey's "Epicurus, the Extant Remains" there is no reference to any appearance of this formulation anywhere in the ancient world other than the above-referenced Herculaneum scroll:



## Post by "Cassius" of February 2, 2019 at 2:33 PM

The reference in "The Epicurus Reader"



regard to particular. Rather, they contain the kind of information which enables one 'to arrive by oneself' at the solutions to many of the problems concerning particulars" (p. D.L. X, 62).<sup>10</sup>

The cardinal tenets (so equivoally mentioned in the passage quoted above) comprise, importantly, the four doses (of 'self preservation'): Diatribe XI, 4) which contains the so-called fatalistic medicine (predestinationism), namely, *atropalaxia*, and also some other ethical claims.<sup>11</sup> In its context from the *atropalaxia* is that 'god presides on fate, death or cause for alarm, it is easy to procure what is good, and also to endure what is evil' (GM I., I, IV, 9-14).<sup>12</sup> So far, as we know, all Epicurean philosophers endorse these tenets and defend them against their critics. As for Philodemus, he establishes each of these tenets separately and all of them together in a number of writings and in ways which are distinctly his own. For example, in *On Choice and Avoidance* he mentions the disastrous consequences of superstition (Diatribe VII, 1-3, 10) and argues for the superiority, both ethical and pragmatic, of the view that we should not fear the gods. Also, he demonstrates the irrationality of the fear of death and its disastrous impact on everyday life (Diatribe XVI, 1-32, 33).<sup>13</sup> Moreover, he justly examines the dead and the fourth tenet of the *atropalaxia* concerning, respectively, the limits of good and evil. "We should know both that the good is not only limited in quantity and duration, but is also easy to attain"<sup>14</sup> and that the bad is not only less enjoyable and more, but is also easy to bear. For otherwise it would be of our use (so to say) that the good (should be limited) has inseparable or difficult for us to achieve, or that the bad should be limited but unbearable because of its long duration" (Diatribe 1-10). As the sequel of the text suggests,<sup>15</sup> the principles embodied

<sup>10</sup> "That this is not a Philodemus text."  
<sup>11</sup> On the meaning of the expression of 'straps' as distinguished from its equivalent, see Heist and Verbeke (2018), pp. 110-111.

<sup>12</sup> Again, the cause concerning the *atropalaxia* comes in the discussion by Heist and Verbeke and the text. For their discussion on the discussion of the topic, see the fourth note (Heist, 2018, p. 110) and the discussion with which I started concerning the other three of Philo: 112) and the Philo text, (2018), p. 111-112.

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## Post by "Cassius" of February 2, 2019 at 2:40 PM

"[A Conceptual and Theoretical Analysis of Fear](#)" by Sergio Starkstein, including a reference that Long considers the tetrapharmakos encapsulates Epicurus' entire philosophy.

### 2.4.1 The Principal Causes of Fear

The main causes of human fear, which are described in the first four chapters of the *Atrota Doseis*, were briefly summarized by Epicurus' follower Philodemus in the famous *atropalaxia* or the four-fold remedy (Heist and Schofield 1993):<sup>10</sup> "Don't fear god, Don't worry about death, What is good is easy to get, and What is terrible is easy to endure." The *atropalaxia* is structured in a hierarchy that facilitates a philosophical treatment of fears. The first step is to dispense the fear of the afterlife, which should allow an easier removal of the fear of death. Once this step is achieved, the remaining fears can be diminished or removed by following the Epicurean ethics of a tranquil life and Epicurus' maxims regarding fear and safety (see below). I shall now analyze the *atropalaxia* in its four individual components.

### 2.4.2 Don't Fear God

During the Hellenistic period, as already noted, there was a widespread belief that human life was in the control of gods, the goddesses of fortune. Religion became one alternative to escape from the grasp of an inexorable destiny, although (depending on one's fears, for example, individuals could ask the gods for protection, but at the same time had to seek protection from the gods' anger. Gordon (Gordon and Stein 2004, pp. 5-16) considers this ambivalent status of the Hellenistic gods as the origin of the human fear of the divine. Dickinson (2013, p. 9) suggested that in the Hellenistic era the Greeks were terrified by the powers of nature, which became personified in spiritual beings. Later, these beliefs crystallized in a religious system that made the gods more familiar and named phenomena (as lightning). The Greek gods acquired a human form and could interfere with human affairs in both positive and negative ways. According to Epicurus, fear of the gods is

<sup>10</sup>Philodemus *Atrota Doseis* (The Four Remedies) (Philo 100, col. 63-11) Heist and Schofield 1993. Long considers the the composition "Natural, some additions" (Long 2010, p. 130).

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## Post by "Matt" of February 2, 2019 at 2:41 PM

Interesting. I always thought this formula was firmly associated with Epicurus. But it sounds like Philodemus was the one who coined it.

But wouldn't Philodemus have based this model on the teachings of Epicurus? And would we believe Epicurus would disagree with the formula?

Maybe it was some sort of proselytizing tract that was formulated during those 200 years between Epicurus and Philodemus by other devoted Epicureans looking to give a simple “cure” to the world while Epicureanism was still flourishing.

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### **Post by “Matt” of February 2, 2019 at 3:02 PM**

It’s clearly in the vein of Epicureanism. Whether or not Epicurus himself would’ve liked it or coined it himself.

In my opinion, It’s a super simplified breakdown of the very basic tenants that kept (and keep) Epicureanism afloat.

“Don’t fear the divine” According to E’s own specific theological doctrines, the very ones he promoted. This one makes sense to me as being very Epicurean.

“Don’t fear (worry, obsess etc.) death.” This is also E’s doctrine and it ties directly into the first premise. There are no gods, no judgement, no afterlife. So when life ends, it’s just a cessation of sensation. So don’t “fear it” because there is nothing after you stop breathing.

The last two are a bit more vague, but they are certainly a reference to the shortness of mortal life and the battle between pleasure and pain. “What’s terrible (painful)” doesn’t last forever and “what’s good (pleasurable)” is easy to obtain, because if you follow the Epicurean system, you would have the wisdom to know the difference between necessary pleasures and unnecessary ones.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of February 2, 2019 at 3:32 PM**

I’ve thought of the tetrapharmakos as a pithy mnemonic for beginning students (such as myself) to get a basic understanding of the philosophy. For me, it’s been helpful in that regard. That being said, a treatment such as this is a necessary step to a deeper and more nuanced grasp of the ideas.

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### **Post by “Matt” of February 2, 2019 at 3:44 PM**

I agree with you Godfrey. I think the formula clearly has an Epicurean stamp on it. Whether or not Epicurus coined it himself.

It's not a "full" presentation of Epicureanism by any stretch. But it certainly functions as a brief reminder of the most basic beliefs.

I mean it's not like it's possible that it would endorse anything other than Epicureanism. The first two premises are drawn directly from the first two PD's!

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### **Post by "Godfrey" of February 2, 2019 at 4:53 PM**

I've got the impression that the school of EP is considered to have followed Epicurus's thinking unusually closely through the centuries. But this topic is interesting in that it may be an example of a bit of variation in the doctrine and the potential ramifications of that, which I think Cassius is doing a good service to explore. Given the fragmentary remains of the documentation, it's great to see accessible studies of what exists and how it might fit together.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of February 2, 2019 at 8:40 PM**

Thanks for the comments above. Godfrey, in case I am not being clear, I don't really suspect that the phrasing indicates a divergence from Epicurus in Philodemus. Rather, what I suspect is that modern interpreters are reading into fragmentary remains something that probably is not there.

My greatest concern after the fragmentary nature of these lines is the lack of context before and after in the scroll. Based on what I read in Philodemus in "On Methods of Inference" and "On Rhetoric" it was common for him to quote opposing philosophers and discuss opposing views. For all we know he could have been writing something with which he did not agree, so he could explain the problems with it.

I agree also with the comments that there are aspects of the passage that are useful, even in prompting us to have discussions like this. It's certainly possible to interpret these in ways that are consistent, but I do question whether Epicurus himself would ever say that "what's good is easy to get" and "what's bad is easy to avoid." Those don't seem to me to be sympathetic interpretations of PD3 and PD4, or the way that someone who does have compassion for the suffering of mankind would talk, as Epicurus clearly had. So even if the translation and context

are accurate, I'd question what is going on with this formulation.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of February 2, 2019 at 9:38 PM**

Oh I forgot this point - there really ought to be some leads in the rest of the text that is in this scroll, but I have no clue as to what the rest supposedly says, even on the same page as this "tetrapharmakon" text.

That's the kind of research I'd really like to pursue, because somebody must know more detail about this text.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of February 7, 2019 at 8:29 AM**

More comments:

Cassius:

Yes it does have its uses when wielded by the right hands, and it is so well known today that it has to be dealt with regardless of what we might think about it. I wish we had an example of an actual ancient Epicurean using it in context and explaining it from his or her perspective. Many of the passages that seem so tricky I think are perfectly understandable given the right perspective, which they would have had and of which we have been robbed for 2000 years.

[Elli Pensa Cassius](#) my friend, I agree with you ...the "tetrapharmakos" is that kind of schooling as it is for the little children when they are starting the nursery school. We the greeks when we learned the alphabet we sung an old song that goes like this :

Alpha, beta, gamma, delta...

bring all the books,

and a pencil and a paper,

to write all the things,

to write little letters

that are the God's little things. ( i.e. the little letters and the little things that we learn at school are derived from god and are ending to the god). 😊

So, that old song we have learned at nursery school stopped to the four letters, as four medicines means in greek the tetrapharmakos. And I wonder now where are the other letters of the greek alphabet ? Where is our alpha and omega that is pleasure inside the tetrapharmakos? It does not exist inside and that old song we sung in nursery school, and in the tetrapharmakos. Sorry guys, but inside wrong hands and the tetrapharmakos is like that old greek song we said in nursery school. That's the whole issue, I suppose. Every little and condensed issue, when you see it reading or hearing and is about the EP, as a honest Epicurean, you have to make it huge, clear, mature, grow, strong and obvious connected it with the real GOAL ! 😊

Cassius:

The formulation does have its uses, just like these rhymes do. But I think its grossly overused, and mostly by people who have no affinity for a pleasure-based philosophy. In fact, this formulation does not even mention "pleasure" at all, which is probably the main reason it goes down so well with those who interpret Epicurus as consistent with the Stoics.

And one of the best ways I can think to caution people about it is to point out that we have ZERO-NONE-ZERO evidence of any Epicurean from 300 BC to about 1800 AD (whenever the scroll was deciphered) ever citing this formulation in any intact text written by a recognized Epicurean. Even this text itself is (1) not intact, and (2) not without doubt written by Philodemus, and (3) even if written by Philodemus, we don't have his backup explanation for why it is good, rather than a child's rhyme. And even after 1800, we don't have the original text (just a drawing of a reconstruction) and we don't have any way to assess the accuracy or the mindset of the person who transcribed it. Nor do we know if the person who transcribed it would endorse the use being put to his transcription.

I would be very grateful if someone reading this who is an expert can cite exceptions to the list of cautions I've just cited, but in my reading (which is pretty wide by now) I have not seen a single instance of it being cited, much less endorsed, by an authoritative proponent of Epicurean philosophy.

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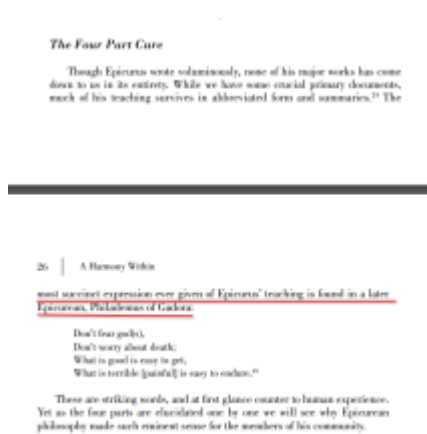
## Post by “Cassius” of February 1, 2023 at 11:49 AM

I note that the material forwarded by [ResponsiblyFree](#) referenced [here](#) uses the **Tetrapharmakos as an organization model. I am adding this post to an earlier thread to expand discussion.**

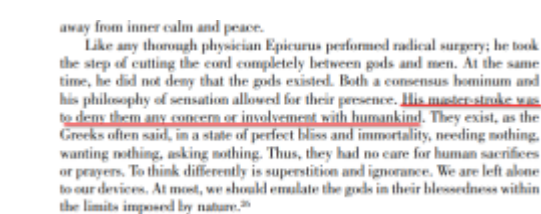
The article under review correctly cites the Tetrpharmakos as coming from Philodemus. It's not - as I need not repeat, but will - stated in this form by Epicurus himself, or by Metrodorus, or by Hermarchus, or by Diogenes of Oinoanda, or by Lucretius, or by any other recognized authority on Epicurus.

Further, to the extent the Tetrpharmakos appears to be included in a Herculaneum reconstruction of a work by Philodemus, it is (1) a fragment without clear context as to the point of its inclusion, and (2) contained in a work in which Philodemus is also campaigning against failure to pay proper attention to the original texts - in which I would suggest it would be natural to include *inadequate summaries of the original texts* (such as I would label the "Tetrpharmakos") as an example of what to avoid, not to follow.

Here is the way it is framed in the article we're discussing:



There are a couple of points I want to make about this presentation:



First, I don't consider the "non-involvement" to be Epicurus' "masterstroke." The masterstroke was to develop Democritus' atomism into a full-blown conclusion that the universe is eternal, entirely natural, was never created by, and is not supervised by, any supernatural beings. That aspect is the foundation of the gods' non-involvement, because if we ever admitted the possibility that the gods created the universe originally, or supervise it now, then their lack of concern or involvement would be entirely reversible at any moment. And whether you want to skip over the issue that Epicurus "first" concern was to get at the truth, and not to justify a pre-ordained conclusion that relief from anxiety is desirable, then it's important not to leave the issue hanging: the reason that the gods won't decide to revoke their supernatural intervention in the future is that they have never in the past been capable of it, nor are they now or will they

ever be.

The writer gets a lot of it right from my point of view, but his attitude continues to imply that Epicurus was fudging the truth by being "wise in not denying their existence" for reasons that are at the very least unattractive and not an appropriate assessment of the full impact of his work:

Thus, Epicurus eliminates one of the two chief causes for anxiety: Why fear the gods? It's a waste of time, they don't care. But he was wise in not denying their existence and in public respected people's religious observances, though in private he often pointed out their inconsistencies: "If God listened to the prayers of man," he said, "all men would have perished, for they are always praying for evil to fall on one another."<sup>29</sup> Epicurus had no desire to stir up the animosity of the multitudes which might shatter the quiet and peace of his community. But it was clear to him and his friends that it was less impious to

As for the section on death I see most of it as acceptable, but it always seems to me that going too far in comparing Epicurus to Buddhism is a bad idea, given the strikingly different assessment they make of the nature of life:

dissolves with it, thus eliminating the possibility of retribution after death."  
Epicurus' teaching here can be compared to the Buddhist doctrine of "no soul" (Anatta) according to which the idea of an individual soul or self subsisting after death is a projection created out of the ego's need for self-preservation. In fact, Buddhist teaching comes very close in places to Epicurean philosophy of nature or sensation. Buddha said that it is better for one to take his or her physical body as a self rather than mind, thought or consciousness, because the former seems more solid than the latter which change constantly day and night faster than the body. Yet if this physical body dissolves at death how much more mind, thought, consciousness which is *flaming even now*!<sup>31</sup>

As to the "good is easy to get" we have a good treatment of the sweeping nature of the term pleasure, but coupled with the typical narrowing to exclude sensual pleasures - which Epicurus did not do when his philosophy is read in full:

The Epicurean notion of pleasure is not what we understand when we use the term one-dimensionally. For it is both subtle and refined, beginning with the physical and reaching to the highest mental states. Thus, it is all-inclusive. Hedonism (hedone) does not mean the wild pleasures of orgiastic experience which Epicurus eschews:

When we say that pleasure is the end of life, we do not mean the pleasures of the profligate, or the pleasures of consumption, as some believe, either from ignorance and disagreement or from deliberate misinterpretation, but rather the lack of pain in the body and disturbance in the soul.<sup>32</sup>

And this comes very close to reversing the proper perspective of wisdom as a tool for pleasure, rather than wisdom being a goal in and of itself as the Stoics allege:

So much for traditional views of Epicureanism. At this point it becomes apparent that the term "Hedonistic ethics" is not a contradiction. Pleasure will be rationally sought in line with what brings tranquility of soul (*ataraxia*). For the good life is one of balance. Thus, a kind of prudence or foresight, even wisdom, accrues in the choosing of pleasure. Sedgwick has put it well:

And we also get "the simple life of frugality is the best" stated as an absolute, rather than contextually:

The implications of Epicurean teaching here are twofold: First, one can find the most pleasure and tranquility if he or she fulfills those desires which are natural and moderate. Thus, a simple life of frugality is the best since *basic* desires are most easily satisfied and deal with the most available things—food, drink, adequate shelter, safety from hostile invasion, and so on. Epicurus praised

As to the "terrible is easy to endure" we go through the familiar apologies for the wording:

The alert reader will probably find two problems with this reasoning. The first is in regard to the words "easily endured." We are not accustomed to viewing pain, especially persistent chronic pain, in this manner. Chronic pain which is more than just a nuisance lowers the quality of life for most of us. Simply put, there is a definite difference between living with pain and a life relatively free of pain. It is hard to see how one could equate them, especially in espousing a philosophy based on pleasure. However, one must remember that the overriding good Epicurus sought to procure for himself and his disciples was "ataraxia"—freedom from disturbance. And this ultimately involved a mental adjustment, the kind of coming to terms with things that creates psychic equilibrium. A life of healthy frugality spent among caring friends would most likely reduce the physical factor, especially when one considers the many ways life can still be enjoyed. Perhaps, one has to have spent some time coping with

Still, one has to seriously wonder whether such an argument adequately addresses the issue of chronic pain which can infiltrate one's being to such an extent that we find ourselves in a state which seems endless. Emily Dickinson's striking verse puts the matter well:

Pain—has an Element of Blank—  
It cannot recollect  
When it began—or if there were  
A time when it was not.<sup>73</sup>

Those who suffer from chronic pain—whether it be that of severe arthritis or from an injury too deep and destructive to have allowed adequate healing—know all too well how it can come to dominate one's existence. Surely, Epicurus himself was familiar with this kind of chronic pain. Whether his solution to the problem is adequate enough to create the equilibrium necessary for *ataraxia* is open to question, at least in our time.

So in summary:

There is some documentation that the ancient Epicureans discussed this formulation, but there is slender if any good reason to expect that the ancient Epicureans held this up as the climactic expression of their philosophy. There is equal if not more reason to think that Philodemus was critical, rather than supportive, of the formulation, given his criticism of failure to read the original texts, of which the "four part cure" is but a serious amputation of the first four [principal doctrines](#).

The tetrapharmakos does provide an a shorter version of the first four doctrines, but at the cost of adding ambiguity, obscurity, and the possibility for ridicule (especially as to the latter two). It is not clear, it is not unambiguous, and it is not an accurate summary of the philosophy.

Yes it has its uses, but it has at least as much use for explaining what Epicurean philosophy does not claim as what it does claim.

And thus my point in this post is this not to endlessly criticize but to ask: Do we really need to endlessly hold up the tetrapharmakos as the supreme statement of Epicurean philosophy? Neither Lucretius nor Diogenes of Oinoanda nor Epicurus himself expressed the philosophy in this truncated this way. ***Why should we?***

Note: I see from the earlier posts in the thread that this was started back before we had some of our best current researchers. I hope that we can add this topic into our sights and target it for much deeper investigation. ***What is the true and accurate context of this formulation? Did anyone else beside Philodemus cite it? Do we even know that Philodemus approved of it?***

## Post by “Plantpierogi” of October 18, 2024 at 1:41 PM

I understand it's flaws, but I do think it's a good base to work from. However, I tend to do a few tweaks to it

Don't fear god,

Don't worry about death;

What is good is generally easy to get, and

What is terrible can be endured and is often temporary

---

## Post by “Cassius” of October 18, 2024 at 2:06 PM

[Quote from Plantpierogi](#)

Don't fear god,

Just out of curiosity, how would you interpret that one for yourself, or to someone to whom you want to be as clear as possible?

---

## Post by “Don” of October 18, 2024 at 2:57 PM

[Quote from Plantpierogi](#)

Don't fear god,

Don't worry about death;

I feel the need to comment when this comes up. For me, it's critically important to remember that these are not imperatives or commands in the Greek original. They are statements of fact: The gods are not to be feared. "Death is not to be approached with suspicion."

The "don't" translations are objectively incorrect, but also sound to ...judgy? The original asks us to see things as they are.

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## Post by “Plantpierogi” of October 18, 2024 at 3:17 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

[Quote from Plantpierogi](#)

Don't fear god,

Just out of curiosity, how would you interpret that one for yourself, or to someone to whom you want to be as clear as possible?

For myself, this comes naturally. I have been an atheist since I was ten years old. I don't fear a being, or the torture said being would have in store for me, that I don't believe in.

For the religious, it depends on the individual believer and how they interpret holy scripture.

I think the three part cure is a useful thing to keep in mind for my own life. I think it explains a lot of the unnecessary fears and anxieties that we put on ourselves out of plain habit.

---

## Post by “Eikadistes” of October 18, 2024 at 4:34 PM

[Blue Öyster Cult speaks for me.](#)

*Seasons don't fear the reaper*

*Nor do the wind, the sun or the rain*

*We can be like they are...*

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## Post by “Don” of October 18, 2024 at 6:08 PM

Here's a quick paraphrase that literally just came to mind (apologies for the first draft nature, suggested revisions or edits welcomed):

Gods aren't scary.

Death won't bite.

Feeling good is easy.

Feeling bad is finite.

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## Post by “Pacatus” of October 20, 2024 at 4:39 PM

Here is a poetic rendition I did for myself sometime back:

***No fear of gods, ghosts or fates;  
nor death's bare naught that awaits.***

***Simple pleasures come easy to gain;  
a happy soul serves, travails to wane.***

The last line is intended to reflect Epicurus' own tapping into memories and his friends whilst in great physical pain. But I still think that line might be improved upon (whilst retaining the rhyme 😊). Suggestions welcome.

{The transitive usage of "wane" is, I think, archaic.}

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## Post by “Bryan” of December 7, 2024 at 12:28 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I frequently repeat my reservations and criticisms of the "Tetrpharmakos"

Yes, the context in which Philódēmos mentions the Tetrphármakos will further support some reservations. We should remember the paragraph just before the Tetrphármakos says:

"...of those who are called Epicureans. While someone known or even described in detail by us, who also claims to be '**the authentic reader**' on select writings and on a multitude of compositions – even if he performs poorly, he has selected many passages, but in individual thoughts he is the most inexperienced! In fact, for what he must do, he looks only at the main points – just like [someone] whom they say is '**a helmsman [navigating] from the book.**'"

(Philódēmos, [Ad Contubernales], P.Herc. 1005, col. 3/4)

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## Post by “Don” of December 7, 2024 at 12:43 PM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

[Ad Contubernales]

Just a reminder that the papyrus only has ΠΡΟΣ ΤΟΥΣ... We have no idea to whom Philodemus was addressing the treatise or who he was arguing against (in the title, he obviously had strong feelings expressed in the text itself).

Plus, even if Philodemus wasn't a fan (a for or against case can be made) of the "four line cure" it was *definitely* in use and in circulation among the wider Epicurean community. It's authenticity as an Epicurean "memento" verse is indisputable. That connection to the ancient members of the school is enough for me to continue to be a "fan."

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## Post by “Cassius” of December 7, 2024 at 1:49 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

it was definitely in use and in circulation among the wider Epicurean community. It's authenticity as an Epicurean "memento" verse is indisputable

Don aside from the papyrus we are talking about what citations can you provide for that? Possibly they are in the thread above and if so I will delete this post... (But after looking I don't see anything.)

I cited in this post above that Bailey does not mention it appearing anywhere else. But maybe someone has found another cite. Can anyone provide a cite to where this appears other than the papyrus? I seem to recall there might be something brief in Cicero but not even a full recitation that would verify that this is the version. But by all means let's keep an eye out to track this down.

Post

## [RE: Diving Deep Into The History of The Tetrpharmakon / Tetrpharmakos](#)

In Bailey's "Epicurus, the Extant Remains" there is no reference to any appearance of this formulation anywhere in the ancient world other than the above-referenced Herculaneum scroll:



Cassius

February 2, 2019 at 2:29 PM

In the intervening time since this thread was started we have spent a lot of time with Cicero and he quotes Epicurus in great detail but does not ever give this formulation the kind of central estimation of being a summary of the whole philosophy that it receives in the modern world. Cicero lets Torquatus and Velleius go on and on with apparently reliable explanation of many without any reference to this formulation.

If some combination of Lucretius or Diogenes of Oinoanda or Diogenes Laertius or any similar figure were found to have cited this formulation I would feel entirely differently.

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**Post by "Don" of December 7, 2024 at 2:25 PM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Don aside from the papyrus we are talking about what citations can you provide for that? Possibly they are in the tread above and if so I will delete this post...

I'm not aware of any other than a possible paraphrase in Cicero and its similarity to the first few PDs.

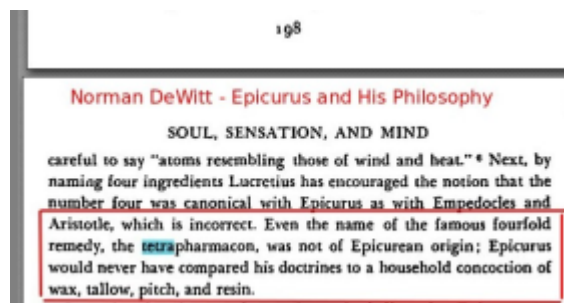
My contention + and fondness for it as a link to the ancient members of our school and that it is of ancient *Epicurean* provenance is:

1. If Philodemus created it, he is a pivotal member of the ancient Epicurean school.
2. If Philodemus was critiquing its use among other Epicureans, they were obviously using it.

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## Post by "Don" of December 7, 2024 at 4:25 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)



This is exactly the kind of thing that infuriates me about DeWitt's book 😡 (not, notably, his academic papers). He'll throw out a statement like this with no citation or reference. And then he brings up the tetrapharmakos in other points of the book in an evidently positive light.

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## Post by "Cassius" of December 7, 2024 at 4:37 PM

Yes I agree! I see his statement about "would never" as a personal opinion -- which sounds good to me -- but it sure would have been nice to cite for us where the name "tetrapharmakon" comes from! 😊

And yes I agree too with the inconsistency that he cites it elsewhere more approvingly than I would myself. Again, not that I think that it can't be made to work quite nicely by those who know the big Epicurean picture, but that in its truncated form it can too easily be misunderstood by those who don't, especially if people get the impression it can take the place of the first four full doctrines. Nobody here does that, but it's very frustrating to read these generalist articles stating that *the tetrapharmakon is all you need to know! It's a great summary of everything important that Epicurus had to say!*

**No, it's not!** 😊

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## Post by “Cassius” of December 7, 2024 at 4:45 PM

The "ultimate authority" in December 2024! 😊

I asked:

When was the word "Tetrapharmakon" first used?

ChatGPT said:

The word "Tetrapharmakon" (meaning "four-part remedy") is attributed to the later Epicurean philosopher Philodemus of Gadara (circa 110–35 BCE). While it encapsulates key aspects of Epicurean philosophy, its formulation as a concise term may not have originated directly from Epicurus himself. The phrase is most famously associated with a poetic fragment found in Philodemus' works, which outlines four key maxims derived from Epicurus' teachings:

1. **Do not fear the gods.**
2. **Do not worry about death.**
3. **What is good is easy to get.**
4. **What is terrible is easy to endure.**

The earliest surviving textual evidence of the term is in Herculaneum papyri linked to Philodemus' writings, dating to the 1st century BCE. This suggests that the term gained currency among Epicureans as a way to succinctly summarize their core ethical guidance during or after Philodemus' time.

Cassius said:

Who was the NEXT person after Philodemus to mention it?

ChatGPT said:

The term "Tetrapharmakon" is primarily associated with the Epicurean philosopher Philodemus of Gadara (circa 110–35 BCE), who utilized it to encapsulate four [principal doctrines](#) of Epicurean philosophy. The earliest known textual evidence of this term appears in the Herculaneum papyri, specifically in Philodemus' works dating to the 1st century BCE. Subsequent explicit mentions of the "Tetrapharmakon" are scarce in surviving ancient literature. While later Epicurean thinkers and commentators, such as Diogenes of Oenoanda in the 2nd century CE, propagated Epicurean doctrines, it remains uncertain whether they specifically referenced the "Tetrapharmakon" by name. Therefore, based on existing evidence, Philodemus is the earliest and, perhaps, the sole ancient source to explicitly mention the "Tetrapharmakon."

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## **Post by "Cassius" of December 7, 2024 at 4:50 PM**

Hey this might actually lead to something - but note the qualifying last sentence. I hope this doesn't lead us to find eventually that the term was intended by the christians who used it to be insulting, as one might read DeWitt to deduce....

So the name tetrapharmakos, and not just the details of the formulation, does appear in the Philodemus text itself?

--- For Comparison Purposes, Grok:

When was the word "Tetrapharmakon" first used?

The word "Tetrapharmakon" (or its variant "Tetrapharmakos") was first used in the context of ancient Greek pharmacology, but its metaphorical use in Epicurean philosophy dates back to the 1st century BCE. Specifically, it appears in the works of Philodemus, preserved in the Herculaneum Papyri, where it refers to the four chief doctrines or remedies for healing the soul. This is documented in sources like the Liddell-Scott Greek Lexicon, which lists the term and its uses, and various discussions on Epicurean philosophy websites.

Who was the NEXT person after Philodemus to mention it?

After Philodemus, the next known mention of the "Tetrapharmakon" comes from the early Christian writers Hippolytus of Rome and Tertullian, both of whom referenced it in their works critiquing Epicurean philosophy. This is based on posts found on X.

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### **Post by “Don” of December 8, 2024 at 7:57 AM**

According to the PhD dissertation linked below, it appears *tetrapharmakos* was a general idea among philosophers and physicians in the ancient world. The Epicurean one was likely a response to this.

[Theory and Terminology of Mixture in Galen.](#)

[The concepts of krasis and mixis in Galen’s thought: PhD Dissertation, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin von MA Claudia Mirrione](#)

For Hippocrates showed that what constitutes the nature of man is not one thing but many, not that none of the four exists in the body in its pure state. For the leading proponents of this doctrine do not say that this is the principle. Rather they hold that there is one thing over and above the four, and which is constituted from them, just as the power of the *tetrapharmakon* is neither wax, pitch, resin, nor fat, but something else over and above them, which is generated from the mixture of all of them, although this latter doctrine comes in two forms. For some people say that only the four qualities are mixed through-and-through with one another, while others hold that also the substances themselves are (the Peripatetics favour the former doctrine, the Stoics the latter). (Trans. Hankinson; slightly modified)

T2 Galen in Hipp. Nat. Hom. comment. K. XV 32.1-11 Mewaldt 18.27-19.7

In fact, the four line verse found in Philodemus is not even brought up! This dissertation sheds a whole new light on how tetrapharmakos was understood in the ancient world. I wouldn't necessarily recommend reading the entire paper, but do a few searches for Epicurus or the word tetrapharmakos and skim the quotes. An unexpected find.

PS. It appears Dr. Mirrione got her PhD: <https://www.klassphil.hu-berlin.de/en/avh-profess...-staff/mirrione>

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**Post by “Cassius” of December 8, 2024 at 8:24 AM**

Great find Don.

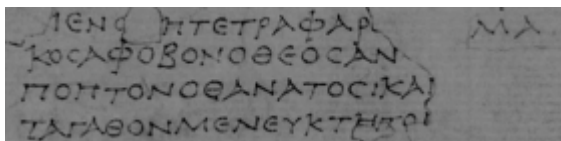
So where, if ever, in the ancient world do we have a variation of the word "tetrpharmakos" appearing on the same piece of paper as the four lines from Philodemus?

Are you then saying that the general idea of a "four-part-cure" originated with nothing to do with Epicurus whatsoever, and it is a generic term that commentators just came to apply to the passage from Philodemus after it was discovered in the modern world simply because it has four parts, just like we apply the word "kleenex" to any kind of tissue paper or "xerox" to photocopying?

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### Post by "Don" of December 8, 2024 at 9:00 AM

Not quite. Philodemus calls it the tetrpharmakos:



right there starting at the end of the first line in this clip: ΤΕΤΡΑΦΑΡ ΜΑ / ΚΟΣ (tetrphar ma / kos).

It appears to me that the idea of a four part mixture that resulted in something greater than its parts was a common idea in ancient Greece. The Epicurean one is simply the school's response to this idea.

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### Post by "Don" of December 8, 2024 at 10:11 AM

Another paper:

[Substance, Element, Quality, Mixture: Galen's Physics and His Hippo...](#)

Hippocrates' own words will make it clear to you that in the treatise Nature of Man he often refers to the elements (stoicheia) by the names of their qualities...

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... bodies as evidenced with parents. Now, even though Hippocrates does not make great play with the elements by name, as Galen quite happily admits, he does talk at length of the qualities, and by so doing, according to Galen (see Book 1), he frequently seems to refer neither simply to the quality, not to any body which happens to be hotter rather than colder, but to the essentially hot body, or in other words, to the element fire. To make out this case, Galen needs to reject the generally favored interpretation <sup>10</sup> of Hippocrates' target at the beginning of Nature of Man, namely that he rejects all material theory in favor of the view that his target is only various forms of elemental mixture:

It seems that both Aristotle and Hippocrates have constructed their account in the same way, but that the commentators have not understood them. ... For the bodies designated as elements [i.e. the elemental] drugs because none of them is seen in the body in its pure form. In the same way, one might refuse to allow that the tetrapharmakon <sup>11</sup> is a compound of wax, resin, oil, and fire, as the grounds that some of these bodies if whole and simple indeed, are even kinds of these things which are so mixed throughout (at least all the bodies) in other cases than they drug compounded from cadmia, antimony and arsenic (supper). If the simple ingredients are being questioned, no longer retains any of them in their pure form (though not even the smallest, can be found in which you will see any one of the ingredients), but mentioned unadorned and undivided with some other. [Text 26] <sup>12</sup>

Hippocrates' theory is attributed to Aristotle, and the implied objection, that if element theory is true, you should be able to discern the elements as such in the human body, is rejected as absurd by comparison with the condition of a compound drug whose original components are lesser and distinct, although indistinguishable as such in the compound form. The parallel passage of *AMM* makes the same point:

One might wrongly then transcribe upon those who suppose that our bodies are generated from a mixture of the elements, rather and as often to show that water or fire or earth or air and separated substances, as if Aristotle did so, to admit they have been refused. You see how thinking that, in the case of the power of the tetrapharmakon, you had rather direct to the pure wax, or resin, or oil, or fire, as if you intended to show that, that you were concerned with the compound of these things, but to suppose that these things are mixed, one makes it clear that so one of them could not pure state. [Text 21] <sup>13</sup>

This all seems reasonable enough. Certainly the mere fact of it is one that one cannot side-track the ingredients from a mixture itself, show that they never did exist separately, or that they aren't still there in some sense. I can't now return whole again.

And look at that, a different WP article!

[Tetrapharmacum - Wikipedia](#)

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## Post by “Bryan” of December 14, 2024 at 12:25 AM

We do have the use of "pharmakon" by Epikouros in *Peri Phýseōs*, Book 14 (P.Herc. 1148 col. 24):

"This is also desirable: that one who is entirely afflicted by such over-questionings has a kind of remedy – through which it is possible that a simple condition [of life, focused] in the observation of nature will set free their innate trouble."

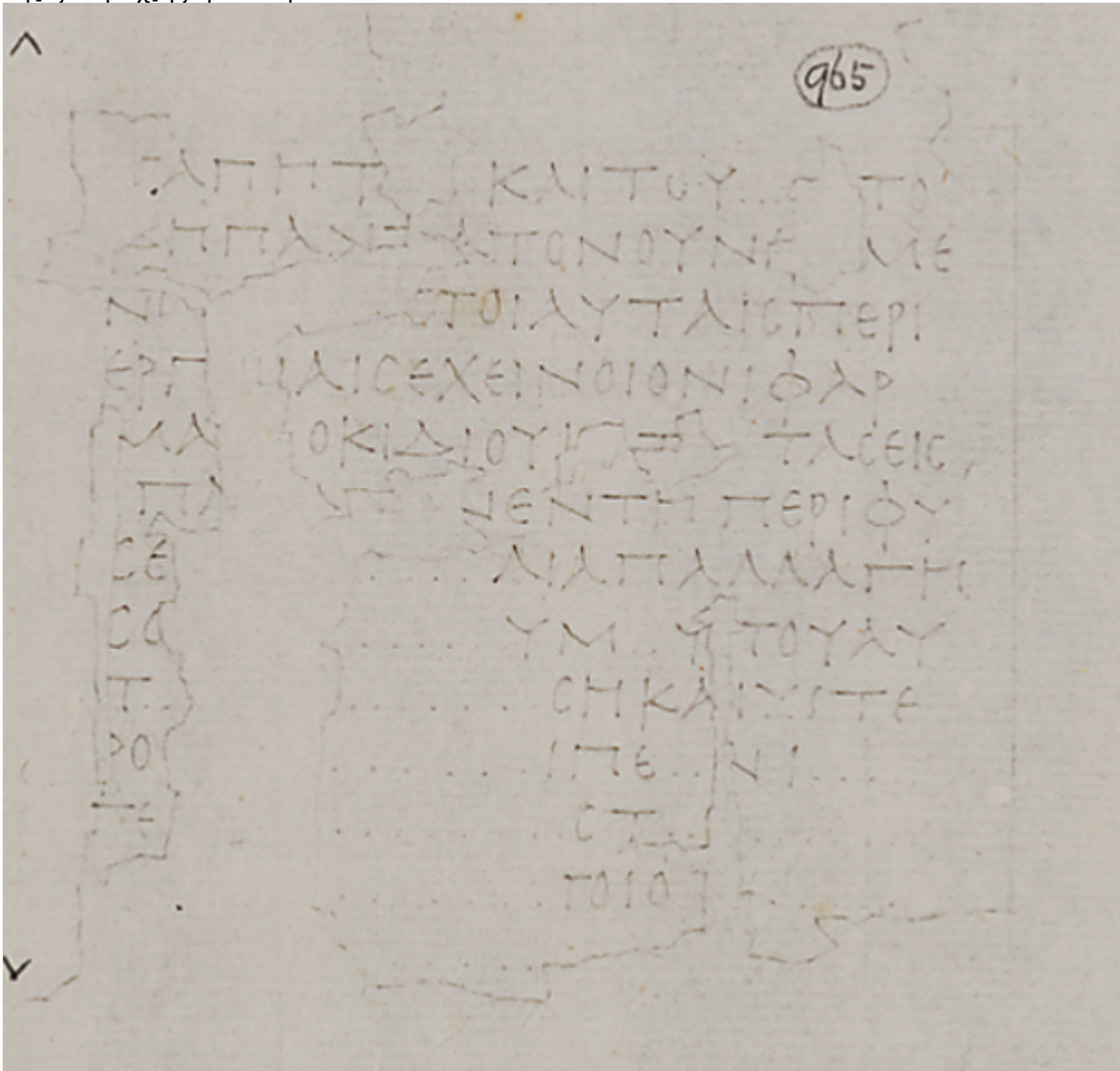
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## Post by “Don” of December 14, 2024 at 7:35 AM

column 24  
P.Herc. 1148 col. 24  
Sketched 1803-1803 by Carlo Orazi

[ἀ-]  
γαπητ[ὸν] καὶ τοῦτ[ο], τὸ  
δὴ πάντα τὸν συνε[χό]με-  
νον [ταῖς] τοιαύταις περι-  
εργ[ε]ίαις ἔχειν οἰονὶ φάρ-

μακρον δι' οὗ καταστάσεις  
 ἀπλ[ᾶς ἔστι]ν ἐν τῇ περὶ φύ-  
 σε[ως θεωρί]αι ἀπαλλαγῆ-  
 σε[σθαι τῆς σ]υμφύτου ἑαυ-  
 τα[ῖς ταραχ]ῆς ἢ καὶ ὕστε-



## Post by “Cassius” of May 14, 2025 at 1:19 PM

Prompted by some comments by [Rolf](#) , and then by Godfrey, I have a new question to add to this thread since a long time has passed since it started. I hope this hasn't been covered already but even if so it would be good to revisit this question:

We've had a number of references to statements like "the sun is the size it appears to be" as being in the nature of a "shibboleth" or in-your-face test of whether you understand a doctrine, as expounded by the article by Dr. Gellar-Goad.

I don't recall putting the "easy" wording of the Tetrpharmakon into that mold, but I suppose in thinking about it that the Epicureans might have over time developed such wording as a "test" of understanding, rather than as the kind of thing you'd say to your grandmother dying in the hospital.

I glanced back this morning at the word translated as "easy" and I see that there are also shades such as "readily" which arguably might not be so "in-your-face." And I stand firm in my general reservation that this formulation is not recorded to have been used by Epicurus, and apparently has never been seen other than in the fragment attributed to Philodemus in a book where he is critical of other Epicureans.

However for the sake of argument, to what extent might someone suggest that the "easy" phrasing as to the good and to the terrible was intended as a "make your point dramatically" shibboleth, rather than just a memory device or overgeneralization of [PD03](#) and [PD04](#)?

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## Post by “Don” of November 7, 2025 at 7:51 AM

Today, I came across this section of Diogenes of Oenoanda (emphasis added):

Quote

But, as I have said before, the majority of people suffer from a common disease, as in a plague, with their false notions about things, and their number is increasing (for in mutual emulation they catch the disease from one another, like sheep) moreover, [it is] right to help [also] generations to come (for they too belong to us, though they are still unborn) and, besides, love of humanity prompts us to aid also the foreigners who come here. Now, since the remedies of the inscription reach a larger number of people, I wished to use this stoa to advertise publicly the [medicines] that bring salvation. These

**medicines** we have put [fully] to the test; for we have dispelled the fears [that grip] us without justification, and, as for pains, those that are groundless we have completely excised, while those that are natural we have reduced to an absolute minimum, making their magnitude minute.

And the last part in Greek, emphasis added...

#### [Quote from Diogenes of O](#)

column 6

ρίας προθεῖν[αι φάρμα-]  
κα, ὧν δὴ φαρμ[άκων]  
πεῖραν ἡμε[ῖς] π[άντως]  
εἰλήφασμεν. [τούς]  
γὰρ ματαίως [κ]ατ[έχον-]  
τας ἡμᾶς φόβους [ἀ-]  
πελυσάμεθα, □ vac. 1□ τῶν τε  
λυπῶν τὰς μὲν κενᾶς  
ἐξεκόψασμεν εἰς τέ-  
λειον, □ vac. 1□ τὰς δὲ φυσικὰς  
εἰς μεικρὸν κομιδῆ  
συνεστείλαμεν, ἐλα-  
χιστιαῖον αὐτῶν τ[ὸ]  
μέγεθος ποιήσα[ντες]

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Diogenes specifically used φαρμακος (6.1 & 2) "[pharmakos] medicine." This medicine metaphor is in keeping with U221 and VS54. It's not a stretch for me to see this extrapolated to use in the Tetrpharmakos.

Diogenes' wording is also interesting in that I see it being a perfect encapsulation and summary of ataraxia and aponia:

*These medicines we have put [fully] to the test; for we have dispelled the fears [that grip] us without justification ([τούς] γὰρ ματαίως [κ]ατ[έχον]τας ἡμᾶς φόβους [ἀ]πελυσάμεθα) and, as for pains (λυπῶν), those that are groundless (κενᾶς "empty") we have completely excised, while those that are natural we have reduced to an absolute minimum, making their magnitude minute.*

The "fears [that grip] us without justification" are fears of the gods and death. Dispelling those fears that have no justification is what calms the troubles in the mind. That is, by definition and etymology, is *ataraxia*. These are also the first two lines of the tetrpharmakos.

Λυπων , genitive of λύπη (lupē) is grief, sadness; pain (of mind or body), suffering, affliction, distress.

These musings hit me this morning, so I'm placing them in this thread for thoughts and comments.

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## Post by “Patrikios” of November 9, 2025 at 4:00 PM

### [Quote from Don](#)

Diogenes specifically used φαρμακος (6.1 & 2) “[pharmakos] medicine.” This medicine metaphor is in keeping with U221 and VS54. It's not a stretch for me to see this extrapolated to use in the Tetrpharmakos.

Thanks, [Don](#) I appreciate your reference to Epicurus as the physician of the mind & soul. This is a good reason to separate Epicurus from other philosophers who provided advice on how to act. Epicurus, the ‘savior of humanity’ teaches us to **feel**, as he provides us with a prudent path to follow nature’s provided feelings (pain & pleasure) to guide us in daily choices and avoidances.

### [Quote from Don](#)

Dispelling those fears that have no justification is what calms the troubles in the mind. That is, by definition and etymology, is **ataraxia**

The more we can calm the mind, reaching a state of ataraxia; modern physiology shows that a calm mind can release chemicals that relax the body, which helps relieve body pains in order to also achieve aponia. ☐☐