

PD04 - Visualizing Principal Doctrine Four



Pain does not last continuously in the flesh, but the acutest pain is there for a very short time, and even that which just exceeds the pleasure in the flesh does not continue for many days at once. But chronic illnesses permit a predominance of pleasure over pain in the flesh.

- Epicurus Principal Doctrine 4

****Visualizing Principal Doctrine 4**** Contrary to the common idea that Epicureans flee from pain as the ultimate goal of life, the reverse is clearly documented in the Epicurean texts: Epicurus taught that we should embrace pain when it brings more pleasure than pain. Yes, we also avoid pain when possible, and we also embrace pain when more pain is avoided by the embrace. But in no way is "fleeing from pain" the meaning of life either in the words of Epicurus or in the best-documented illustrations of Epicureans in action, those given by Torquatus in "On Ends."

Consult the original text for the full description, but in short, Torquatus explains the actions of his ancestors in vividly Epicurean terms, holding that it is entirely Epicurean to fight one's enemies in physical combat ("charging an armed enemy;" wrestling the necklet from his foe") and even to treat one's own child "cruelly" ("sentenced his own son to death"), when necessary for the sake of the ultimate balance of emotional and physical pleasure and pain.

But the final balance has another component, and that is the meaning of Principal Doctrine 4: "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."

Nature has not stacked the cards against us so that all human life is "nasty, brutish, and short." As Epicurus explains here, moderate pain allows for a balance of pleasure over pain if we order our lives correctly, and in the unfortunate happenstance that we are unable to avoid

excruciating pain, then both our physical nature in not being able to withstand that pain for long, and our own ability to end our lives when necessary to prevent long-term agony, mean that even intense pain has no long-term hold over us. Ending our own lives, while of course the last resort, is known to any Epicurean to be a total escape from pain, because of course there is no afterlife in which to be punished in any way whatsoever.

The final impact of PD4 completes the conclusion that PD3 started: Pleasure is the goal of life, and a balance of pleasure over pain is attainable for most of us, and for most of life. And when (for most of us after many years) pain becomes unbearable, even then we have the ability to control when we depart, which we will not do for so long as we have the expectation that living on brings a net balance of pleasure.

Therefore the graphics attached to this Principal Doctrine do not portray the cowering, retiring, passive picture that many people (Stoics, Platonists, Aristotelians) seek to paint the true Epicurean. The true Epicurean will follow the lead of Torquatus, or, in another valid Roman example, the lead of Mucius Scaevola, who endured the pain of thrusting his right hand into a flame for the sake of saving his country, in which his greatest pleasures were embodied.

The full set of graphics for Principal Doctrine 4 can also be found here: <https://www.epicureanfriends.com/wcf/gallery/in...e-list/191-pd4/>