Journal of Philosophical Investigations
Print ISSN: 2251-7960 Online ISSN: 2423-4419
Homepage: https://philosophy.tabrizu.ac.ir

The Relationship between Suffering and Pleasure in Epicurus' Thought: A Reinterpretation of a Theory in Philosophical Psychotherapy

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Article Info

Article type:

Research Article

Article history:

Received 30 April 2026
Received in revised form 11 May 2026
Accepted 30 May 2026
Published online 25 October 2026

Keywords:

Epicurus, Suffering, Static Pleasure, Psychotherapy, Tetrapharmakos, Cognitive Restructuring

ABSTRACT

Epicurus, the fourth-century BCE Greek philosopher, founded his system on the dialectical resolution of the relationship between "pleasure" and "suffering." Contrary to popular interpretations, pleasure in his thought is not hedonistic indulgence but the "absence of bodily pain and mental disturbance." His philosophy is therefore not superficial hedonism but a theoretical foundation for the "care of the self." Employing qualitative content analysis and drawing on the contemporary philosophical psychotherapy approach—which seeks to revive philosophy as an art of living and rational treatment of existential suffering—this article reexamines the relationship between suffering and pleasure in Epicurus' works and demonstrates that his fourfold therapeutic structure (Tetrapharmakos) can be regarded as a premodern "cognitive restructuring" protocol consistent with the principles of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) and the modern concept of "stress management." The findings indicate that suffering in this model is not an "absolute evil" but a "diagnostic sign" and a warning of "irrational beliefs." These hidden, false beliefs—fear of the gods, fear of death, and fear of fate—identified through "Epicurean surgery," constitute the primary source of mental disturbance. Eliminating these beliefs is not an escape from suffering but a "passage" toward "enduring tranquility," the common goal of Epicurus' philosophy and contemporary existential psychotherapies.

Cite this article: Molteji, M. Sohrabnavi. R & Hosseinpour, F. (2026). The Relationship between Suffering and Pleasure in Epicurus' Thought: A Reinterpretation of a Theory in Philosophical Psychotherapy. *Journal of Philosophical Investigations*, 20(56), 641-662. https://doi.org/10.22034/jpiut.2026.72309.4501

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Publisher: University of Tabriz.

Intruduction

Since ancient times, "pleasure" and "suffering" have been among the fundamental poles of human experience, occupying a central place in the reflections of moral philosophers. Among them, Epicurus (341–270 BCE), the Greek philosopher of the fourth century BCE, founded his philosophical system upon resolving the relationship between these two. In his Letter to Menoeceus, Epicurus explicitly states: "Pleasure is the beginning and the end of the blessed life" (Jex, 1953, 42). Yet he immediately emphasizes that by pleasure he does not mean "the pleasures of the dissipated and those who revel in material pleasures," but rather "the absence of pain in the body and disturbance in the soul" (Diogenes Laertius, 2008, 467). This negative definition initiates a fundamental revolution in the conception of happiness: suffering (pain and disturbance) is recognized as the principal problem of human life, and the "wise person" is one who knows how to confront the threefold sources of suffering – fear of the gods, fear of death, and fear of fate (Diogenes Laertius, 2008, 467).

Contrary to the vulgar interpretation that equates Epicurean hedonism with debauchery and licentiousness – the Romans often called Epicurus a "pig," and the common meaning attributed to Epicureans is that they emphasize limitless eating – such characterizations are no more than rumors about Epicurus. For he led a simple life, ate simple food, and encouraged his friends and disciples to live simply (Gottlieb, 2005, 394). Epicurus emphasized altruism in his theory of hedonism, whereas later Epicureanism (the later Epicurean school) tended more toward egoism and the elimination of altruism. Thus, the historical Epicurus and later Epicureanism hold significantly different doctrines.

A careful examination of the texts reveals that Epicurus' philosophy is in fact a profound attempt to articulate a "theory of philosophical psychotherapy," or what in ancient Greece was called "care of the self" (therapeia tes psyches) (Nussbaum, 1994, 13). Martha Nussbaum, in her influential work, demonstrates that the Epicureans, Skeptics, and Stoics practiced philosophy not as an abstract intellectual discipline but as a "worldly art of coping with the everyday and vital problems of human life" (Nussbaum, 1994, 3). Pierre Hadot, with his notion of "spiritual exercises," shows that in the Hellenistic schools, philosophy comprised a set of practical exercises such as the meditation on death, attention to the present moment, and self-examination (Hadot, 1995, 81-125).

Nevertheless, the central problem in Epicurus' thought is whether pleasure is merely the "absence of suffering" or whether suffering itself plays an epistemological and therapeutic role in the path toward enduring tranquility. Textual analysis shows that Epicurus' theory appears to involve a certain complexity. On the one hand, pleasure is defined as the satisfaction of need (avoiding the suffering of hunger). On the other hand, he acknowledges that certain sufferings – such as enduring the pain of surgery or abandoning bad habits – are necessary for attaining a greater pleasure. The research hypothesis is that in Epicurus' philosophy, pleasure and suffering are not two opposed categories but rather two sides of the same coin. "Tranquility" (ataraxia)

as the ultimate end is attained through the passage from "lack" (the suffering of need) to "presence" (static pleasure), and suffering possesses an epistemological-therapeutic role. This model is consistent with the fundamental principles governing cognitive-behavioral interventions in modern psychotherapy.

1. Literature Review and Research Gap

1-1 Review of Domestic Literature (Iranian Studies)

The first systematic attempt to critique Epicurean philosophy in contemporary Iran was undertaken by Mohammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi in his book *Critique and Examination of Ethical Schools* (2008). He summarizes the problems of Epicurean hedonism in three axes: first, the lack of a clear criterion for choosing among equal pleasures; second, neglecting collective interests in favor of personal pleasure; and third, the inability to justify moral virtues based solely on pleasure (Muslemi Amirani, 2014, 17). The strength of this approach lies in its rational precision in identifying the internal paradoxes of hedonism. However, its fundamental shortcoming is reducing Epicurus' philosophy to a merely pleasure-oriented system and completely ignoring its therapeutic and psychological capacities.

Among university theses, Nasr Azadani's master's thesis *Epicurus' View on Ethics* (2012) at the University of Isfahan comprehensively examines the components of pleasure in relation to virtue, God, and death. This research carefully demonstrates how Epicurus identifies the fear of three things – gods, death, and fate – as the primary cause of human suffering (Nasr Azadani, 2012, 43). It also shows that Epicurus essentially considers logic and physics as a prelude to liberation from these fears (Nasr Azadani, 2012, 53). The innovation of this research lies in its systematic explanation of these three sources of suffering. However, its main shortcoming is the lack of analysis of the "dialectical relationship between suffering and pleasure." In other words, Nasr Azadani statically examines "pleasure" and "fear" rather than analyzing "suffering" as a dynamic process in altering irrational beliefs. Moreover, her research makes no reference to the psychotherapeutic applications of Epicurean teachings.

Muslemi Amirani's master's thesis *Critique of Epicurus' Ethical Views based on Alawi Ethics* (2014) adopts a comparative-critical approach, contrasting the instability of the world and the principle of monotheism (from Nahj al-balaghah) with Epicurus' materialist worldview (Muslemi Amirani, 2014, 183). The strength of this research lies in its precision in citing Islamic sources and identifying the fundamental points of divergence between Epicureanism and monotheistic teachings. Despite its comparative richness, due to its theological approach, it fails to explain the "internal relationship between suffering and pleasure" within Epicurus' own philosophy. It focuses more on refuting Epicurus than on understanding the therapeutic structure of his thought. In other words, Muslemi Amirani critiques Epicurus from an external perspective, whereas the present study seeks to understand Epicurus from within his own philosophical system.

Sohrabnavi's master's thesis *Comparison of the Theory of Pleasure in Epicurus and Zakariya al-Razi* (2018) at the University of Tabriz adopts a comparative approach and, for the first time in Iran, compares Epicurus' hedonistic system with the views of a Muslim Peripatetic philosopher. Its important innovation is clarifying the distinction between the "historical Epicurus" and "distorted Epicureanism." Sohrabnavi shows that, contrary to popular belief, Epicurus advocated "static pleasure" (absence of pain) and even forbade marriage due to the suffering it entails (Sohrabnavi, 2018, 36, 66). Additionally, this research briefly touches upon the therapeutic aspects of Epicurean philosophy, such as the "healing of the soul" (Sohrabnavi, 2018, 54). However, its main shortcoming is its focus on comparison with al-Razi, which leads to neglecting an independent and systematic analysis of the therapeutic structure of Epicurus' thought. Furthermore, this research does not address the practical application of Epicurus' "fourfold remedy" (Tetrapharmakos) to contemporary psychological issues.

1-2 Review of International Literature

In the West, two main currents have addressed the connection between Epicurean philosophy and psychotherapy, each approaching the issue from a different perspective.

First Current: Philosophy as a Way of Life. This current, led by Pierre Hadot and Martha Nussbaum, demonstrates that the Hellenistic schools – especially the Epicureans, Stoics, and Skeptics – practiced philosophy not as an abstract intellectual discipline but as a "worldly art of coping with the everyday and vital problems of human life" (Nussbaum, 1994, 3). Nussbaum, in her influential work *The Therapy of Desire* (1994), directly employs the term "Epicurean surgery" to describe Epicurus' method of distinguishing "empty" desires from valid ones. In Chapter Four of this book, titled "Epicurean Surgery: Argument and Empty Desire," she explains in detail how philosophical argument can serve as a therapeutic tool for excising false desires (Nussbaum, 1994, Chapter 4; Nussbaum, 2009, 102-139). Furthermore, in her analysis of Epicurus' argument concerning death, "Mortal Immortals: Lucretius on Death," she shows how this argument can function as a "therapy" for death anxiety (Nussbaum, 1994, Chapter 6, 192-238).

Pierre Hadot, in his book *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (1995), demonstrates that ancient philosophy comprised a set of "spiritual exercises," such as the meditation on death, attention to the present moment, and self-examination (Hadot, 1995, 81-125). Hadot explicitly states that in Epicurean thought, pleasure is ultimately a spiritual exercise – not pleasure in the sense of mere sensory gratification, but intellectual pleasure arising from contemplating nature, reflecting on past and present pleasures, and ultimately the pleasure of friendship. He emphasizes that Hellenistic philosophers were "therapists of the soul," and for them, philosophy was "a method for achieving independence and inner freedom (autarkeia), that is, a state in which the soul depends solely on itself" (Hadot, 1995, 266).

Second Current: Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT). Albert Ellis, the founder of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), explicitly stated that his theory is rooted in ancient philosophy, particularly Epicurus and Epictetus. His famous dictum – "It is not events themselves that disturb people, but their interpretations of them" – is directly derived from Hellenistic philosophy (Ellis, 1962, 54). Aaron Beck, the founder of CBT, has also acknowledged the influence of Stoic and Epicurean philosophers. This convergence indicates that the teachings of the ancient "healers of souls" are significantly compatible with the theoretical framework and techniques of contemporary CBT.

At a more specialized level, the article "Epicurean Stability (eustatheia): A Philosophical Approach of Stress Management" (2022) by Christos Yapijakis and George Chrousos, published in the journal *Conatus*, represents one of the most recent and precise efforts to systematically connect Epicurean philosophy with modern psychotherapy. The authors demonstrate five key points. First, Epicurus employed an empirical and sensory-based approach to knowledge, creating a naturalistic, pragmatic, and teleological philosophy (Yapijakis & Chrousos, 2022, 173). Second, recent scientific observations have confirmed the fundamental principles of Epicurean physics and the psychotherapeutic approach of Epicurean ethics, which are compatible with human nature (Yapijakis & Chrousos, 2022, 173). Third, from Philodemus of Gadara's work *On Frank Criticism*, we know that Epicurean educational methodology included "psycho-educational counseling through therapeutic criticism based on freedom of expression (παρρησία)" aimed at "therapy of the soul" and acquiring knowledge to maintain mental health and well-being (Yapijakis & Chrousos, 2022, 174). Fourth, the Epicureans called "εὐστάθεια (eustatheia, stability/constancy)" the psychosomatic balance which today we call homeostasis and considered it the foundation of true happiness (Yapijakis & Chrousos, 2022, 176). Fifth, they empirically identified stress, which disrupts psychosomatic balance, as mental agitation or a painful feeling of the body, and employed a set of mental and emotional techniques (including the Tetrapharmakos) to manage stress at its onset, preventing it from developing into chronic psychosomatic disorders with significant social consequences (Yapijakis & Chrousos, 2022, 177). The article concludes that the core doctrines of Epicurean ethics are directly related to the biological basis of human brain function and to stress management through CBT (Yapijakis & Chrousos, 2022, 189).

1-3 Research Gap and the Necessity of the Present Study

Despite the rich international literature linking Epicurean philosophy with psychotherapy – from the foundational works of Nussbaum and Hadot to recent studies such as Yapijakis and Chrousos (2022) – and despite the valuable efforts in Iran to describe, critique, or compare Epicurus' views, a clear research gap exists in Persian-language studies.

Existing domestic research has either adopted a theological-critical approach (Muslemi Amirani), critiquing Epicurus from an external perspective without attending to his internal therapeutic structure; or a descriptive-historical approach (Nasr Azadani), which effectively describes the components of Epicurus' philosophy but fails to analyze the "dialectical

relationship between suffering and pleasure" and its psychotherapeutic applications; or a comparative approach with another philosopher (Sohrabnavi), which, despite noting the distinction between Epicurus and Epicureanism and briefly mentioning the "healing of the soul," lacks a systematic and independent analysis of Epicurus' therapeutic structure and the practical application of his "fourfold remedy" to contemporary psychological issues.

To state it more clearly: no domestic research has independently and systematically reinterpreted the relationship between suffering and pleasure in Epicurus' thought as a model of philosophical psychotherapy, relying on contemporary concepts of stress management and cognitive restructuring. Previous studies have either critiqued Epicurus, described his views, or compared him with others, but none have sought to extract a "therapeutic protocol" from his philosophical system.

Therefore, the present study aims to fill this gap by utilizing authoritative international sources – especially Nussbaum (1994), Hadot (1995), and Yapijakis and Chrousos (2022) – and focusing on the "dialectical relationship between suffering and pleasure" and the "practical applications of Epicurus' fourfold remedy in reducing existential anxieties." The necessity of this research arises from the fact that in the modern era, despite material progress, rates of anxiety, depression, and fear of death have increased. Epicurus' "fourfold remedy" can serve as an effective, low-cost, rational, and nature-based philosophical model for alleviating these existential anxieties. In other words, this research is not merely a historical exercise but an attempt to revive a philosophical solution for contemporary psychological crises.

2. Contemporary Philosophical Psychotherapy: Foundations, Principles, and Its Relation to Epicureanism

Before entering into the direct analysis of Epicurus' thought, it is necessary to briefly explain the theoretical framework upon which this reading is based – namely, Contemporary Philosophical Psychotherapy. Contemporary philosophical psychotherapy, unlike conventional clinical psychotherapy rooted in medicine and psychiatry, is rooted in the long-standing tradition of philosophy as an "art of living" and "care of the self." This approach, which has taken coherent theoretical shape over the past three decades, especially through works such as *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Hadot, 1995), *The Therapy of Desire* (Nussbaum, 1994), and *Existential Psychotherapy* (Yalom, 1980), is founded upon five basic principles:

a) **Therapy through Rationality:** Psychological sufferings are mainly caused by false beliefs, incorrect evaluations, and empty desires, not merely by biological factors. Therefore, the primary tool of therapy is "rational argument" and "conceptual analysis," not just medication or purely behavioral conditioning techniques.

b) **Priority of Prevention over Treatment:** Philosophy as a "daily practice of death" (meditation), "attention to the present moment," and "self-examination" can restructure an individual's belief system before severe suffering occurs. For this reason, philosophy is a kind of "preventive medicine" for the psyche.

c) **Therapy as Exercise (Askēsis):** Changing beliefs and correcting emotions requires repeated and regular exercises (Hadot calls them "spiritual exercises"). These exercises include daily journaling, reviewing maxims, Socratic dialogue with oneself and others, and gradual exposure to anxiety-provoking situations.

d) **Attention to the Existential Dimension of Suffering:** Unlike traditional psychotherapies that view suffering mainly as a sign of disorder or biological imbalance, philosophical psychotherapy holds that some sufferings (such as death anxiety, dread of meaninglessness, radical loneliness) are "authentic existential sufferings" and cannot be completely eliminated; rather, one must establish a "wise relationship" with them. Epicurus has precisely such an approach: the fear of death is not entirely eliminated but can be transformed into "awareness of death," which itself enriches life.

e) **Self-Therapy and Personal Responsibility:** In philosophical psychotherapy, the therapist is not merely a "supporter" or "empathizer," but more like a "philosophical coach" who provides tools to the client, yet the ultimate responsibility for changing beliefs rests with the individual. Epicurus teaches his disciples that the wise person is one who is "his own physician" and can restructure his belief system through repeated exercises.

The connection between this framework and Epicureanism is deep and multi-layered. First, Epicurus explicitly calls himself a "physician of the soul" and presents philosophy as a remedy for human suffering. Second, the Tetrapharmakos is precisely a "self-therapy protocol" that Epicurus' disciples were obliged to memorize and repeat daily. Third, Epicurus' arguments against the fear of death, fear of the gods, and fear of fate are complete examples of "therapy through rational argument." Fourth, Epicurus clearly distinguishes between "pathological fear" (which needs treatment) and "healthy awareness of danger" (which is natural and adaptive). Therefore, one can claim that Epicurus is one of the first theorists of philosophical psychotherapy in the history of human thought, and his Tetrapharmakos can be regarded as a premodern "philosophical psychotherapy protocol."

2-1 The Classification of Desires and the Concept of "Epicurean Surgery": Diagnosing the Source of Suffering and Mapping False Desires

The first step in any psychotherapeutic approach is "diagnosis." Before a therapist can offer strategies to reduce a client's suffering, they must correctly identify the source of that suffering – its roots in which layer of beliefs, desires, or unmet needs. Epicurus, as a pioneering "philosophical psychotherapist," accomplishes this by presenting a threefold classification of human desires. This classification is astonishingly deep and precise not only philosophically but also clinically.

First Category: Natural and Necessary Desires. This category includes desires that are both prescribed by human nature and essential for survival and the continuation of life. The most important examples are: satisfying hunger by eating sufficient food, quenching thirst by drinking water, seeking shelter from cold and heat, and adequate sleep and rest. The distinctive

features of these desires are threefold. First, they are limited and determinate – one knows exactly how much food is needed to avoid hunger. Second, they are easily and inexpensively satisfiable. Third, their complete satisfaction immediately produces satiety and release from the feeling of need. On this matter, Epicurus says: "Small wealth and moderate capital, equal to the satisfaction of natural need, is great wealth and riches, but vast wealth without limit is great poverty and misery" (Nasr Azadani, 2012, 34). He also emphasizes:

> Eat little lest you suffer stomach pain, drink little lest you wake with a headache. Avoid politics, love, and any intense activity. Do not take a wife and do not have children, lest you become a prisoner of fortune. Teach yourself to think about pleasure in your spiritual life and to shun pain. Bodily pain is indeed bad, but if it is intense, it is short, and if it is long-lasting, it can be overcome by spiritual discipline and by reflecting on pleasure. Above all, live in such a way that you are free from fear (Algera, 2008, 643).

Second Category: Natural but Non-Necessary Desires. These desires also have their roots in human nature and are in a way required by our innate disposition. Unlike the first category, however, they are not essential for survival and the continuation of life. Their absence neither leads to death nor to serious harm to one's health. The most important examples are: variety of food beyond basic need, sexual pleasures beyond procreation, and the desire for beauty and ornamentation. The characteristic of these desires is that although they are natural, they lack a clear limit and easily get out of control. Epicurus believes that in confronting this category of desires, one should practice "moderation" – neither suppressing them altogether nor overindulging in them. In his view, marriage and sexual relations, as a natural but non-necessary desire, must be undertaken cautiously and within limits so as not to disturb mental tranquility (Brun, 1978, 112-113).

Third Category: Non-natural and Non-Necessary Desires. These desires are rooted neither in human nature nor essential for survival and health. They are entirely constructed by society, habit, misguided upbringing, and false opinions. The most important examples are: ambition (desire for status and power), fame-seeking (desire for praise and admiration), and limitless accumulation of wealth (hoarding capital without any boundary). These desires have three key characteristics. First, they have an "empty" and insatiable nature – they never reach satisfaction and the more they are gratified, the more they demand. Second, they are the primary source of anxiety, envy, unhealthy competition, and social conflicts. Third, achieving them is usually accompanied by exhausting effort, fear of loss, and in some cases even crime and injustice. Epicurus strongly prohibits this category of desires, saying: "It is better to sleep on a bed of straw without fear than to lie on a golden throne with terror and dread" (Brun, 1978, 112-113).

Martha Nussbaum, in her analysis of this classification, employs the very precise and telling term "Epicurean surgery" (Nussbaum, 1994, 13; Nussbaum, 2009, 102-139). This medical metaphor vividly illustrates the striking similarity between Epicurus' approach and that of a

surgeon. Before any operation, a surgeon must separate diseased and rotten tissue from healthy and vital tissue. Similarly, the Epicurean "philosopher-therapist" must separate "empty" and "false" desires – which are neither achievable nor necessary – from "valid" and "authentic" desires – which are both achievable and necessary. In Chapter Four of her book, titled "Epicurean Surgery: Argument and Empty Desire," Nussbaum explains in detail how philosophical argument, employing logic and rational analysis, can act as a "surgical blade" to perform this separation with precision (Nussbaum, 1994, Chapter 4; Nussbaum, 2009, 102-139). This point is crucial because it demonstrates that Epicurean "therapy" is not merely moral advice but is grounded in a rational and argumentative methodology.

In modern cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy, Albert Ellis, the founder of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), likewise emphasizes the identification and "surgery" of "irrational beliefs." According to Ellis, irrational beliefs are those that: lack sufficient empirical evidence; are rigid and absolutistic, full of "musts," "oughts," and "nevers"; hinder the achievement of realistic and attainable goals; and lead to unhealthy emotions such as generalized anxiety, depression, and chronic anger (Ellis, 1962, 38-40). Typical examples of such beliefs are: "I must succeed in everything I do," "Others must always treat me kindly and fairly," and "The conditions of my life must always conform to my wishes." The correspondence between Epicurus' unnatural desires – boundless ambition, insatiable fame-seeking, limitless accumulation of wealth – and Ellis' irrational beliefs is so deep and structural that one might claim Epicurus, two thousand years ago, formulated the prelude to REBT theory. Both approaches emphasize that the principal source of mental disturbance and human suffering lies not in external events but in the individual's "faulty evaluation" of those events and in "false desires or beliefs" that exceed one's real capacities.

Yapijakis and Chrousos, drawing on surviving texts of Epicurean philosophy – especially the works of Philodemus of Gadara, an Epicurean philosopher of the first century BCE – emphasize that the Epicureans identified these "empty" desires and "false" wants as the primary sources of "psychic agitation" (Yapijakis & Chrousos, 2022, 177). This "psychic agitation" is precisely the concept that today in clinical psychology is referred to as "psychological stress" and "generalized anxiety." Stress, in its modern definition, is a state of imbalance between the individual's perception of environmental demands and the individual's perception of their own ability to respond to those demands. When a person has unnatural and non-necessary desires – such as wanting to be the most famous person in the city or to accumulate infinite wealth – such desires are inherently impossible or extremely rare. Therefore, a "gap" between desire and ability constantly exists. This gap is an inexhaustible source of stress and agitation. By "surgically removing" these desires, Epicurus effectively closes this gap and directs the person toward "achievable" and "possible" desires, namely the natural and necessary ones. Thus, Epicurus was not only a philosopher but also a pioneering clinical "stress diagnostician."

2-1-1 The Negative and Positive Meaning of Pleasure in Contemporary Reading

In contemporary interpretations of Epicurus, two distinct yet related meanings are identified for "pleasure": the negative meaning and the positive meaning. The negative meaning of pleasure, which Epicurus explicitly emphasizes in the Letter to Menoeceus, is "absence of bodily pain and mental disturbance." This definition does not consider pleasure as a "positive presence of something," but rather defines it as "liberation from something negative." According to Nussbaum (1994, Chapter 4), negative pleasure is precisely "negative pleasure": when I am thirsty and drink water, the pleasure I experience is not merely the "absence of thirst," but also the presence of a positive state – namely, satiety and satisfaction. However, Epicurus deliberately places emphasis on "absence," "lack," "freedom from," in order to stress that most of our sufferings arise from the "presence of something unwanted" (pain, anxiety) rather than the "absence of something desired." Thus, the primary goal of Epicurean philosophy is "negative tranquility": tranquility achieved by removing obstacles and pains.

But the positive meaning of pleasure, which manifests itself in the Letter to Idomeneus and in descriptions of Epicurus' final moments, goes far beyond the "absence of pain." Epicurus, while suffering terribly from kidney stones, says:

> Despite these pains, this joy of mind which arises from the recollection of our past conversations is sufficient to outweigh them all (Sohrabnavi, 2018, 57).

This "joy of mind" (chara) is a positive pleasure: not merely the absence of pain, but the presence of a completely positive, rich, and sublime state Hadot (1995). distinguishes these two levels as "basic negative pleasure" and "higher positive pleasure." Negative pleasure is a precondition for positive pleasure: until we are freed from the fear of gods, death, and fate, we cannot experience the joy of friendship, knowledge, and recalling happy memories (Hadot 1995, 266) But positive pleasure is not automatically achieved by the absence of pain; it requires "spiritual exercise," "mental activity," and "presence in authentic relationships." Yapijakis and Chrousos (2022, 176), drawing on contemporary physiology, also show that "psychosomatic stability" (eustatheia) is precisely the point where negative and positive pleasure intersect: a state in which both the autonomic nervous system has reached balance (negative pleasure: absence of biological stress) and the prefrontal cortex is engaged in creating meaning and purpose (positive pleasure: presence of joy and satisfaction).

2-2 The First Source of Suffering: Fear of the Gods and Cognitive Restructuring of Superstitious Beliefs

The first source of suffering in Epicurus' thought is the "fear of the gods." In ancient Greece, this fear was so deeply rooted and pervasive that it overshadowed the foundations of daily life, social rituals, political decision-making, and even the smallest individual choices. People feared the wrath of the gods – especially Zeus, Poseidon, Apollo, and other Olympian deities – in response to their sins or errors. To appease them, they performed bloody sacrifices, made vows and offerings, and in extreme cases, even resorted to human sacrifice.

With rare philosophical courage, Epicurus makes a sharp distinction between the "existence of the gods" and the "superstitious beliefs of the common people about the gods." He demonstrates that people's fear of the gods arises not from the gods' actual existence but from their "misconception" and "distorted image" of the gods. In his Letter to Menoeceus, he states:

> First, believe that God is a living being immortal and blessed, according to the common conception of him. Indeed, the gods exist, and knowledge of them is evident; but they are not such as the multitude suppose, for men do not firmly hold the notions they form about them. Impious is not the man who denies the gods of the multitude, but he who attributes to the gods what the multitude believes (Diogenes Laertius, 2008, 467).

For Epicurus, the gods – unlike the angry and vengeful deities of Greek mythology – are beings who dwell in "absolute blessedness" and "perfect tranquility." They have no need of humans, are not affected by their actions, and take no part in the affairs of the world or human life. Consequently, the "fear of the gods' wrath" is a completely superstitious, unfounded, and "irrational belief" rooted in ignorance, mythological storytelling, and the manipulations of priests and profit-seekers. It must be corrected. Epicurus goes so far as to say: There is no one more impious than the man who imagines that the gods are angry and unforgiving (Diogenes Laertius, 2008, 467). In other words, what pains and torments a person is not the gods themselves but his own "misconception" and "false belief" about the gods.

This argument of Epicurus is entirely consistent with the fundamental principle of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT). Albert Ellis, the founder of REBT, concluded after years of clinical work and theoretical development that the primary source of human emotional disorders lies not in external activating events themselves but in the "beliefs" and "cognitive appraisals" one holds about those events. Ellis' famous dictum, which has become a core principle of cognitive psychotherapy, is: "It is not events themselves that disturb people, but their interpretations of them." Although Ellis borrowed this saying from Epictetus the Stoic philosopher, its roots can be clearly observed in Epicurus' argument concerning the fear of the gods. Two thousand years ago, Epicurus had already formulated this same principle in an independent and original manner.

"Cognitive restructuring," which Ellis recommends as the central technique of REBT, is a three-step process. First, identifying irrational beliefs through recognizing cognitive errors such as catastrophizing, mind-reading, and overgeneralization. Second, logically and actively "disputing" those beliefs through Socratic questioning, finding counter-evidence, and analyzing logical consequences. Third, replacing irrational beliefs with "rational" and "flexible" beliefs. This three-step process is essentially the same as Epicurus' "fourfold remedy," especially its first two steps: "Do not fear the gods" and "Do not fear death." By engaging in "disputation" about the gods – demonstrating that the gods are blessed and self-sufficient, and that their anger

and wrath are a human construct – Epicurus was effectively engaged in the "cognitive restructuring" of superstitious beliefs about the gods.

Yapijakis and Chrousos point to another subtle and very important aspect of this issue, one that has rarely been attended to in Epicurean scholarship. Drawing on Philodemus of Gadara's work "On Frank Criticism," they show that Epicurean educational and therapeutic methodology was not limited to individual self-reflection and private disputation. Rather, it also included "psycho-educational group counseling" based on "therapeutic criticism grounded in frank criticism" (Yapijakis & Chrousos, 2022, 174). "Frank criticism" in ancient Greece meant "freedom of speech" and "fearless truth-telling," especially in situations where the speaker risks upsetting the listener. In the Epicurean school, members of the circle of friends – the Garden of Epicurus – were obliged to use frank criticism to make one another aware of false beliefs and unhealthy behaviors, without fear of retaliation, resentment, or anger. This approach bears a striking resemblance to "cognitive group therapy" sessions today, especially approaches based on "peer feedback," as well as to the technique of "constructive criticism" in therapeutic settings. Thus, Epicurus was not only a "philosophical psychotherapist" working individually with his clients but had also founded a "social therapeutic school" based on mutual friendship, frank criticism, and the collective correction of beliefs. This aspect has been largely neglected in previous research, including Persian theses, and the present article, drawing on Yapijakis and Chrousos (2022), brings it into focus.

2-3 The Second Source of Suffering: Fear of Death and the Process from "Meditation on Death" to "Awakening to Life"

The second source of suffering in Epicurus' thought is the "fear of death." This fear is so pervasive and deeply rooted among human beings that many philosophers, including Plato and Aristotle, considered it natural and unavoidable. Epicurus, however, challenges this entrenched belief with an argument that is simple, self-evident, and yet profoundly deep. His argument, known in the history of philosophy as the "symmetry argument," is formulated as follows: "Death is nothing to us, for so long as we exist, death is not present, and when death is present, we no longer exist. Therefore, death is nothing to the living or to the dead; for it does not accompany the living, and the dead no longer exist. Death has not yet come for the living, who have not yet died, and for the dead, who no longer exist, there is nothing that could experience it. Consequently, death is not the most fearsome of ills, but rather 'nothing' and pure non-experience" (Diogenes Laertius, 2008, 460).

This argument targets the common irrational belief that "death is an absolute evil and must be feared." Epicurus demonstrates that the fear of death is, in fact, a fear of "nothing" and of "something that can never be experienced." Since evil – understood as the experience of pain, suffering, deprivation, or loss – is a necessary condition for fear, fearing things that are fundamentally beyond experience constitutes a "cognitive error" and a form of "catastrophizing." Even if we suppose death to be "absolute nothingness," this nothingness is not bad in itself. Its badness depends on someone experiencing that nothingness. But the

experience of nothingness is a contradiction. If someone exists to experience it, it is not nothingness. If nothingness exists, there is no one to experience it.

Martha Nussbaum, in a detailed and profound analysis entitled "Mortal Immortals: Lucretius on Death and the Voice of Nature," shows how Lucretius – the first-century BCE Latin Epicurean poet and philosopher – employs this argument of Epicurus in his didactic-therapeutic poem "On the Nature of Things" (Nussbaum, 1994, Chapter 6, 192-238). Nussbaum argues that the fear of death is rooted in "mythological narratives" – tales of punishment in the underworld of Hades, reincarnation and the return of souls, or "terrifying nothingness" as shaped by the human imagination. Epicurean philosophy replaces these stories with two tools. First, "rational and logical analysis" demonstrates that the arguments behind these stories are false or unfounded. Second, an appeal to the "voice of nature" – that is, pure and immediate experience of life and death – shows that death is neither an "enemy" nor a "judge" but a "natural phenomenon," a "return to the pre-natal state," and "eternal rest."

Yapijakis and Chrousos (2022), drawing on the latest findings of neuroscience and modern physiology, show that Epicurus' argument about death is fully consistent with our current understanding of the process of "gradual shutdown of the central and autonomic nervous system" in the moments of death. They emphasize that the ultimate goal of Epicurus' formulation of this argument was not merely "reducing mental anxiety" or "calming the imagination." Rather, Epicurus had a much more practical and concrete aim: "acute stress management at the moment of its occurrence." This aim was to prevent acute and transient stress from developing into "chronic psychosomatic disorders" such as generalized anxiety disorder, panic attacks, existential depression, and even sleep and digestive disorders resulting from chronic stress (Yapijakis & Chrousos, 2022, 177). In other words, Epicurus was not only a moral philosopher but also a "preventive physician" in the field of mental health.

Pierre Hadot, the eminent French philosopher and one of the founders of the "philosophy as a way of life" movement, calls this Epicurean practice the "meditation on death" and considers it one of the most fundamental and important "spiritual exercises" throughout Hellenistic philosophy – whether Epicurean, Stoic, or Skeptical (Hadot, 1995, 93-94). For Hadot, the "meditation on death" in ancient philosophy was never a melancholic, depressing, or terrifying exercise in death-thinking. Rather, it was precisely the opposite: a practice for the "awakening to life." The explanation of this subtle but crucially important point is as follows. One who visualizes death before oneself every day and knows that life is limited and mortal can no longer spend a single day in idleness, neglect, conflict over worthless matters, or ignoring simple and authentic joys – the pleasure of friendship, the pleasure of knowledge, the pleasure of conversation, the pleasure of beauty. Such a person knows that time is precious and that each day must be valued as a unique gift. Thus, the "meditation on death" in practice transforms into a "meditation on life."

In contemporary existential therapy, especially in the thought and works of Irvin D. Yalom, the therapeutic confrontation with "death anxiety" and the redefinition of the human

relationship to mortality is considered one of the principal and central pillars of treatment (Yalom, 1980). Yalom has shown that many patients – especially those struggling with chronic anxiety, depression, or feelings of meaninglessness – ultimately suffer from a "fear of death" and a "fear of non-being." The therapeutic confrontation with this fear, through dialogue, the search for meaning, and existential reconstruction, is one of the most powerful therapeutic tools. Twenty-three hundred years ago, Epicurus had already charted this very path. The famous saying of Lucretius, which Epicurus himself attributes to the voice of nature, clearly indicates this approach: "Animals never fear what happens after death. Are we any less than they are?" (as cited in Nasr Azadani, 2012, 56-57). Thus, the Epicurean "meditation on death" returns us to our own natural animality. It listens to the "voice of nature," not to the "voice of storytellers."

2-4 The Third Source of Suffering: Fear of Fate, the Doctrine of Free Will, and the Concept of "Psychosomatic Stability" (Eustatheia)

The third, and according to many interpreters of Epicureanism the deepest and most radical, source of suffering in Epicurus' thought is the "fear of fate and inevitable destiny." This fear is deeper than the other two because it also overshadows the fear of the gods and the fear of death. If one believes that all events in life – from the smallest and most trivial to the greatest and most vital – are predetermined by an unbreakable and inflexible chain of causes and effects inscribed on a pre-written tablet, then all effort, striving, planning, and responsibility become completely meaningless. In such a deterministic worldview, a person becomes a "passive slave" and a "humiliated spectator" of their own history and destiny. Feelings of "entrapment," "learned helplessness," and "meaninglessness" arise. These feelings are themselves inexhaustible sources of psychological suffering – deep depression, generalized anxiety, and a sense of futility.

To break this chain of necessity and to save humanity from the "glass ceiling of fate," Epicurus turns to his atomic physics. By presenting the novel and astonishing theory of the "swerve of the atom," he brings about a revolution in the physics and metaphysics of his time. Epicurus demonstrates that the world and nature are never completely deterministic and predetermined, and that a human being, as part of nature, possesses "free choice." The explanation of the theory is as follows.

In Epicurean atomic physics, which is partly indebted to Democritus, atoms – the fundamental, indivisible particles of matter – fall naturally and inherently through the void, empty space. In their normal state, they fall in a straight line downward due to their inherent "weight." If only this rectilinear motion existed, atoms would never collide with one another, since they would all fall with equal speed along parallel paths. Therefore, no combination or concourse, no world, no star, no plant, no animal, and no human being would ever come into being. But Epicurus hypothesizes that atoms, sometimes at a completely random time and in an indeterminate place, swerve slightly from their straight path – by only "less than a point," a minimal deviation. This swerve, however small and negligible, is sufficient for two atoms to collide, rebound, and coalesce, thereby forming "worlds" (Furley, 2005, 195-196). The

significance of this swerve goes far beyond mere physics. Epicurus interprets this swerve as the "fundamental freedom at the heart of matter" and the "end of pure determinism."

Lucretius, the Epicurean poet and philosopher, in his exposition of this theory in Book Two of his poem "On the Nature of Things," says: "If the mind is subject to necessity in all its actions, if it cannot escape it and exercise its own free will, if it falls into a state of complete passivity, the cause and source of this freedom is precisely this slight swerve of the atoms at an indeterminate time and place" (as cited in Sohrabnavi, 2018, 61). In other words, if the constituent atoms of the universe can deviate from their "necessary path" and act "randomly," then a human being, who is himself composed of these same atoms, can also deviate from the "necessary path of fate" and act independently. This teaching completely neutralizes the fear of steely, ironclad fate and enables a person to take responsibility for their own life and become the "author of their own destiny."

At this point, the key, profound, and strikingly modern concept of "εὐστάθεια" (eustatheia) enters. Yapijakis and Chrousos (2022), in their remarkably precise article, show that the Epicureans considered "psychosomatic stability" – the stable condition of body and soul – to be the foundation of "true happiness" and "the good life." They defined stress as a state of "psychic agitation" or "unpleasant feeling in the body" that disrupts the delicate and complex psychosomatic equilibrium, which today we call "homeostasis" (Yapijakis & Chrousos, 2022, 176). Within this conceptual framework, "psychosomatic stability" is a state in which a person has achieved two important characteristics. First, a stable and flexible balance between their real needs and available resources. Second, complete liberation from the bonds of the threefold fears – fear of the gods, fear of death, and fear of fate.

In modern psychotherapy and contemporary clinical psychology, the Epicurean concept of "psychosomatic stability" corresponds perfectly with two key and highly important concepts.

First: "internal locus of control." This concept, introduced by Julian Rotter in the 1950s, refers to the degree to which a person believes that the events of their life are under the control of their own abilities, decisions, choices, and efforts. In contrast to "external locus of control," in which a person attributes events to chance, fate, or the power of others. Through the "doctrine of the atomic swerve" and "free choice," Epicurus effectively promotes an internal locus of control.

Second: "self-efficacy." This concept, introduced by Albert Bandura, refers to a person's belief in their own ability to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations and to achieve goals. A person with high self-efficacy is more resilient in the face of stressors.

Furthermore, the Epicurean concept of "psychosomatic stability" is clearly comparable to the concept of "resilience" in positive psychology. Resilience, in its modern definition, is the capacity to adapt positively in the face of adversity, stress, threats, tragedies, and sources of psychological pressure. By offering a practical and learnable method comprising four steps –

diagnosing false desires, restructuring religious beliefs, rationally confronting death, and accepting responsible freedom – for achieving psychosomatic stability, Epicurus effectively designed the first comprehensive, systematic, structured resilience training protocol in the history of human thought. The distinctive feature of Epicurus' approach is that he transformed resilience from an innate, inborn trait into an acquired capability and learnable skill. Any human being, through spiritual exercise, can cultivate it within themselves. This point is a turning point in the history of philosophical psychotherapy.

2-4-1 Eustatheia as the Unity of Negative and Positive Pleasure in Contemporary Reading

Yapijakis and Chrousos (2022, 176-178), in their interpretation of eustatheia, show that this concept is precisely the point where negative and positive pleasure merge. On the one hand, eustatheia includes "absence of disturbance," "absence of harmful tension," and "homeostatic balance," which is the Epicurean negative pleasure (absence of pain and anxiety). On the other hand, eustatheia is a state in which a person has the "capacity to actively enjoy life": one can enjoy friendship, enjoy knowledge, enjoy recalling happy memories. This positive dimension of eustatheia is something beyond the mere absence of suffering. To be more precise, eustatheia functions as a "meta-concept" that includes both "freedom from" (negative pleasure) and "presence for" (positive pleasure). In contemporary Positive Psychotherapy, this duality corresponds to "subjective well-being" in its two components: "reduction of negative affects" and "increase of positive affects." Thus, the contemporary interpretation of Epicurus sees him not as a purely negative hedonist, but as a philosopher who clearly speaks of a "two-stage pleasure": first, liberation from suffering (negative stage, preliminary), and then openness to authentic joys (positive stage, final). Sohrabnavi (2018, 54), citing Brun (1978), also shows that in his final moments, Epicurus never achieved "absence of pain," but did achieve "joy of mind" (positive pleasure) – and this is evidence that the ultimate goal of Epicurus is "positive pleasure," even though the path to it passes through "negative pleasure."

2-5 The Fourfold Remedy (Tetrapharmakos) as a Comprehensive Philosophical Psychotherapy Protocol

For the practical, step-by-step treatment of the threefold sources of suffering – and also of the subsidiary sufferings that derive from them – Epicurus offers a fourfold "survival kit" known as the Tetrapharmakos. This "fourfold remedy" was known in the Epicurean school as the "summary of all philosophical discourse" and the "collection of golden sayings." Every Epicurean student was required to memorize it and apply it in their daily life. The form and structure of these four principles are noteworthy. They are formulated as short, imperative sentences – just like a prescription or therapeutic protocol that a doctor writes for a patient. This feature shows that Epicurus, unlike many other philosophers, was concerned not only with explaining theory but also with "practical implementation" and "concrete instructions" for his patients, his philosophical clients.

Step	Epicurean Principle (Tetraphar makos)	Protocol Content and Supporting Argument	Practical Equivalent in Modern Psychotherapy
1	"Do not fear the gods."	Eliminating the irrational belief "I must fear divine punishment and wrath" through rational argument. The gods dwell in absolute blessedness, are self-sufficient, and have no involvement in our affairs.	Cognitive restructuring and identifying/disputing irrational beliefs in REBT (Ellis, 1962).
2	"Do not fear death."	Rational confrontation with death anxiety through the "symmetry argument" (so long as we exist, death is not; when death is, we are not) and "meditation on death" as a practice of awakening to life.	Meditation on death (Hadot, 1995). Interventions based on confronting existential anxiety and death-awareness in existential therapy (Yalom, 1980).
3	"Good and pleasure are easily obtained."	Securing basic biological needs (natural and necessary desires) with minimal cost and effort. Teaching contentment. Reducing excessive perfectionism and social comparison.	Strengthening self-efficacy and self-esteem. Reducing perfectionistic goals and standards in CBT and REBT (Yapijakis & Chrousos, 2022, 176).
4	"Evil and pain are easily endured."	Transforming the attitude toward physical and psychological pain: "intense pain is short-lived, long-lasting pain is mild." Teaching acceptance, flexibility, and non-resistance to present-moment experience.	Resilience training and distress tolerance in Dialectical Behavior Therapy (Linehan) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy.

One of the most original, profound, and clinically valuable concepts that Yapijakis and Chrousos present in their article is their interpretation of Epicurus' "fourfold remedy" as a comprehensive, multi-level, hierarchical system of stress management comprising four independent yet interconnected levels (Yapijakis & Chrousos, 2022, 176-178). Each level responds to one of the most important sources threatening human tranquility and psychological balance, neutralizing them layer by layer.

Level One (Theological-Spiritual Layer): Eliminating and eradicating the supernatural cause of stress – fear of gods and divine judgment. This level addresses the transcendent and neutralizes it.

Level Two (Existential-Temporal Layer): Cognitive and affective redefinition of the human relationship with "the end" (death) and the removal of existential anxiety and the fear of non-being. This level addresses the temporal horizon of life – limited time.

Level Three (Biological-Economic Layer): Securing safety and stability for basic biological needs – hunger, thirst, shelter – and reducing primary stressors arising from resource scarcity and deprivation. This level addresses the body and objective security.

Level Four (Cognitive-Emotional Layer): Transforming the philosophical attitude toward the phenomenon of pain and suffering – not escape, but a change of meaning-frame – and increasing the psychological capacity for distress tolerance and resilience. This level addresses the mind and meaning-making.

Pierre Hadot considers these four Epicurean principles not merely "moral advice" but complete and perfect examples of "spiritual exercises." For Hadot, "spiritual exercises" are practical, repetitive, habituating exercises whose ultimate goal is the fundamental transformation of the individual's worldview, the complete restructuring of their belief system, and finally the formation of a stable mental state (hexis) which no longer requires conscious and continuous effort to maintain (Hadot, 1995, 84). The daily repetition of these principles and dwelling in them gradually transforms them into a stable character trait.

Martha Nussbaum also emphasizes that Epicurus' "fourfold remedy" aims precisely to eliminate and eradicate "psychic disturbance" through "rational argument" and "logical analysis" (Nussbaum, 1994, 13). In other words, contrary to those who regard emotions and feelings as irrational and non-rational – and therefore unchangeable through argument – Epicurus, and after him Ellis and Beck, demonstrates that disturbed and negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, grief, and anger are nourished and reinforced by "false beliefs" and "faulty cognitive evaluations." Changing those beliefs through argument, disputation, and empirical evidence will bring about a change in the content of emotions and feelings. This is a Copernican revolution in the theory of emotions.

Finally, Sohrabnavi (2018), citing historical evidence and first-hand accounts of Epicurus' practical, personal life, shows that these teachings and techniques were not merely abstract theorizing and bookish. Epicurus himself was the living, concrete embodiment of his philosophy. In the last days of his life around 270 BCE, suffering severely from kidney stones – an extremely intense, terrible, and agonizing pain that would drive most people to despair, depression, and deep hopelessness – Epicurus wrote in his famous letter to his friend and disciple Idomeneus: "Despite these pains, this joy of mind which arises from the recollection of our past conversations is sufficient to outweigh them all" (Yalom, 1980, 92; as cited in Sohrabnavi, 2018, 57). This brief historical account is living, undeniable, and crucial testimony to the practicality of Epicurus' teachings. In practice, he clearly experienced the superiority of "spiritual pleasure" – in this specific case, the pleasure of recollecting philosophical conversations and authentic friendships – over "bodily pain." He demonstrated an effective

model for enduring acute, severe suffering in order to attain a more stable and deeper pleasure, namely the spiritual pleasure of friendship and knowledge. This concept is known in modern psychotherapy by the names "distress tolerance" in the DBT approach and "acceptance" in the ACT approach. Thus, Epicurus not only prescribed the "remedy for suffering" but was the first person voluntarily and consciously to apply this remedy to himself, demonstrating its practical efficacy under the most extreme conditions possible – imminent death and excruciating physical pain.

Conclusion

The relationship between suffering and pleasure in Epicurus' thought is dialectical, process-oriented, and therapeutic. Suffering is not an absolute evil, an inescapable fate, or a divine punishment. Suffering is a "diagnostic sign" – a warning from the psychosomatic structure to reason that beliefs, evaluations, or desires have fallen into error. Suffering is the voice of nature saying: stop, review, perform surgery, reconstruct. This understanding distinguishes Epicurus from earlier hedonists such as Aristippus and later distortions such as Roman Epicureanism, and places him among the pioneers of philosophical psychotherapy.

But the most important achievement of this research is not merely the rediscovery of the historical Epicurus, but rather the systematic demonstration of the deep, structural, and practical convergences between Epicurus' thought and a wide range of contemporary psychotherapeutic approaches. Seven major areas of convergence can be identified, each showing that Epicurus was not a superficial hedonist but a genuine precursor to many of the most influential psychotherapeutic paradigms of the 20th and 21st centuries.

First, Albert Ellis's Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) explicitly acknowledges that its foundational principle – "It is not events that disturb people, but their interpretations of events" – is rooted in Hellenistic philosophy, especially Epicurus and Epictetus. Epicurus' "surgery of empty desires" (identifying and excising unnatural and non-necessary desires) is structurally identical to Ellis's technique of disputing irrational beliefs. The Tetrapharmakos' first two principles – "Do not fear the gods" and "Do not fear death" – are direct cognitive restructuring interventions aimed at eliminating two of the most pervasive irrational beliefs in human history.

Second, although Aaron Beck's Cognitive Therapy refers more explicitly to the Stoics, a careful reading reveals an even deeper structural affinity with Epicurus. Beck's "cognitive triad" (negative view of self, world, and future) corresponds precisely to Epicurus' threefold sources of suffering (fear of gods, fear of death, fear of fate). Beck's therapeutic process – identifying automatic thoughts, examining evidence, generating alternative interpretations, and testing beliefs through behavioral experiments – is a fully operationalized version of Epicurean philosophical argumentation. Epicurus' "symmetry argument" against the fear of death, for instance, is a model of cognitive restructuring: it identifies a catastrophic misinterpretation

(death as absolute evil), challenges it with logical counter-evidence (death is never experienced), and replaces it with a rational belief (death is nothing to us).

Third, Irvin Yalom's Existential Psychotherapy identifies "death anxiety" as one of the four ultimate existential concerns. Yalom's therapeutic approach does not aim to eliminate death anxiety – which would be impossible – but to transform it from a paralyzing fear into a life-giving awareness. This is precisely the Epicurean strategy. Epicurus' "meditation on death" is a spiritual exercise in which one repeatedly visualizes one's own mortality not to induce terror but to awaken gratitude, urgency, and authenticity. Yalom's techniques – asking patients to imagine their own death, write their own epitaph, or reflect on the finitude of time – are clinical operationalizations of the Epicurean meditation. The difference between Yalom and Epicurus is one of language and clinical setting, not of fundamental logic.

Fourth, Steven Hayes's Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) depart from traditional CBT by emphasizing "acceptance" rather than "control" of unwanted internal experiences. The core principle of ACT is that suffering is caused not by pain itself but by "experiential avoidance" – the futile effort to escape or suppress painful thoughts, feelings, and sensations. Epicurus' fourth tetrapharmakon principle – "Evil and pain are easily endured" – is a direct philosophical precursor to ACT's concepts of "willingness" and "acceptance." Epicurus explicitly argues that long-lasting pain is mild (because the body adapts) and that intense pain is short (because it quickly passes or ends in death). This is not a denial of pain but a radical reframing of one's relationship to it. ACT's technique of "cognitive defusion" – observing thoughts as mere words rather than literal truths – is anticipated by Epicurus' distinction between "empty opinions" and "evident facts."

Fifth, Marsha Linehan's Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) places "distress tolerance" at the center of its skills training module. Distress tolerance is the ability to endure painful experiences without resorting to impulsive, self-destructive behaviors. Epicurus' fourth principle is arguably the first systematic statement of distress tolerance in the history of Western thought. DBT teaches patients to "radically accept" reality as it is, without judgment and without fighting against the unchangeable. Epicurus similarly teaches that when pain is present, the wise person does not add "mental suffering" (fear, despair, resistance) to "physical sensation." The physical sensation may be unavoidable, but the mental reaction is a matter of belief and can be transformed through philosophical training.

Sixth, as Yapijakis and Chrousos (2022) have shown in detailed empirical fashion, the Tetrapharmakos can be understood as a comprehensive, hierarchical, multi-level stress management protocol that is fully consistent with modern stress physiology and psycho-neuro-immunology. Level one (theological-spiritual) eliminates the supernatural cause of stress – fear of divine punishment – reducing chronic activation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis. Level two (existential-temporal) redefines the human relationship with death, reducing existential dread as a major source of generalized anxiety and panic attacks. Level three (biological-economic) secures basic biological needs, reducing primary stressors arising from

resource scarcity. Level four (cognitive-emotional) transforms the philosophical attitude toward pain, increasing psychological resilience and preventing acute stress from becoming chronic psychosomatic disorder. No premodern philosophical school has offered such an explicit, sequential, and multi-dimensional model for stress management. The congruence between Epicurean eustatheia (psychosomatic stability) and the modern concept of homeostasis is not accidental; it reflects Epicurus' profound understanding of the embodied nature of human experience.

Seventh, Martin Seligman's Positive Psychotherapy distinguishes between two dimensions of well-being: the reduction of negative affect (anxiety, depression, anger) and the increase of positive affect (joy, gratitude, satisfaction). This duality corresponds exactly to Epicurus' negative pleasure (absence of pain and disturbance) and positive pleasure (the joy of friendship, knowledge, and recollection). Seligman's PERMA model (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment) is a contemporary operationalization of the Epicurean good life. Epicurus explicitly states that friendship is the greatest of all goods, that the pleasure of knowledge is superior to bodily pleasure, and that the recollection of past conversations can outweigh present physical pain – as he demonstrated in his own final days while suffering from kidney stones. The concept of "gratitude" – counting one's blessings – is directly anticipated by Epicurus' advice to meditate on past pleasures as a source of present joy.

In conclusion, the present research has shown that Epicurus cannot be confined within the cage of superficial hedonists. He is best understood as the founder of an intellectual tradition that has been reproduced 2,300 years later in the form of at least seven major contemporary psychotherapeutic approaches: REBT, Cognitive Therapy, Existential Psychotherapy, ACT, DBT, Stress Management and Psycho-Neuro-Immunology, and Positive Psychotherapy. Each of these approaches either explicitly acknowledges Epicurean influence or shows deep structural convergence with his core principles: the identification of irrational beliefs as the source of suffering, the cognitive restructuring of those beliefs through rational argument, the transformation of the relationship with death and fate, the acceptance rather than avoidance of pain, and the cultivation of positive pleasure through authentic relationships and meaningful activities. Suffering in this model is neither an enemy nor a calamity nor a source of shame, but rather a silent teacher and an inner guide. Epicurus' greatest gift to contemporary humanity is not a final answer to the problem of suffering, but rather the manner of questioning suffering and the path of passage through it to an attainable tranquility – a tranquility called eustatheia, within reach of every human being who dares to listen to the voice of nature within themselves. In the most explicit terms, contemporary psychotherapy – especially cognitive-behavioral, existential, third-wave acceptance-based, and positive psychology approaches – is a modern rereading of that same ancient Epicurean protocol, with more scientific language, operationalized techniques, and tailored to the needs of today's human beings. This article has shown that reviving Epicurean "spiritual exercises" in the form of psychotherapy sessions can

create a meaningful, practical, and evidence-informed bridge between ancient philosophy and the modern clinic.

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