

THE GARDEN IN THE BOARDROOM: Exploring Epicurean Ethics for Sustainable Business Practices

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This paper delves into the often-misunderstood philosophy of Epicureanism, arguing that its emphasis on ataraxia (tranquility) and aponia (absence of pain) offers valuable, if unexpected, insights for fostering sustainable business practices. Moving beyond the common association of Epicureanism with hedonism, the paper explores how its core tenets – including moderation, simple living, the importance of friendship, and the pursuit of natural pleasures – can guide businesses towards environmentally and socially responsible conduct. The paper examines how these principles can translate into practical strategies for resource management, stakeholder engagement, and long-term value creation, ultimately proposing that the "garden" of Epicurean philosophy can offer a fertile ground for cultivating sustainable business ethics. While Epicurus himself cultivated a small, self-sufficient community, an approach insufficient for today's complex challenges, the urgent environmental crisis demands a broader application of these principles. Therefore, the modern "Garden" of Epicurean thought must extend beyond individual efforts to encompass the entire planet, becoming a universal necessity embedded in the fabric of our global economy. This requires corporate and civic leaders to champion mutual aid over destructive competition, and to prioritize frugality and prudence over reckless consumption, thereby cultivating a global community that embodies Epicurean well-being and addresses the critical need for a sustainable future.

Keywords: Epicurus, ataraxia (tranquility), aponia (absence of pain), friendship, natural and unnecessary desires, phronesis (wisdom), sustainability and "garden".

Introduction

In an era of accelerating ecological breakdown, mounting inequality, and global uncertainty, the dominant models of business—rooted in competition, consumerism, and short-term gain—are increasingly seen as unsustainable. While environmental policy and technological innovation are often highlighted as solutions, the ethical frameworks that shape business values and behaviors deserve equal scrutiny. This paper proposes an unconventional but timely source of ethical insight: Epicureanism.

Epicurus was an ancient Athenian philosopher with three basic ideas: (1) The most important thing in life is enjoyment. (2) You need very little to be able to enjoy life. (3) Most people make themselves unhappy by fearing or desiring things that either don't exist or aren't important.

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In rich capitalist countries, most of us are part of a business culture that tells us other things are more important than enjoyment. Instead, our culture tells us that we should be ruled by fear of failure and desire for success.

You're taught to think of yourself as a "brand" to be marketed rather than just being yourself. (Berkeley Executive Education, 2006). You're told to be unhappy with what you have no matter how much it is.

A capitalist economy would fall into recession or depression without continuing growth in production and consumption. Once you have all you think you need (however "need" is defined), you have, by definition, no need for further growth. So capitalist economies require a constant transformation of "wants" into "needs" and a continual rise in the material "standard of living" to keep growing.

These imperatives have made capitalism a powerful engine of growth. But there are limits to growth, and the world is approaching them, as writers such as Harrison Brown, Robert Heilbroner, Ivan Illich and E.F. Schumacher pointed out long ago.

Natural resources, especially fossil fuels, are becoming scarcer and more expensive. The techniques needed to obtain these scarce resources, such as deep water ocean drilling and hydraulic fracturing for oil and gas, are becoming more expensive and destructive. Meanwhile the burning of fossil fuels is triggering catastrophic climate change.

Mohandas K. Gandhi is often quoted as saying that the world has enough resources to satisfy everyone's needs, but not enough to satisfy everyone's greeds, although he may not have said it in those exact words. (Snopes.com, 2025)

Gandhi advocated small-scale production - village spinning wheels rather than the machinery of textile mills - that would provide a modest living for all. (Gandhi, 1957, p. 489-496)

It may be physically impossible to endow everyone in the world with a material standard of living equal to that of the average person in rich countries such as the USA. The Global Footprint Network's Earth Overshoot Day study indicates that it would take five planets equal to Earth to supply everyone in the world with a standard of consumption equal to that of the average American.

For this reason, there is need for a philosophy that values sustainability, contentment and stability more than growth, ambition and the "creative destruction" valued by certain modern economists and business executives.

Many philosophies embody these values. Taoism in China, Jainism in India, Stoicism in Ancient Greece and Rome are three examples. Epicureanism is another. Its method is reason and its goal is happiness. Epicurus's philosophy encourages us to reassess the nature of the good life—not as the accumulation of wealth or power, but as the cultivation of sufficiency, balance, and connection. In this light, the Epicurean "Garden" is not merely a private refuge from the world, but a potential model for sustainable world.

This paper will explore how these Epicurean ethics, particularly their emphasis on moderation, simple living, and the pursuit of natural pleasures, can offer a powerful framework for addressing the pressing challenges of our modern, growth-driven world and fostering truly principles of prudence, mutual aid, and ecological consciousness—civic and business leaders can play a

transformative role in addressing the planetary crisis. Although Epicurus's original vision was small in scale, the urgency of our global challenges demands a broader application. The Garden must now become planetary. In doing so, Epicureanism emerges not as a relic of ancient thought, but as a vital ethical resource for cultivating sustainable business practices in the 21st century.

Most of what we know about Epicurus is from the writings of Diogenes Laertius. He wrote a life of Epicurus and a summary of his principal doctrines, and preserved three of his letters. Other sources include quotations of Epicurus by other ancient writers, including a list of sayings attributed to Epicurus discovered in the Vatican Library.

This reliance on secondary sources and fragments makes a comprehensive understanding of Epicurean thought a scholarly endeavor, piecing together a philosophy that, despite its fragmented transmission, offers profound insights into human well-being and, as this paper argues, sustainable practices.

Life and Times of Epicurus

Epicurus lived during a troubled time, when Athens and other Greek city-states were overshadowed by the rise of Alexander the Great and wars between vast empires ruled by Alexander's successors.

The future philosopher was born on the island of Samos in 341 BCE, the son of an Athenian colonist. He reportedly took to philosophy at the age of 12 or 14, when he reportedly had asked his teacher to explain a reference by the poet Hesiod about chaos being the first thing formed in the world, and the teacher replied this was a matter for philosophers. (Rist, 1972, p. 1)

He went to Athens in 323 BCE to do two years military service, which was necessary to qualify for Athenian citizenship. During that time his family relocated to Colophon in Asia Minor after the Athenians on Samos were evicted by the Macedonians.

Epicurus joined them and lived there for the next 10 years, studying under a follower of Democritus. He opened his own school in Mytilene, a city in the Aegean, in 311, then was forced to relocate to Lampsacus in Asia Minor a year later, possibly having been forced out by mob violence organized by Aristotelians. His three brothers were among his first followers. (Oates, 1940, p.10)

He moved to Athens in 306 and remained there until his death. He acquired a house and garden there, called the Garden of Epicurus, which was also the name of his community. It endured for centuries after his death.

It was based on equality of rank and mutual aid, not the rule of an individual or privileged class, at a time when city-state democracy was overshadowed by huge empires ruled by warlords and autocrats. He defied Athenian cultural norms by accepting women and slaves as equal members. It must be admitted, though, that everyone in the community deferred to Epicurus; in that respect, he was "more equal than others."

He didn't take part in Athenian public life, but he never left Athens, despite invasions and sieges. Athens was sometimes a battleground in the conflict

between Demetrius and Cassander, heirs of two of Alexander's generals. (Scott-Kilvert, 1973, p 333-383). During one siege, food was so scarce that he had to ration beans to a specific number per person in the community. (Diano, Encyclopedia Britannica)

This act, while born of necessity, highlights a practical approach to resource management and a commitment to ensuring the well-being of all members, even in dire circumstances – a lesson in prudent allocation and communal responsibility that resonates with modern concerns about resource scarcity and equitable distribution.

Unlike in other communities, such as the Pythagoreans, the Epicureans did not hold their wealth in common. Epicurus reportedly said that to ask followers to give up the right to private property would have reflected a lack of trust, which would have been incompatible with friendship.

He was not a collectivist or an authoritarian. Rather he advocated a moral revolution that rejected the relentless pursuit of individual wealth and disregard for communal well-being, which has led to the current crisis. Unlike in Garrett Hardin's "lifeboat ethics," Epicurus did not believe in fighting over scarce resources. His inclusive approach to well-being strives to ensure everyone has enough to satisfy their natural and necessary desires.

Epicurus died in 271BCE. On the day of his death, he reportedly wrote a letter to his friend, Idomeneus, saying, "On this truly happy day of my life, as I am at the point of death, I write this to you. The disease in my bladder and stomach are pursuing their course, lacking nothing of their normal severity, but against all this is the joy in my heart at the recollections of my conversations with you. Do you, as I might expect from your devotion from boyhood to me and to philosophy, take good care of the children of Metrodorus." (Fragments, O'Connor, 1993, p. 93)

This shows that he truly valued friendship; it wasn't just a reciprocal arrangement of "I help you, you help me." Friendship that went beyond transactional relationships was the necessary glue that held the Epicurean community together.

Basic Teachings

Epicureanism is one of the four great schools of Greek philosophy, along with Platonism, Aristotelianism and Stoicism. The founders the other three, Plato, Aristotle and Zeno of Citium, all left voluminous writings. Epicurus himself also was said to be a prolific writer. His biographer, Diogenes Laertius (180-240 CE), said he wrote more than 300 rolls. (Oates, 1940, p.59) Unfortunately, only a few survive.

He taught that the things needed for happiness are Ataraxia (tranquility) and Aponia (absence of pain); or, in other words, mental and physical health. Mental health consists of freedom from fear and freedom from unnecessary and unnatural desires.

This distinction between necessary and unnecessary desires is crucial to understanding Epicurean ethics and its relevance to contemporary issues of consumption and sustainability.

In his letter to Menoeceus, Epicurus wrote: “We must consider that of the desires some are natural and others idle: of the natural desires, some are necessary while others are natural only. Of the necessary desires, there are those that are necessary for happiness, those that are necessary for the body’s freedom from disturbance, and those that are necessary for life itself. A firm understanding of these things enables us to refer every choice and avoidance to the health of the body or the calm of the soul, since this is the goal of a happy life. Everything we do is for the sake of this, namely, to avoid pain and fear. Once this is achieved, all the soul’s trouble is dispelled, as the living being does not have to go in search of something missing or to seek something else, by which the good of the soul and of the body will be fulfilled”. (O’Connor, 1993, p. 64-65)

Elsewhere he wrote, “It is impossible to live pleasantly without living prudently, well, and justly, nor is it possible to live prudently, well, and justly without living pleasantly. The man for whom this latter condition is impossible cannot live prudently, well, or justly; he for whom the former is impossible, cannot live pleasantly...”. (Principal Doctrines 5, O’Connor, 1993, p. 70)

Epicurean pleasure is not a fleeting sensation but a state of being cultivated through virtuous and rational living. This emphasis on prudence, well-being, and justice forms the ethical bedrock of Epicureanism, distinguishing it sharply from a simplistic pursuit of hedonism and providing a philosophical grounding for the sustainable practices discussed in this paper.

One common belief about the Epicureans is that they were greedy for pleasure, especially delicious food. In comic plays, they were depicted as gluttons. This is based on Epicurus’ saying that “the beginning and root of every good is the satisfaction of the stomach.” (Fragments 59, O’Connor, 1993)

What Epicurus meant was that satisfaction of primary needs, such as food, water and shelter, are essential, but if you have these things, and also have friends, you have all you need to be happy.

But the Epicureans were not ascetics. They didn’t practice self-denial for its own sake. They didn’t object to drinking fine wines or eating gourmet food if they were offered. Epicurus said that a plain diet would make fancy food all the more delicious. He wrote, “We think highly of frugality not that we may always keep to a cheap and simple diet, but that we may be free from desire regarding it.” (Fragments, Oates, 1940, p. 47) He said the problem comes when you come to like fancy food so much that you can’t enjoy plain food.

This teaching on moderation and the nature of desire is critical for understanding their approach to consumption and its implications for sustainable living, suggesting that true pleasure lies not in endless acquisition, but in the appreciation of what is sufficient and natural.

The Epicureans’ rivals, in the Academy of Plato and the Lyceum of Aristotle, accused them of sexual orgies. Epicurus scholar J.M. Rist said this is an exaggeration, but he admitted that it is true that Epicurus did not advocate nor require celibacy, only a recognition that sexual pleasure was not a necessity. (Rist, 1972, p.10-11)

Epicurus wrote to a follower, “I hear from you that carnal appetites make you too eager for sexual pleasures. If you do not break the laws, disturb well-

established customs, upset any of your neighbors, do bodily harm to yourself, or waste your resources, give in to your inclinations as you please. However, you cannot avoid being impeded by one of these barriers. For sexual pleasure has never done anybody any good. One must be content if it has not done actual harm.” (Vatican Sayings 51, O’Connor, 1993, p. 82)

The other thing needful for happiness, he wrote, was friendship. Friendships provide security because friends help each other out in time of need. Epicurus taught that just knowing you have a friend you can rely on gives you freedom from fear. To have a friend, you must be a friend, and so you should not have so many friends that you cannot fulfill your obligations to all of them.

Epicureans say communities should be based on mutual advantage of all its members. These teachings foreshadow the Social Compact theory of John Locke. Epicurus wrote: “Natural justice is a pledge guaranteeing mutual advantage, to prevent one from harming others and to keep oneself from being harmed. ... There is no such thing as ‘justice in itself.’ It is always, rather, always a certain compact made during men’s dealings with one another in different places, not to do harm or be harmed. ... Broadly considered, justice is the same for all, because it is a kind of mutual benefit in the business of men’s interactions with one another. ... If someone makes a law which does not result in advantages for men’s dealings with each other, it no longer has the force of justice.” *The Principal Doctrines*, O’Connor, 1993, p. 31, 32, 36, 27, 74, 75)

But for him, friendship was something deeper than a mutual assistance pact, for reasons that are disputed among scholars. (Rist, 1972, 127-139) He wrote, “Of all things that wisdom provides for living one’s life in happiness, the greatest by far is the possession of friendship.” (*Principal Doctrines* 27, O’Connor, 1993, p. 73).

This stress on true friendship is what makes Epicureanism more than just a philosophy of selfish hedonism. It means that there are other values than avoiding pain and enjoying moderate pleasure for oneself.

Epicurus and Sustainability

A number of observers point out how the Epicurean ideals of moderation, simplicity and natural pleasures fit well with the need for a sustainable society.

One teaching of Epicurus was phronesis, or sober calculation. The “Letter to Menoeceus,” explicitly highlights the importance of phronesis. Epicurus advised, “For it is not continuous drinking and revels, nor the enjoyment of women and young boys, nor the enjoyment of fish and other viands that a luxurious table provides, which produce the pleasant life, but sober reasoning, which examines the motives for every choice and avoidance, and which drives away those opinions resulting in the greatest disturbance of the soul.”

(a) Food sufficiency and hedonic pleasure

Valérie Hémar-Nicolas, of Paris-Saclay University in France, and Liselotte Hedegaard, of Roskilde University in Denmark, in a 2023 article entitled “Food sufficiency, an approach rooted in the ethics of Epicurus,” pointed out the pressing need for “a sustainable food model that incorporates economic growth, social justice and environmental protection to meet current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own” (Hémar-Nicolas & Hedegaard, 2023, p.2)

One problem with acceptance of sustainable practices is that they are often presented as a form of austerity and self-sacrifice. Hémar-Nicolas and Hedegaard (Ibid, p, 2–28) said this is all wrong. They said the key to sustainable food production and distribution is to show that sustainable practices can make food consumption more pleasurable. This may require forming new habits, which is in line with the Epicurean philosophy of preferred rational pleasure over the unthinking satisfaction of appetites.

Unprocessed food is usually more nutritious and also tastier than processed food. But human beings are programmed to desire foods that are high in sugar, fat and salt (Ibid, p. 3) - a pleasure that arguably is natural, but also unnecessary in today's world and, past a certain point, harmful.

“Eating well” means eating in moderation, seeking out natural food and natural materials, and preparing food ourselves rather than eating prepared foods. Hémar-Nicolas and Hedegaard admit that this may feel troublesome at first, but reason and reflection tell us that these practices will not only be more sustainable in the long run, but produce greater pleasure, satisfaction and well-being.

“For example,” they wrote, “cooking a dish for the first time instead of buying it ready-made may initially result in negative emotions, such as failure or frustration with giving up another more attractive activity. However, this displeasure can eventually lead to self-satisfaction and amplified taste pleasure. This shift from displeasure to pleasure is grounded in sensory experiences (stimulation of the senses, greater nimbleness to cook, etc.) and social experiences (e.g. exchanging recipes, receiving gratitude from other eaters, etc.).” (Ibid, p, 12)

Hémar-Nicolas and Hedegaard call on the food industry to develop sourcing, distribution, marketing and advertising to make the consumer's acquisition, preparation and consumption of food more pleasurable and to make consumers more mindful of the pleasures of food. I would say that the European Union's "Farm to Fork" strategy serves as an example of this growing emphasis on sustainability.

One could add that awareness of local products, whose flavors are closely linked to their land of origin and avoid long transportation distances, should also be encouraged.

It is significant that these two scholars combine a background in management (Hémar-Nicolas) and philosophy (Hedegaard) and that their article was published in *Recherche en Applications en Marketing*, a publication of l'Association Française du Marketing, rather than a philosophy journal. It is an indication of the growing recognition by commercial interests in the relevance of both sustainability and philosophy in today's world.

(b) Epicureanism and a sustainable world

Ecophilosopher Freya Mathews said philosophy, including environmental philosophy, must be not only theory, but a way of life. (Mathews, 2023, p.1-20). Epicureans, like the Stoics, taught ways of life that transformed consciousness in ways that the world needs today.

“The contentment that would accrue from the Epicurean way of life, lived in comfort but without adornment, close to nature, in colloquy with intelligent companions who share the practitioner’s path, seems hard to deny,” she wrote.

“Plausible too is the central intuition that in tailoring ourselves to the often exaggerated or arbitrary conventions and expectations of society, we are likely to miss the central point of life, which is simply to register and rejoice in the reality of our existence. To register the reality of our existence may indeed be to experience a sense of sufficiency and plenitude that no other experience can begin to equal. The Epicurean way of life then surely retains its relevance and appeal today.” (Ibid, p. 7)

Edward Howlett Spence also wrote that external policies may not be enough to save a world threatened by climate change, diminishing natural resources, and increasing pollution, population and energy consumption per capita. Policies that do not allow for a sustainable good life are bound to fail, he says, and Epicureanism may be a path to the sustainable good life. (Spence, IOP Conference Series, 2009)

He wrote that technological progress may enable more people to satisfy their natural and necessary desires for good and shelter. On the other hand, technological change creates new needs. One can argue that Internet access has become necessary for a good life. And it fosters unnatural and unnecessary desires, such as the desire for such things as the most advanced flat-screen TV.

Emily Austin, author of *Living for Pleasure: an Epicurean Guide to the Good Life*, said Epicurus would advocate a society in which everyone had enough to satisfy their natural and necessary desires, and was happy with this. But in contemporary society, she wrote, success is more valued than satisfaction.

She wrote, “Those content to have enough are often considered suspicious, as though their failure to work for more makes them lazy or complacent. Working constantly becomes a badge of honor, even as it crowds out more desirable goods like time with friends and family.” (Austin, 2023, p. 142)

Gerald Gutenschwager argued that Epicureanism offers a solution to the main problems facing our destructive, high-growth society - the economic problem of overproduction, the resulting environmental destruction and the ethical failure of the growth imperative to provide a meaningful and happy life.

He pointed out the similarities between Epicureanism and Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs, each one building on the previous one and making possible the next one - at the base (1) the biological necessities of life, then (2) safety, (3) friendship and membership in a group, (4) self-esteem and the respect of others and at the peak (5) “self-actualization,” the realization of one’s potential.

He said Epicurus created a small, loving community, free from fear, which provided for simple material needs and allowed satisfaction of emotional and spiritual needs. He said Epicurus created a small, loving community, free from

fear, which provided for simple material needs and allowed satisfaction of emotional and spiritual needs.

“How ironic!” Gutenschwager added. “Almost the entire evolution of humanity since Epicurus has gone in the opposite direction, especially with the rise of economic theory, individualism and the technological society, which have brought a culture of egoism, competition, conquest and arrogance, and with ultimate consequences that may well circumscribe significantly, if not conclusively, human life on our planet.” (Gutenschwager, 2013, p. 66-90)

John O’Neill gave Epicureans credit for providing evidence that reduced consumption does not mean a reduced quality of life, which is important for sustainability. “However, these virtues disappear when we turn to the question as to why sustainability might matter in the first place. Hedonic accounts of welfare cannot give us an account of the way the future might matter to our own lives. The future like the past does not matter to us.” (O’Neill, 2006, p.168). To Epicurus, death is oblivion and what happens after death cannot affect one’s present happiness.

O’Neill contrasted Epicurean hedonism with Aristotle’s idea of eudaimonia, or human flourishing. Aristotelians seek excellence by cultivating the virtues, while Epicureans seek enjoyment by cultivating natural and necessary pleasures. He said the first is objective; the other, subjective. Also, Aristotle believed that political participation, which is an integral part of the modern environmental movement, is necessary to a good life, but Epicurus did not.

Aristotelianism is not opposed to Epicureanism, O’Neill said, but it contains things the latter philosophy lacks. He said that, according to Aristotle, it is not possible to determine the meaning and impact of someone’s life until after that person is dead, which means Aristotelianism is necessarily future-oriented in a way Epicureanism is not. (O’Neill, 2006, p. 168-171)

But in fact, the Garden was not a place of isolated indulgence, but of intergenerational care, ethical cultivation, and sustainable living. While Epicurus did not engage in public politics, he enacted a quiet revolution by modeling a way of life that prized long-term tranquility over short-term gratification, sufficiency over luxury, and community over individualism. These values align closely with the very principles sustainability requires: living within limits, caring for others, and thinking beyond immediate desires. Far from being indifferent to the future, the Garden offers a living example of how deeply rooted personal contentment can foster enduring, socially and ecologically responsible lives.

The Roman Stoic philosopher, Seneca the Younger (4 BCE - 65 CE), described the Garden, which still existed in his day, as follows: “Go to his Garden and read the motto carved there: ‘Stranger, here you will do well to tarry; here our highest good is pleasure.’ The care-taker of that abode, a kindly host, will be ready for you; he will welcome you with barley-meal and serve you water also in abundance, with these words: ‘Have you not been well entertained?’

“This garden,” he says, “does not whet your appetite; it quenches it. Nor does it make you more thirsty with every drink; it slakes the thirst by a natural cure, a cure that demands no fee. This is the pleasure in which I have grown old.” (Seneca’s Letters, Book I, Letter XXI)

Epicurus and Modern Business

One must be careful not to claim too much about present-day application of Epicurean ideas to modern business. Few if any business owners or managers claim to follow the teachings of Epicurus, in the way that some claim to be followers of the teachings in Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* or the novels of Ayn Rand.

Epicurus himself thought the quest for wealth was an unworthy pursuit. He wrote, "To love ill-gotten wealth is impious; [but even] to love wealth justly earned is [still] shameful. For even with justice on your side, it is unseemly to be thrifty to the point of meanness... A life of freedom cannot acquire many possessions, since to accomplish this requires servility to the rabble or to kings; but such a life possesses everything in unfailing supply. If somehow such a life does happen to acquire many possessions, it will also know how to distribute these to win the neighbors' good will." (Vatican Sayings 43, 67, O'Connor 1993, p. 81,84)

This was the prevailing philosophical view in the context of his time. Adam Smith's idea that self-interest could be tamed and made a force for good did not exist.

But if you look at today's business world with an Epicurean squint, you can see companies trying to combine the profit motive and the general good.

One example is the new emphasis on work-life balance which, according to Zarak Mumtaz, founder of the Hayal Agency, a marketing services company, reflects the Epicurean value of mental tranquility and balance. (Mumtaz, 2025)

Basecamp, a project management company, is a noteworthy example of this. It limits the employee work week to 40 hours, and to 32 hours in summer. Employees are forbidden to work overtime, but they are given control over how they spend, so that work time is not wasted in useless meetings and reports. Basecamp, unlike some tech companies, does not offer amenities on-site such as gourmet meals or workout rooms. It prefers that employees go home when the work day is done. (Boogaard, 2017; Nguyen, 2020)

Management values calm deliberation over intense effort. Hao Nguyen of Balance the Grind, a consultant firm on work-life balance, said motivational slogans he's seen on wall of high-tech companies include such things as "*Move fast and break things*," "*Fail early, fail fast, fail often*," and "*Fear is the disease, hustle is the antidote*." He said the equivalents at Basecamp are "*Calm is profitability*," "*Calm is reasonable expectations*," "*Calm is about 40 hours of work a week*," and "*Calm is about sustainable practices that can run for the long-term*." (Nguyen, 2020)

It should be noted, though, that while Epicurus advocated Ataraxia (tranquility) as a way to avoid unhappiness, Basecamp advocated calmness is a means to ensure long-term corporate survival and profitability. The two goals are not the same, but they are aligned.

Similarly, there is an analogy between a present-day business corporation adopting sustainable practices and followers of Epicurus limiting their desires to natural and necessary pleasures. The two goals are not the same, but they also are aligned and show the way to a better future.

Here are some examples of sustainable business practices:

Smith & Hawken: This garden tool distributorship, founded in 1979, is the best-known of a number of successful companies founded by Paul Hawken, an organic gardener himself and a well-known advocate of sustainable business practices. One of his practices was to send catalogs (printed on recycled paper) only to those who requested them, which kept tons of paper out of landfills. He quit as CEO in 1992, saying he wanted to devote himself to writing and lecturing. Hawken, like Epicurus, believed in limiting consumption to what was useful and necessary. Like Epicurus, he strongly believed in a healthy diet and lifestyle and sought to promote them by example. (“Smith & Hawken Ltd.,” Encyclopedia.com, n.d.)

Patagonia Clothing and Gear: On 2011’s Black Friday, the start of the Christmas shopping season, Patagonia ran a full page ad in the New York Times under the headline, “Don’t Buy this Jacket,” featuring one of its best-selling products. “As is true of all the things we make and you can buy,” the ad said, “this jacket comes with an environmental cost higher than its price.” It mentioned that manufacture of the jacket required 135 liters of water and generated 20 pounds of carbon dioxide. But it promised that Patagonia was doing everything it could to make a durable, recyclable product, and asked customers not to buy things unless they really need them. This aligns with the Epicurean emphasis on moderation and limiting unnecessary desires. (Kuang, 2025; Patagonia Inc., 2025)

Interface Inc.: This company is a leader in making carpet tile, whose raw materials include nylon, fiberglass and polyvinyl chloride, which usually wind up in landfills. Its founder, the late Ray Anderson (1934-2011), had an epiphany in 1994 when an employee gave him a copy of Paul Hawken’s *The Ecology of Commerce*, which argued for the need to reduce per capita use of resources and energy by 80 percent. He committed the company to the eventual production of 100 percent recyclable products, and achieved a 30 percent reduction in emissions and solid waste in the first four years. The company has continued to make progress, and recently committed to reducing carbon emissions by an additional 50 percent by 2030 and to become carbon negative without offsets by 2040. This showcases a commitment to living in harmony with nature and minimizing harm, which resonates with Epicurean values. (Patton, 2013; Interface Inc., 2025)

Ecovative Design: This company uses mycelium, a type of mushroom, to create biodegradable packaging and building materials as a replacement for plastics and other non-renewable materials. They also make synthetic bacon. This aligns with the Epicurean appreciation of natural pleasures and the desire to live in harmony with nature. By replacing harmful plastics with natural alternatives, they demonstrate a commitment to minimizing harm and promoting ecological balance, which can be seen as a practical application of Epicurean environmental ethics. (Cumbers, 2023)

These companies, through their actions, demonstrate that businesses can thrive by embracing values that align with Epicurean principles. Their focus on sustainability, moderation, community, and natural pleasures reflects a growing recognition that businesses have a responsibility to contribute to a better world, aligning with the idea that "the good life" should be a central concern for businesses.

The companies mentioned above have not only contributed to a more sustainable and ethical world but have also reaped benefits in terms of profitability and positive social/environmental impact:

Enhanced Brand Reputation and Customer Loyalty: Companies like Patagonia and Smith & Hawken have built strong brand reputations by aligning their values with those of their customers. This has led to increased customer loyalty and advocacy, which translates into higher sales and profitability. This aligns with the idea that businesses that prioritize ethical considerations can build stronger relationships with stakeholders.

Cost Savings and Efficiency: Companies like Interface have found that sustainable practices can lead to significant cost savings through reduced waste, energy efficiency, and resource optimization. This demonstrates that environmental responsibility and profitability can go hand in hand, aligning with the Epicurean emphasis on "sober calculation" (phronesis) in resource management.

Attracting and Retaining Talent: Companies with strong ethical and sustainable practices are more attractive to talented employees who want to work for organizations that align with their values. This can lead to increased employee engagement, productivity, and retention, reflecting the Epicurean emphasis on creating a harmonious and supportive work environment.

Positive Social and Environmental Impact: By adopting sustainable practices, these companies have contributed to a healthier environment, reduced pollution, and promoted social equity. This positive impact not only benefits society but also enhances the company's reputation and strengthens its relationships with stakeholders, aligning with the Epicurean emphasis on community and social well-being.

Innovation and Competitive Advantage: Companies like Ecovative Design have gained a competitive advantage by developing innovative sustainable products and services. This demonstrates that sustainability can be a driver of innovation and business growth, aligning with the Epicurean emphasis on adapting to changing circumstances and finding creative solutions to challenges.

These case studies demonstrate that businesses can thrive even though they have values that align with Epicurean principles. By focusing on sustainability, moderation, community, and natural pleasures, businesses can create a positive impact on the world while also achieving financial success. This reflects a growing recognition that businesses have a responsibility to contribute to a better future for all, aligning with the idea that, according to Epicurus, "the ethical life will be a divine one," where ethical living leads to a higher form of well-being.

Conclusion

While Epicurus himself shunned politics and cultivated a small, self-selected community, a group that was largely self-sufficient, such an approach is insufficient for the challenges of today's world. To address the growing environmental crisis, all individuals, including corporate executives and business owners, must embrace Epicurean principles. Indeed, some businesses as we mentioned above, already exemplify these values, prioritizing long-term well-being and responsible

practices over short-term excesses. The imperative now is to transform these commendable individual efforts into a universal necessity, embedding Epicurean wisdom into the very fabric of our global economy.

To address the growing environmental crisis, all individuals, including corporate executives and business owners, must embrace Epicurean principles. Indeed, some businesses as we mentioned above, already exemplify these values, prioritizing long-term well-being and responsible practices over short-term excesses. The imperative now is to transform these commendable individual efforts into a universal necessity, embedding Epicurean wisdom into the very fabric of our global economy.

For this transformation to occur, corporate and civic leaders play a vital role in making the public understand that the desire for unnatural and unnecessary pleasures is a key contributor to today's sustainability crisis. The educational system should promote awareness of one's desires and needs, so young people are not attracted to unnecessary and unnatural pleasures. It is incumbent upon them to persuade policymakers in business and government to use their power to elevate natural and necessary pleasures.

This shift will lead to corporate and political leaders prioritizing mutual aid over destructive competition, and valuing frugality and prudence over reckless consumption. In doing so, we begin to cultivate a global community that embodies the core tenets of Epicurean well-being.

Epicurus's original "Garden" was a sanctuary for philosophical inquiry and simple self-sufficient living, providing a haven where individuals could pursue tranquility and contentment. However, the pressing environmental concerns of our era demand a vastly expanded vision for this philosophical ideal. The modern "Garden" cannot be confined to a small, isolated group; it must extend its boundaries to encompass the entire planet. Perhaps there could be an explicitly Epicurean movement, with a network of "Gardens" in the form of small affinity groups, uniting to practice a modern form of Epicurean philosophy. This global "Garden," in whatever form it takes, implies a collective commitment to sustainable practices, where the pursuit of genuine human flourishing aligns with the health of our shared environment.

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