

Welcome Al-Haakim!

Post by “Cassius” of January 13, 2025 at 7:40 AM

On behalf of all of us who have generated the content over the years, thank you for the kind words about the website Al-Hakiim!

For me finding the Jefferson endorsement of Epicurus was key. I'm not sure what you've seen here at the forum, but be sure you find the full collection of Jefferson material collected [here](#). Hopefully we have all or part of that here, but if not we need to make sure those other letters beyond the Peter Carr "I too am an Epicurean" are easily findable. The letters with John Adams make it even more plain that Jefferson understood a lot about Epicurus.

So yes the Jefferson connection was a major influence on my own thinking. Now, given the path that you're own, i'd recommend the DeWitt book (for the sweeping scope) followed by the Austin book (for a contemporary appreciation that doesn't follow the modern trend to water down the philosophy).

it may not be an issue for you, but one of the most challenging aspects for most people is getting past a superficial interpretation of the word "pleasure." I would not recommend too much focus on Lucretius or even the core texts until you have read an introductory summary like DeWitt, but for me the most benefit has come from reading Books One and Two of Cicero's On Ends. Definitely don't tackle that until you've read enough introductory material to give you background on the "Pleasure" debate - for example you need to be sure that you are acquainted with the "anti-pleasure" arguments typified by Plato's "[Philebus](#)." DeWitt can provide most of that. But once you get familiar with how Cicero (and the other philosophers) were limiting the term "pleasure" to "sensuality," and how Epicurus saw fit to respond to that by emphasizing that there are only two feelings, and thus all feelings which are not painful come within "pleasure," then you are no longer trapped into thinking that the advocacy of "pleasure" means nothing more than tea parties and dreamy indulgence.

As Dewitt put it on page 240 of “Epicurus And His Philosophy” page 240 (emphasis added):

*“The extension of the name of pleasure to this normal state of being was the major innovation of the new hedonism. It was in the negative form, freedom from pain of body and distress of mind, that it drew the most persistent and vigorous condemnation from adversaries. The contention was that the application of the name of pleasure to this state was unjustified on the ground that two different things were thereby being denominated by one name. Cicero made a great to-do over this argument, but it is really superficial and captious. **The fact that the name of pleasure was not customarily applied to the normal or static state did not alter the fact that the name ought to be applied to it; nor that reason justified the application; nor that human beings would be the happier for so reasoning and***

believing.

And getting back to Jefferson, he too has really good advice:

I take the liberty of observing that you are not a true disciple of our master Epicurus, in indulging the indolence to which you say you are yielding. One of his canons, you know, was that "that indulgence which prevents a greater pleasure, or produces a greater pain, is to be avoided." Your love of repose will lead, in its progress, to a suspension of healthy exercise, a relaxation of mind, an indifference to everything around you, and finally to a debility of body, and hebetude of mind, the farthest of all things from the happiness which the well-regulated indulgences of Epicurus ensure; fortitude, you know is one of his four cardinal virtues. That teaches us to meet and surmount difficulties; not to fly from them, like cowards; and to fly, too, in vain, for they will meet and arrest us at every turn of our road. Weigh this matter well; brace yourself up....