

Use Of The Term "Metaphysics" In Discussing Epicurus

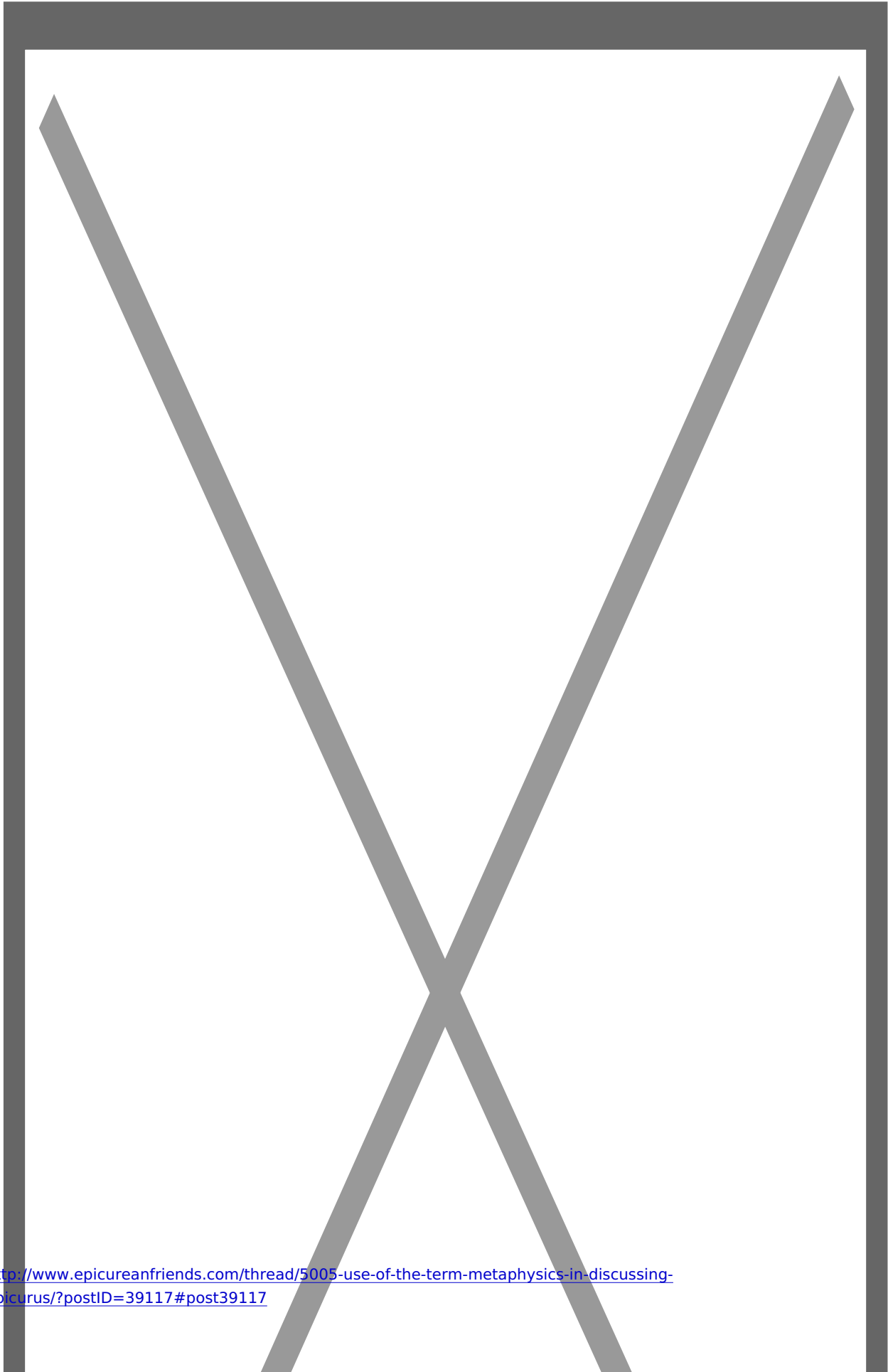
Post by "Cassius" of March 30, 2026 at 7:37 PM

In several conversations recently, including with Martin on one of our recent Zooms (if I recall correctly) and others here privately on the forum, the question has arisen as to whether it would be better to refer to Epicurus' study of nature as "Metaphysics" rather than "Physics."

No doubt we'll continue to use "Physics" as the generic term to organize most of our discussions here, but there are definite differences between "Metaphysics" and "Physics" that would probably be useful to discuss. For example, in some conversations I get the impression that some people (sometimes even me) consider "metaphysics" to imply something of lesser importance, or to be more suspicious of, than "physics." As I read it that attitude might arise from a modern tendency to consider "science" as the trump card for all matters for which we can claim knowledge (at least of a sort) while "metaphysics" is necessary speculative and impossible to be confident about.

Here's the opening from Wikipedia on "metaphysics":

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<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/5005-use-of-the-term-metaphysics-in-discussing-epicurus/?postID=39117#post39117>

[Quote from Wikiedia - Metaphysics](#)

Metaphysics is the branch of [philosophy](#) that examines the basic structure of [reality](#). It is traditionally seen as the study of mind-independent features of the world, but some theorists view it as an inquiry into the conceptual framework of human understanding. Some philosophers, including [Aristotle](#), designate metaphysics as **first philosophy** to suggest that it is more fundamental than other forms of philosophical inquiry.

Metaphysics encompasses a wide range of general and abstract topics. It investigates the nature of [existence](#), the features all entities have in common, and their division into [categories of being](#). An influential division is between [particulars](#) and [universals](#). Particulars are unique individual entities, like a specific apple. Universals are general features that different particulars have in common, like the color *red*. [Modal metaphysics](#) examines what it means for something to be possible or necessary. Metaphysicians also explore the [concepts of space, time, and change](#), and their connection to [causality](#) and the [laws of nature](#). Other topics include how [mind and matter are related](#), whether everything in the world is [predetermined](#), and whether there is [free will](#).

Maybe a concrete question might help:

Is the letter to Herodotus best described as "Physics," "Metaphysics," or both?

Is the poem of Lucretius "Physics," "Metaphysics," or both?

Is the conclusion that the universe is eternal in time and infinite in space Physics, Metaphysics, both, neither, or what?

Is the conclusion that there is no immortal soul that survives (for very long anyway) after death Physics, Metaphysics, or what?

I'd like to know what others here think so I can consider if I want to alter my own usage of these terms.