

# Highlights and doubts after reading Chapter 1 (Part 1 of 2)

Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of July 5, 2020 at 7:25 PM

Just some things I've gotten out of it. Some remarks so people who haven't read it perhaps get a feeling of what it includes (without any promise of comprehensiveness, these are just things I highlighted for myself) and some doubts (that I'll be marking with bold type) I'd like to bring to the forum to see if they can be resolved.

- P4 "The gods are not to be feared, because 'the incorruptible being is immune to feelings of anger or gratitude'". Keeping this attitude will put the reader in "the right disposition to learn subsequent teachings".
- P4 Epicurus employs the synoptic view as a device to facilitate teaching/learning, that goes from the general view to the details.
- P4 "The universe consists of atoms and void" so the soul is composed of atoms. **Is somebody willing to elaborate on this point?**
- P4 Epicurus believed that the truth can be properly described in terms of its details, parting from the whole, and only if "the beginning was rightly made", and so knowledge can be attained.
- P5 The first text for students of Epicurus was "The Little Epitome, which is extant as the letter addressed to Herodotus".
- P5 "Faith was recognized for the first time as a factor in happiness". **I guess this will be expanded upon later in the book, but... why does faith play such an important role in Epicurean Philosophy? How is this not contradictory to its materialistic ontology and its empiricist epistemology?**
- P5 The poem of Lucretius "On the Nature of Things" is the follow-up text for the student after "the Little Epitome".
- P5 The nature of gods, which is presumed to be the topic of the book missing from Lucretius's poem. **What is Epicurean Philosophy's stance on this topic since there is no extant text about it? Or there is?**
- P5 There is a mention about "the thirty-seven books on Physics". **What is this referring to?**
- P5 The synoptic view of Epicurus and his philosophy are "presented in the form of *dogmatic* general statements". **From my first reading, I remembered some reference about the value of dogma, but I don't know if it's this one or another one later on. Dogma doesn't strike me as a constructive thing, let alone in philosophy; is this something that is just asked of the reader at the beginning because of the synoptic view, or is dogma a particularly important part of the philosophy?**

- P6 The stated objectives of the chapter are "to show where Epicurus belongs in the succession of philosophers, how his thought is related to the cultural context in which it arose, and how it survived in the cultural context into which it was finally absorbed", "to orientate the reader at the outset as to create the proper attitude for a sympathetic understanding of the man and his work; and not less to warn the reader against the disparagement and prejudice that abound in all the secondary literature".
- P6 Diogenes Laertius wrote an "excellent biography of Epicurus" and it is used as "chief authority" on his life.
- P7 "He was the first to promulgate a dogmatic philosophy" ... "The distinction of being a dogmatist was naturally not denied him, because it was deemed a demerit, the renunciation of inquiry". **This is the part I was referring to (in my comment lines above); I too think that dogmatism is a renunciation of inquiry; how is this not in agreement with Dewitt? Am I understanding something wrong? Why does he propose dogmatism as an argument in favor of the philosophy.**
- P7 Epicurus epistemology is not empiricist in the modern sense, since "he never declared sensation to be the source of knowledge; much less did he declare all sensations to be trustworthy". **What is Dewitt referring to when he says "empiricism in the modern sense"?**
- P8 Epicurus used mostly ("his chief reliance") deductive reasoning.
- P8 "The mistake is to look upon Epicurus as an effeminate and a mora invalid". **My doubt here is not specifically about the philosophy but rather how in this instance and in some other texts stoic texts I've read they refer to femininity (which I take as having a behavior that likens that of women) as a very bad thing. This hasn't aged well. My surprise here is that the one who uses this adjective is Dewitt, as he's not quoting a text of that old period. This doesn't seem to me to be very Epicurean, from what I've understood so far of Epicurus.**
- P8 "He was an altruistic hedonist".
- P8 Epicureanism "shunted the emphasis from the political to the social virtues and offered what may be called a religion of humanity". "The mistake is to" ... "think of its founder [of the philosophy, Epicurus] as an enemy of religion". **Again, religion (for me) is the epitome of dogma; how important is religion to Epicurean philosophy? Does religion here have a different connotation than what it usually means? How is somebody going to be able to learn something different (and change his/her mind to something better) if we argue in favor of dogma and religion?**
- P8 Epicureanism has survived in literature and ethics "by amalgamation with Stoicism, chiefly through Seneca and Marcus Aurelius".
- P9 Some influences of Epicurus were Isocrates, Euclid, Diogenes, Aristotle, Aristobulus, Nearchus, the first Ptolemy.
- P9 From Euclid he got a simple style for communicating and deductive procedures.
- P9 From the Cynics, the quest of honesty, but repudiating "their insolence and vulgarity", emphasizing that "honesty be joined with courtesy and decorum".
- P10 From Aristotle, "the revelation of a new order of Nature", and from here "Epicurus rejected the hypostatized Reason of Plato as the norm of truth and looked instead to

Nature as furnishing the norm".

- P10 The "chief negative influences were Platonism and oratory" which were both obsessed with politics, rendering "happiness of the individual [as] inseparable from his life as a citizen".
- P11 War ensued with the program of Platonic education, because Platonism "stood for the tight combination of ethics with politics which disqualified philosophy for universal acceptance".
- P11 Stoicism is written off as a possible influence in the life of Epicurus.
- P12 Sophocles may have inspired the principle that pain is evil, and Homer was cited as "authority for the doctrine that pleasure is the telos or goal of living".
- P12 Epicurus "declared dialectic a superfluity". " He rejected geometry as having no bearing upon problems of conduct".
- P12 Epicurus's "classification of the desires is developed from a Platonic hint, and he begins to erect his structure of hedonism from the point where this topic was left by Plato", and "more than half of his forty Authorized Doctrines are direct contradictions of Platonic teachings".
- P13 With Aristotle he had in common a "direct analytical approach to problems as opposed to the circuitous analogical approach adopted by Plato", but Epicurus was also pragmatic at the same time.
- P13 "There is no better preparation for the ethics of Epicurus than a perusal of that treatise (Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle), and especially of the sections on Friendship, the Magnanimous Man, and Happiness".
- P13 "Many anticipations of his teachings may there be identified: for example, the possibility of man's attainment to a life that in respect of quality may be called immortal or divine". **Did Epicurus actually use immortality or divinity as qualities to describe a good life? Isn't this a bit contradictory?**
- P13 "Aristotle's study of the embryo seems to have given rise to the doctrine of innate ideas or Anticipations...". **It just seems kind of incongruent that they would derive conclusions from things they were unable to sense in any way, and criticize others for doing the same in a different domain. But here I have doubts I may be misunderstanding something.**
- P13 Epicurus based his theory of pleasure and definition of justice in animal behavior.
- P13 He studied with Nausiphanes who gave him a suggestion about a canon of truth. **What suggestion would this be?**
- P14 Many explanations as to why Epicurus didn't show gratitude to his teachers.
- P15 "he arrogated the title of Sage or Wise Man" and he was capable "of claiming perfection of knowledge, because *he had approximated to the life of the gods*". **What do you think this means?**
- P15 He held a presumptuous attitude "virtually imperative for him as the founder and head of a sect". **The term sect to me holds a negative connotation; would you agree to call Epicurus's movement a sect?**
- P15 He revived "the tradition of Ionian science, which had been interrupted by Socrates and Plato".

- P15 Two separate trends can be identified in Greek philosophy: One observational and speculative, and the other mathematical and contemplative.
- P16 Geometry inspired a movement that was romantic; Plato seemed to see in it "absolute reason contemplating absolute truth, perfect precision of concept joined with finality of demonstration". "He began to transfer the precise concepts of geometry to ethics and politics". "Especially enticing was the concept which we know as definition. This was a creation of the geometers; they created it by defining straight lines, equilateral triangles, and other regular figures. If these can be defined, Plato tacitly reasoned, why not also justice, piety, temperance, and other virtues? This is reasoning by analogy, one of the trickiest of logical procedures. It only holds good only between sets of true similars. Virtues and triangles are not true similars. It does not follow, therefore, because equilateral triangles can be precisely defined, that justice can be defined in the same way." **This makes sense, at least at a glance. But perhaps it could be argued that it still lacks more arguments for proof. I think if this can be further developed by way of examples it could be validated, without the need for more argumentation. Can you think of any?**
- P17 The abilities of both Socrates and Plato gave fruit to the "dramatization of logic which is called dialectic, best exemplified by the Platonic dialogues".
- P17 "The quest of a definition, of justice, for example, presumes the existence of the thing to be defined". **What would be your answer to the argument that, from this sentence, follows that justice doesn't exist?**
- P17 "Hence arose Plato's theory of ideas. The word idea means shape or form and he thought of abstract notions as having an independent existence just as geometrical figures exist, a false analogy". This was rejected as absurd by Epicurus. **So... geometrical figures are things that exist, that can be abstractly defined, in terms of its relations with physical things. But the ideas of virtues, don't exist in the physical world. Then, a definition of them, eludes us, because we cannot derive it from observation of their existence in the physical world of atoms and void. Or, so we can try to define them, albeit poorly or in a very limited fashion, in abstract terms, when we observe something in the physical world that we would call is a physical manifestation of said idea, but accepting that the definition can only comprise the observed phenomenon, and hence it cannot be absolute or universal and only related to that one observation?**

I'm going to have to finish this in another post.