

Epicurean Worldview, Personal Identity, and Creating Community

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 18, 2022 at 12:17 PM

I've been contemplating why it is that I feel that the Epicurean worldview is so important to me. In the study of Epicureanism, I have found many helpful ideas for how I want to make sense out of my life, and also how to determine what I want more of in my life (and less of) in my life. And yet, I am still in the process of formulating my own personal understanding of what is an "Epicurean worldview".

My childhood experience of growing up in Christianity and going to church shaped my mind and how I see the world. As a young child and young teen, I was fully absorbed into the church and religious beliefs, due to the intense programs that children were placed in. But by age 16, I began questioning my religious understanding of God, and by the age of 17, I could no longer believe in God. After moving out of my parents house, I began the journey of overcoming that strict Christian worldview that I was raised in. Going to college helped a bit, and also along the way I met people who greatly helped to expand my views and challenged me to think outside of "black and white" and "either / or" thinking.

After a number of years of studying all world religions and psychology/self-help, I entered into sole study and practice of Buddhism (for about 10 years). I studied on my own for a time, but then attended several different groups. I then went deeply into Zen Buddhist practice at a Zen temple, but then found it to be unsatisfying for a number of reasons.

So now coming to the study of Epicureanism just this last year (2020), and acknowledging that I have a bit of a "religious" drive within myself, and that I have a drive to find meaning in a complete worldview. I see Epicureanism as having a worldview in which I can organize my thoughts and my desires. On encountering this philosophy, I already had within me the "seeds" of this kind of thinking, so basically the draw for me is that this philosophy already resonates for me. I am not changing myself to fit into anything, much of how I think is already "Epicurean".

Coming from my past experience in Christianity and Buddhism, I see that surrounding oneself with others who have the same worldview can create a feeling of safety, security, and belonging. I acknowledge that I do feel a desire to surround myself with people who share my worldview of Epicureanism, but this is made a bit more difficult by the fact that there are so few Epicureans. The only answer to this is to create a way to share Epicureanism with others, and to build Epicurean community.

Also, when it comes to an internal sense of personal identity, perhaps that is something unique for every person, and the desire or "feeling of need" is at various levels, whether one feels secure or insecure in relation to other people. And this personal identity can affect what one wants from other people, such as the drive for emotional sharing or emotional closeness, or the drive for belonging and recognition...the desire to see and be seen, and to understand and be understood.

Others here on the forum may feel fine living independently in an Epicurean worldview, and not feel a desire to be surrounded by a community, and I can accept that. But for myself, I feel a great desire to create something, and how and what that will be is still unfolding. I want to call forward the creation of whatever is the most pleasureable and joyful community. And so I want to send out this to see what others think with regard to the Epicurean worldview and creating community?

Post by “Cassius” of January 18, 2022 at 2:31 PM

Beautifully written Kalosyni. Clearly you are a very talented writer and that is greatly needed to advance this project!

Post by “smoothiekiwi” of January 18, 2022 at 3:33 PM

[Cassius](#) , I agree with that! [Kalosyni](#) , you truly are a great writer, and it brought me pleasure reading your text 😊

Regarding your text, I've two thoughts. First, that Epicureanism is a philosophy which offers a coherent worldview. And I'll be the first one to acknowledge that I struggle with applying it, but a community isn't necessary to see the truth Epicurus had been preaching. Ataraxia, the independence from external events, is actually an extremely important concept in the philosophy, at least according to [Hiram](#) (looking at "Tending the Epicurean Garden"!)

But I of course completely agree that a community of like-minded people makes life so, so much easier. Heck, friendship is one of the things which make life worth living, and a community of like-minded individuals with whom one can discuss philosophical concepts even more!

The biggest problem with that is, I think, that adults are very, very, very reluctant to change their worldviews. It's necessary for them to a) have a very impactful event (like a divine revelation, although it may almost always explained psychologically), or b) to have an example for a long period of time.

And that's where Epicureanism kicked in. I remember that some time ago, I got a comment at the sub-reddit r/Stoicism: "if you want to change the people around you, you've to be the example".

And this quote is (sadly) right. No one will simply look at Epicureanism nowadays and think: "Wait, that makes sense!" People are wayyy too absorbed in politics and news and non-natural desires. What I think matters is that you set an example.

People will come. Charismatic personalities, self-assured people always attract friends.

I'm honestly hoping that this answer helped you at least a bit. And yes, I fear that it isn't the best answer or the one you've hoped for, but this exact question has also annoyed me for some time now, and this way is the best one I see out of this whole situation. It obviously isn't ideal, nor easy- but I don't really see another way out. If you know of one, let us know- I think the whole forum will benefit from it 😊

Post by “Cassius” of January 18, 2022 at 4:34 PM

Just a couple of notes:

[Quote from smoothiekiwi](#)

but a community isn't necessary to see the truth Epicurus had been preaching

It is not necessary, certainly, but it surely is desirable, and there's no reason not to work toward it.

[Quote from smoothiekiwi](#)

Ataraxia, the independence from external events, is actually an extremely important concept in the philosophy, at least according to Hiram (looking at "Tending the Epicurean Garden"!)

Certainly ataraxia - which I would prefer to simply go ahead and translate as "absence of disturbance" is an important concept, just as is absence of pain. It is interesting that you are

linking it to "independence from external events" more than the literal absence of disturbance. This is indeed where I would argue that many modern commentators (no need to refer specifically to Hiram) go off the beam and forget that Epicurus had clearly laid down that it is not "absence of disturbance" but pleasure that is the goal of life. We don't need to go into that whole argument here now, but I do think by linking it here you are perhaps giving an example of what I worry about most - which is that tranquility has replaced pleasure as the focus of some in the Epicurean community. Please again let me restate I am not criticising you, SK, but making the observation that in life we have some major options, and whether we pursue pleasure aggressively during the time we have, or whether we accept "tranquility," is a huge question. And yes I state it in terms of "accepting" tranquility because I would argue that it is a major error to think that Epicurus held tranquility or tranquility to be higher than pleasure.

But I am glad you wrote that because again it focuses the issue: Yes we can choose to be "tranquil" as we accept our existing situations (which rings of Stoicism even as I write it). Or we can choose to use the insights of Epicurean philosophy to focus with intensity on pleasure as the goal, the shortness of life as a spur, and the eternity of nothing after death as good reason to "make hay while the sun shines."

You're right in all of your considerations about how a large community is not necessary, and how we can live happily regardless of those circumstances which we can't change. But we CAN change some of our our circumstances - we can certainly work to make more Epicurean friends - and if we don't do that in the name of the "Tranquility" which some commentators urge --- then that would be a great tragedy.

[Quote from smoothiekiwi](#)

No one will simply look at Epicureanism nowadays and think: "Wait, that makes sense!" People are wayyy too absorbed in politics and news and non-natural desires. What I think matters is that you set an example.

People will come. Charismatic personalities, self-assured people always attract friends.

You are absolutely right. The philosophy has been there for thousands of years, it's largely (from the Epicurean point of view) common sense, and yet not very many have chosen to follow it in the open. It's going to take a new generation of opinion leaders coming after us to really kick things into gear. But we can make a start now, and I think we can make significant progress.

Post by "SimonC" of January 18, 2022 at 4:40 PM

I think the religious drive you describe is extremely common, the plethora of self-help / "become a stoic in 30 days" books is a testament to this.

How do you talk to people about Epicureanism? It's tricky.

You can't lead with hedonism or "live like a god" because of the suspicion pleasure is viewed with.

If you lead with the atomism or perception as basis of knowledge you will get agreement at least from the science types but it might be difficult to move on because they are still carrying unexamined Platonistic ideas and don't see the contradiction. "I agree the world is material but I want to believe in an afterlife".

For now I try not to teach my kids any nonsense. Perhaps one day Epicureanism will come back in a big way - maybe on the tail of some new neuroscience finding - but idealism is so very very deeply ingrained in our whole culture and institutions.

Post by “Cassius” of January 18, 2022 at 7:12 PM

[Quote from SimonC](#)

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[Quote from SimonC](#)

Perhaps one day Epicureanism will come back in a big way - maybe on the tail of some new neuroscience finding - but idealism is so very very deeply ingrained in our whole culture and institutions.

I agree with everything you wrote.

At the same time, we have the direct statement that almost amounts to a command, in the sense that it is clear that any prudent Epicurean is going to follow it:

[PD27. Of all the things which wisdom acquires to produce the blessedness of the complete life, far the greatest is the possession of friendship.](#)

So at the same time we face these hurdles that KW and SC have stated, we have to take action in our own lives to accomplish finding friends as best we can. And the best friends are generally

going to be those who share some significant part of our worldview.

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 18, 2022 at 7:43 PM

Thank you everyone, and especially [Cassius](#), for your helpful comments.

I don't think I would be enjoying my study of Epicureanism without everyone's help here on this forum. So this is an example of how community is helpful.

I think that atheists would probably be the most receptive people to talk to about Epicureanism, because there are so many similarities. In the atheist meetup that I went to pre-covid, I can't think of even one of the attendees who would actually believe in an afterlife. As for unexamined Platonic ideas (perhaps the "left-over" remains of a Christian upbringing) I can imagine if that was an issue, they would be very open to examining that. The main difficulty would be to convey: "pleasure as the highest good".

I would say tranquility is in the service of pleasure, so tranquility is under the umbrella of pleasure. So that also means that for those who really enjoy tranquility, then we must see that they desire it for the sake of pleasure. But those who enjoy tranquility, shouldn't make judgements against those modern Epicureans who enjoy motion, movement, sensations, and the liveliness of an "extroverted" lifestyle.

And of course, even friendship is in the service of pleasure.

Post by “Cassius” of January 18, 2022 at 7:54 PM

In the context of targeting atheists or any other group I would say this: I am not aware of anyone who can fill the "charismatic" shoes that SK referenced earlier, but part of what we are missing is a coherent message packaged in an attractive form (the honey on the rim) that can serve as the centerpiece of discussion for any group that comes together in an initial meeting.

Whenever a group of strangers comes together on ambiguous terms, something has to be done to immediately "take charge" of the conversation so that it isn't taken over by those with another agenda. That means being clear in our agenda, and presenting it in an attractive and non-threatening but firm way so that it is clear what those who might consider returning would expect in the future.

So for example while a group of atheists might come together on the basis of knowing that rejection of supernatural religion is part of the program, the rest of the program needs to be immediately up front in outline form so that those who happen to be atheists but who are otherwise categorically and constitutionally adverse to Epicurus (such as crotchety old men, nihilists, and the list could go on and on) could immediately be discouraged from trying to take over the meeting or discourage those who are sincerely open-minded.

I remember as I have mentioned before that Elayne was the last who tried a meetup group format, and she tried to use "Tending the Epicurean Garden" as a text. I think she concluded that was a huge mistake and just played into taking an already eclectic group and making it even less unified.

It's probably much more appropriate to use something like the DeWitt book, especially the outline form presented in Chapter One, to quickly convey to everyone the general outlines of the direction. But at the same time combine it with more immediate references to pleasure (potentially food, drink, outside activities) to establish that the group isn't focused on being a bunch of disembodied minds.

Post by "Cassius" of January 18, 2022 at 7:57 PM

I see the potential format being something much more like a Rotary Club, which in my mind is a group that meets for a meal, hears a presentation on a topic of common interest, but really serves as more of a meet and greet occasion where people can find each other as potential friends who might be interested in talking to each other and doing things between meetings as well.

Possibly there are other groups that meet regularly that we could productively talk about as examples. There's the obvious example of "churches" but there are all sorts of issues with that model, and I do think that what is doable is more along the lines of a "meetup" group, but more organized and therefore more like a Rotary or Lions or Kiwanis or other more recent examples of those old names that may no longer exist.

Post by "Godfrey" of January 18, 2022 at 9:24 PM

It comes to mind that a good basic "catchphrase", rather than pleasure or atomism, is simply "Physics, Canonic, Ethics".

This emphasizes the complete worldview in a synoptic way. If someone you are trying to introduce to the philosophy then has specific questions, they can be clearly related back to the big picture.

As I recall, the Stoics use "Physics, Logic, Ethics" as their basic structure. And for me that's where Stoicism fell apart: the moderns try to sidestep the physics and its emphasis on logos, the logic was baffling, and therefore the ethics had no grounding. On the contrary, the strength of EP is that it holds together as a complete worldview and it seems most effective to present it in this way.

Post by “Cassius” of January 18, 2022 at 10:05 PM

I am thinking also that if I were to convene a meeting this weekend at some convention, I would have one of those large standup posters made with the quote that is currently on the top of the home page as a verbal summary of how things all fit together and what to expect in the discussion over time.

Quote

Moreover, unless the constitution of the world is thoroughly understood, we shall by no means be able to justify the verdicts of our senses. Further, our mental perceptions all arise from our sensations; and if these are all to be true, as the system of Epicurus proves to us, *then only* will cognition and perception become possible. ... [W]hen cognition and knowledge have been invalidated, every principle concerning the conduct of life and the performance of its business becomes invalidated. So from natural science we borrow courage to withstand the fear of death, and firmness to face superstitious dread, and tranquillity of mind, through the removal of ignorance concerning the mysteries of the world, and self-control, arising from the elucidation of the nature of the passions and their different classes...

Post by “smoothiekiwi” of January 19, 2022 at 10:08 AM

I'm a little late here, but gonna jump right into the party 😊

[Quote from Cassius](#)

But I am glad you wrote that because again it focuses the issue: Yes we can choose to be "tranquil" as we accept our existing situations (which rings of Stoicism even as I write it). Or we can choose to use the insights of Epicurean philosophy to focus with intensity on pleasure as the goal, the shortness of life as a spur, and the eternity of nothing after death as good reason to "make hay while the sun shines."

Yep, absolutely agree. I think that Epicurus would most certainly agree that tranquility is a major factor in the pursuit of pleasure- but if I want complete tranquility, I would simply kill myself. When I interact with people, there's a disturbance- different opinions and worldviews collide and influence one another. When I go out into the nature, there isn't any tranquility- nature is extremely dynamic and always changing. To sum it up: if you want to find tranquility, then you go into an isolation cell in a prison. But that won't be a life worth living. Thus, we need some sort of impulses or disturbances in order to have pleasure. Nowadays, I think that we have too many disturbances- but that doesn't mean that total tranquility is really better than our current state.

[Quote from SimonC](#)

For now I try not to teach my kids any nonsense. Perhaps one day Epicureanism will come back in a big way - maybe on the tail of some new neuroscience finding - but idealism is so very very deeply ingrained in our whole culture and institutions.

Well yes, but I as a kid always understood when my parents said to me "well, work now hard and be happy later". I think that as soon as your children develop the concept of "sometimes its necessary to sacrifice the now in order to be happy later on", then you can teach them to listen to themselves and to what their nature says them. Because thats in essence what Epicureanism is- to listen to your body and your mind, and detecting pleasure and pain 😊

By the way, regarding idealism. I've caught myself admiring students who e.g. work on school stuff during their lunch time. Although I've many opposite arguments why my way of spending time is far better- I talk with people and have pleasure, I don't need to study during my free time in order to get good grades, I simply study during another time than them, etc.-, I still doubt if it'd better to pursue "fulfilling your potential" in an Aristotelian manner. Yet I also recognize that I'm far too young to judge it, because I simply can't see the implication of studying during your lunch time in the long run. What do you think on that?

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

The main difficulty would be to convey: "pleasure as the highest good".

Respectfully disagree! As soon as you truly convince someone that there isn't any Platonic ideal out there, the step to recognize pleasure as the only goal is extremely simple: that's the only thing we can rely on. The Platonic ideals are far more difficult, as far as I can judge.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

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Well, but the theory that "the world only consists of atoms and void" is false (waves), that the "universe is infinite" (it only expands really fast, but it has a border), that the multitude of atoms is infinite (we've only a few types of quarks and bosons), etc..... so I wouldn't call EP coherent by today's standards. Sadly.

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Sounds great!

Post by "Cassius" of January 19, 2022 at 11:52 AM

[Quote from smoothiekiwi](#)

By the way, regarding idealism. I've caught myself admiring students who e.g. work on school stuff during their lunch time. Although I've many opposite arguments why my way of spending time is far better- I talk with people and have pleasure, I don't need to study during my free time in order to get good grades, I simply study during another time than them, etc.-, I still doubt if it'd better to pursue "fulfilling your potential" in an

Aristotelian manner. Yet I also recognize that I'm far too young to judge it, because I simply can't see the implication of studying during your lunch time in the long run. What do you think on that?

Only one I have time to comment on now is this one: As usual with Aristotle I think he's sounding grand without being suspicious. What IS your potential? Just like "what IS happiness?" Aristotle evades giving an answer to those questions, or simply hints that you should follow virtue or what noble Athenians do. I think Epicurus might say that your "potential" is not being the best student you can be, but living a happy life based on what is pleasurable to you. Now study might in fact be pleasurable, in the way that Epicurus said he liked to pursue the study of nature. But if you're studying just to get the highest grades, or out of some duty or abstract goal that you can't really even identify, that seems very shortsighted to me.

Post by “smoothiekiwi” of January 19, 2022 at 11:53 AM

I absolutely agree, and to be honest I thought the same things. But I've also noticed an interesting pattern- when talking with other people, I manage to fabricate some pretty wise concepts, but fail to utilize them myself. Very strange 😊

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 19, 2022 at 1:00 PM

[Quote from smoothiekiwi](#)

When I interact with people, there's a disturbance- different opinions and worldviews collide and influence one another.

You wrote this in reference to tranquility. So just the act of conversing with people can bring the opposite of tranquility. And I think it depends on the situation, and we have choices that we can make to either move toward something (move toward what feels good) or to move away from something (move away from what feels painful).

When I went to visit my parents last year. One of my sisters was also visiting my parent's house at the same time. She sometimes has a very nervous high-strung way of speaking, and views events and the world as negative, focusing on problems. I was feeling tremendous emotional

distress, and the opposite of tranquil. After she left and I was still at my parents house, things were much quieter and relaxed, but I still felt untranquil. My parents also have some conversational quirks that make things "less than wonderful". So knowing this about my family, I don't expect anything different, and I visit once a year out of my own need to maintain the family bond...out of my own added material "security" (since there isn't very much emotional "security")...it gives me an added feeling of security in my life, but that requires that I also give a certain amount of attention and consideration to my parents, even though I am not "friends" with my parents. (As for my sister, we talk on the phone at a minimum, and I do so out of compassion). So we don't choose our family, but with friends we can make choices, and we can choose to surround ourselves with people who are happy and supportive, and don't cause us emotional distress.

So with friends...as the highest aim is pleasure...we can ask this of every social situation: "How can I make this more pleasureable?" Then let your mind open up to creative ideas for making things feel good. That will include making a request... to invite the other person (or persons) to join in your new idea. That could be as simple as "I apologize, but could we change the topic to something more easy-going? Like, let's talk about where we want to go to get lunch (or x,y,z, etc...to put the focus on enjoyment of life).

The hard part is when you have a friend that has a very strong worldview in support of the supernatural or some other very different worldview, and then you might choose to no longer meet up with that person.

So finding friends who have a common worldview will create more joy and ease.

Post by "Godfrey" of January 19, 2022 at 1:06 PM

[Quote from smoothiekiwi](#)

Well, but the theory that "the world only consists of atoms and void" is false (waves), that the "universe is infinite" (it only expands really fast, but it has a border), that the multitude of atoms is infinite (we've only a few types of quarks and bosons), etc..... so I wouldn't call EP coherent by today's standards. Sadly

Ancient atomic theory is the basis for modern physics. The fact that the theory has evolved over 2300 years doesn't, for me, discredit the original theory, particularly since the original theory was conceived without the benefit of modern technology.

I'm not aware of the universe having a border, only that there is a limit to what we can perceive due to the speed of light. But maybe [Martin](#) has more to add to that.

According to Epicurus the multitude of atoms is infinite but the types of atoms are uncountable but not unlimited. So I assume what you're referring to is the "uncountable" types of atoms, not the overall quantity of atoms.

Atomic theory, to my understanding, is validated as the ancient theory of physics that is most in line with our current understanding of the universe.

The book *God and the Atom* by Victor Stenger provides a history of the the development of atomic theory from Democritus to fairly recently. There are many others, this one in particular is not Epicurean but favorable to Epicurean theory.

Post by “smoothiekiwi” of January 19, 2022 at 1:14 PM

Well, thanks! I absolutely agree that it's the theory which makes the most sense nowadays, yet it still isn't without its flaws. Maybe I'll make a post at the "physics" thread, or else this thread will move away from the original question completely 😊

Post by “Don” of January 19, 2022 at 3:44 PM

[Quote from smoothiekiwi](#)

if I want complete tranquility, I would simply kill myself

That's not tranquility; that's non-existence. Be very careful about throwing around casual statements like this. That is also, if I remember, a Cyrenaic argument against Epicureanism.

[Quote from smoothiekiwi](#)

if you want to find tranquility, then you go into an isolation cell in a prison

I also have to take issue with this one as well.

Epicurus specifically took a stand against the Cyrenaics that what they called the neutral place between pleasure and pain, that tranquil balance was a pleasure. This section from Eusebius that I recently found gives a good summary:

Quote

For he said that there are three states affecting our temperament: one, in which we feel pain, like a storm at sea; another, in which we feel pleasure, that may be likened to a gentle undulation, for pleasure is a gentle movement, comparable to a favourable breeze; and the third is an intermediate state, in which we feel neither pain nor pleasure, which is similar to a calm.

That was the Cyrenaic position. Epicurus said, no, the calm we feel is pleasure, too.

[Eusebius of Caesarea: Praeparatio Evangelica \(Preparation for the Gospel\). Tr. E.H. Gifford \(1903\) -- Book 14](#)

Post by “Cassius” of January 19, 2022 at 4:37 PM

Don makes good points about being precise, but I often fall into stating it the way you do SK. So this is one of the good things about the forum - we can learn to be precise while deciding exactly the point we want to make, because I think Don is very much with us that a life of total contemplation might or might not be hypothetically the one some of us would choose, but as with the Bliss machine hypotheticals, is not practical for most any of us.

There is an Epicurean saying about taking risks for friendships that has come to mind several times recently, but for which I have not located the cite. However I am confident it's there and I think it supports the position all of us are ultimately saying, that since we aren't [Epicurean gods](#) we are going to need to sometimes choose pain in order to experience much of the pleasure that is possible for us before we die.

Post by “Don” of January 20, 2022 at 7:57 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Don is very much with us that a life of total contemplation might or might not be hypothetically the one some of us would choose, but as with the Bliss machine hypotheticals, is not practical for most any of us.

I'm with you, but... 😊

A life of "total contemplation" sounds Aristotelian in his promotion of wisdom and "philosophy" as the highest good. That's not what Epicurus was advocating. Epicurus was not a navel-gazer nor did he advocate removal from all distractions in a cave (to use [Cassius](#) 's favorite metaphor).

That being said, Epicurus's insistence that we strive for the "health of the body and tranquility of the mind" has led me to understand he was including a calm mind in his definition of what it means to lead a pleasurable life. In looking at various sources, ancient and modern, I think Epicurus was specifically including that "intermediate state," described by the Cyrenaics, "in which we feel neither pain nor pleasure, which is similar to a calm" as a pleasure and that it is, in fact, that state which is the natural, biological homeostasis in the body.

Approaching life with a calm, tranquil mind makes us much better equipped to make choices and rejections for what will lead to a pleasurable life. A calm and tranquil mind is a base of operations from which to encounter the "slings and arrows" of our daily existence. It's not living numb in the world. It's like a lens through which to clearly encounter and evaluate what needs to be done. If our minds are disturbed, troubled, turbulent, it's like driving through our lives with a dirty windshield in a snowstorm. There is nothing wrong or improper about trying to have a tranquil mind. I think it can allow us to experience life more fully, more pleurably. That's my summary take on this tranquility discussion.

Post by "Martin" of January 20, 2022 at 8:00 AM

[Quote from smoothiekiwi](#)

Well, but the theory that "the world only consists of atoms and void" is false (waves), that the "universe is infinite" (it only expands really fast, but it has a border), that the multitude of atoms is infinite (we've only a few types of quarks and bosons), etc..... so I wouldn't call EP coherent by today's standards. Sadly.

I am not sad 😊 :

Some of Epicurus' statements on physics do not match reality as we model it today and are therefore obsolete. It is part of the history of science that older theories get replaced by better ones. That does not take anything away from the merit of the obsolete theories.

Moreover, EP is still coherent in itself despite that some of its statements on physics are obsolete. None of the conclusions derived for the philosophy depend on the obsolete parts.

Another perspective to look at it is to not take the statements literally to have to match modern science but just to describe the analogies between them and modern science.

Or we can consider them as analogous to those unrealistic idealizations which we use today sometimes as physical models because they combine mathematical simplicity with sufficient accuracy. E.g., the universe is much larger than a human can travel in his lifetime. Therefore, it is a good approximation to call the universe infinite in size.

Waves are complementary to particles and are therefore rather a refinement than something that exists completely without particles. Taking this into account and by assigning physical properties to the void, there are still just particles and void from a very basic perspective.

As of now, we have no experimental base to claim for sure that the universe is not infinite. We have a horizon beyond which we cannot see but that horizon expands with the speed of light. The furthest away parts of the universe which are now still within the horizon seem to move beyond it to be never seen again because of the apparent expansion of space.

Post by "Cassius" of January 20, 2022 at 8:32 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

has led me to understand he was including a calm mind in his definition of what it means to lead a pleasureable life.

Yes, and the key word there is "including" -- which is different from what some modern commentators seem to allege when they convert Epicurean philosophy into "Tranquilism" - with calmness as the highest good of life.

Also, I should clarify that when I seemed to admit the possibility that someone might choose a life of contemplation as their highest good, I was trying only to make the theoretical point that there's no absolute single definition of how to experience pleasure as the highest good, so i suppose someone "might" want to devote themselves to a life of contemplation, if that somehow floats their boat. The bigger difficulty would be to succeed in sustaining that. i doubt that either of these would be very common, and they probably are not even possible to sustain

for very long.

Post by “smoothiekiwi” of January 20, 2022 at 8:49 AM

[Don](#) , I agree with your statements, but can't really „feel“ through them. Will take a little more time and think about that 😊

[Martin](#) , I also agree with your statement that the Ethics still remain valid, but I still have the feeling that Epicurus had a few inconsistencies in his physics. His idea, that the Sun is as big as it seems (—> DeWitt), is very naive, even in the ancient world. As I've said, that doesn't mean that the Ethics are worthless, only that the Physics seems to be not refined by today's standards, at least as far as I can judge.

Post by “Don” of January 20, 2022 at 9:01 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Yes, and the key word there is "including"

No question.

Even at its most basic wording, we need *both* "the health of the body *and* the tranquility of the mind" for our well-being. That's why Epicurus's definition of pleasure in the letter to Menoikeus does not include an "endless string of drinking parties." That would be detrimental to the health of the body at the very least.

Post by “Cassius” of January 20, 2022 at 9:49 AM

[Quote from smoothiekiwi](#)

His idea, that the Sun is as big as it seems (—> DeWitt), is very naive, even in the ancient world

He was clearly wrong, but I don't think that "naive" is warranted. He had very specific epistemological reasons for his view point based on observing objects at a distance here on earth, and he was also concerned about the use of mathematics to allege that the sun and other stars are gods. Exploring that further belongs in another thread, but I wanted to make a note on this.

Also, as to Martin's post above, which I agree with, I think the big picture point on all of this is that Epicurus was using his physics as a foundation for his epistemology, such as is stated in the quote that's currently at the top of the website home page:

Quote

Moreover, unless the constitution of the world is thoroughly understood, we shall by no means be able to justify the verdicts of our senses. Further, our mental perceptions all arise from our sensations; and if these are all to be true, as the system of Epicurus proves to us, *then only* will cognition and perception become possible. ... [W]hen cognition and knowledge have been invalidated, every principle concerning the conduct of life and the performance of its business becomes invalidated. So from natural science we borrow courage to withstand the fear of death, and firmness to face superstitious dread, and tranquillity of mind, through the removal of ignorance concerning the mysteries of the world, and self-control, arising from the elucidation of the nature of the passions and their different classes....

And we can see that reflected in Diogenes Laertius:

Quote

We must begin with the first letter, but I will first speak briefly about the divisions of his philosophy. It is divided into three parts, the Canonicon (or Procedure), the Physics and the Ethics. The Canonicon gives the method of approach to the system, and is contained in the work called The Canon. The Physics contains all the investigation into nature, and is contained in the thirty-seven books On Nature and in an abridged form in the letters. The Ethics deals with choice and avoidance, and is contained in the books On Lives and the letters and the book on The End. The Epicureans usually group the Canonicon with the Physics and state that it deals with the criterion of truth and the fundamental principles and contains the elements of the system.

In the past I don't think I paid sufficient attention to that line, and I think from now on I am going to emphasize it as strongly as I can.

The purpose of the study of physics is to be able to grasp the way the universe works well enough to understand how to make sense of anything. Unless you have a basic framework that establishes that knowledge is possible, you can't make any progress on anything else.

Epicurean physics isn't perfect from our point of view today, but it provided a basis for being able to have confidence in things right in front of us - things that are essential to happy living. I don't think anything in modern physics has come close to an effective challenge to that basic point of view, which is probably summarized in this statement of Diogenes of Oinoanda. He gets taken to task for attributing the wrong view to Aristotle rather than to others, but I am not going to be quick to just as wrong someone who presumably had access to much more of Aristotle's materials than we do. The point is to argue against those "who hold the same view... that nothing is scientifically knowable...."

Quote

Now Aristotle and those who hold the same Peripatetic views as Aristotle say that nothing is scientifically knowable, because things are continually in flux and, on account of the rapidity of the flux, evade our apprehension. We on the other hand acknowledge their flux, but not its being so rapid that the nature of each thing [is] at no time apprehensible by sense-perception. And indeed [in no way would the upholders of] the view under discussion have been able to say (and this is just what they do [maintain] that [at one time] this is [white] and this black, while [at another time] neither this is [white nor] that black, [if] they had not had [previous] knowledge of the nature of both white and black.

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 20, 2022 at 12:18 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

Approaching life with a calm, tranquil mind makes us much better equipped to make choices and rejections for what will lead to a pleasurable life. A calm and tranquil mind is a base of operations from which to encounter the "slings and arrows" of our daily existence. It's not living numb in the world. It's like a lens through which to clearly encounter and evaluate what needs to be done. If our minds are disturbed, troubled, turbulent, it's like driving through our lives with a dirty windshield in a snowstorm.

There is nothing wrong or improper about trying to have a tranquil mind. I think it can allow us to experience life more fully, more pleurably. That's my summary take on this tranquility discussion.

Thank you Don, this is very important in my opinion. I think that what causes a problem is the meaning of the words "tranquil" and "tranquility" because these imply that when one is tranquil, there is nothing going on in the mind. It might be better to say a "smooth and clear running mind"...so maybe the word "equanimity"...not out of some kind of forced stoic ideal...but because of thoroughly understanding the materiality of the world (and thus not fearing death) and utilizing the guidance of prudence toward the Epicurean aim of enjoyment and pleasure.

[Quote from Don](#)

Epicurus specifically took a stand against the Cyrenaics that what they called the neutral place between pleasure and pain, that tranquil balance was a pleasure.

So in renaming the "neutral" as being a pleasureable tranquility...I would agree, but caution against putting too much on this, as this mind state only naturally occurs in very short intervals. Only if engaging in intentional meditation discipline can one extend this state of "neutral tranquility". But there are so many other things to do with one's mind, and instead of aiming for "neutral tranquility" as a remedy to stress, I would say pleasure is a much better way to deal with stress...so using healthy (and prudent) pleasures as medicine for stress...such as going for a walk or taking a relaxing bath. There is also a simple practice of "enjoying your breath" (mindful breathing) and when practiced correctly it is not a "neutral tranquility" but actually a blissful feeling moves inside the body as one attends to all the pleasureable sensations of breathing.

Post

[RE: Meditation and Epicurean Philosophy \(?\)](#)

I'll go ahead and do a description of a simple breath awareness meditation.

You begin as you say to yourself: "Breathing in, I know I am breathing in. Breathing out, I know I am breathing out." This can be your starting thoughts, then you can drop this and move to watching the sensations as they arise in the body...

Focus your awareness on air moving in through the nose (with mouth closed). Notice the feeling of the air as it flows inside the nostrils. Notice the feeling as your chest expands and...



Kalosyni

January 10, 2022 at 12:23 AM

Post by “Joshua” of January 20, 2022 at 12:45 PM

Quote

His idea, that the Sun is as big as it seems (—> DeWitt), is very naive...

Quote

...even in the ancient world.

I might agree with the first part, but not as much with the second.

It's important to consider the whole proposition. Epicurus thought that the sun was;

1. Wholly material
2. In constant but not uniform motion
3. In a centerless cosmos
4. Governed by the same laws as things on Earth
5. Arose out of matter, and has a finite period of existence
- 5a. But its matter will recombine into other things
6. About as big as it seems.

Compare Aristotle's sun;

1. Made of aether, an element that didn't exist on earth
2. In constant and uniform motion (because aetherial)
- 2a. Set in motion by unmoved mover (god)
3. Orbiting a stationary earth that was the center of everything
4. Governed by different laws than Earth (the laws of the aether)
5. Exists in perpetuity (because aetherial)

6. Size uncertain (not mentioned, as far as I can tell)

In view of the above, I think Epicurus came out alright.

Post by “Cassius” of January 20, 2022 at 2:23 PM

That's a great list and we need to refer to it every time the size of the sun issue comes up. I added it into the FAQ.

Post by “Don” of January 20, 2022 at 3:17 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

in renaming the "neutral" as being a pleasureable tranquility...I would agree, but caution against putting too much on this, as this mind state only naturally occurs in very short intervals.

Thanks for the response. I would add here that it was the Cyrenaics and others that called it neutral, not Epicurus. Epicurus's position was that there are only two feelings, pleasure and pain. Therefore, you can't say you're "neutral." That "calm, tranquil" feeling - what The Eagles called "a peaceful, easy feeling" - is pleasure.

I'm also not talking about the tranquility found in meditation. I think he's referring to the state of the body and mind working correctly. I would include this calm tranquility in taking a walk or a relaxing bath. That relaxation is what I'd describe as calm and tranquil.

Post by “Don” of January 20, 2022 at 7:30 PM

First, I feel bad that we've strayed from [Kalosyni](#) 's original purpose for this thread, but that seems to happen one this freewheeling forum 😊

I've also been letting the topic of this "there is no neutral position between pleasure and pain" roll around in my mind today. I originally, as I stated above, saw the "peaceful easy feeling" of taking a walk, lying in a hammock, taking a warm bath as the position identified by the Cyrenaics as the "neutral" position that Epicurus identified as pleasure. But I'm rethinking that now.

Those activities (walk/hammock/bath) are actively pleasurable. If I do those, I feel pleasure - a calm, peaceful, everything is right with the world, satisfying "aaaaaahhh" feeling that's easily identified as pleasure. Even the calm of meditation is a real, positive feeling.

The Cyrenaics' neutral position, I'm thinking now, is more the "I'm going about my daily routine not paying attention to whether I feel pleasure or pain... I'm not 'consciously' or 'actively' experiencing pleasure or pain right now." But Epicurus posited that you have to be feeling either pleasure or pain. So, I was sitting at work today working on tasks when this question hit me: "Am I feeling pleasure or pain right now?" Honestly, it was a difficult question to answer. I came down on the side that, if I was being honest with myself, I was mostly experiencing pleasure with a couple twinges of pain in my body and a couple minor turbulences in my mind.

Maybe that's what Epicurus is calling us to do by eliminating a "neutral" position. *Really* understand your body and your mind. The feelings are two. How are you really feeling, right now. Do you have a healthy body? Is your mind untroubled? If the answer to either of those is "no," your life is not as pleasurable as it has the potential to be. What needs to change? What choices and rejections do I need to make?

Thoughts?

Post by "Godfrey" of January 20, 2022 at 8:17 PM

I agree completely [Don](#) .

Having said that though, I can't say if that's what Epicurus meant or if he was focused on a philosophical argument. However in practical day to day terms I think your conclusion is spot on.

BTW I always enjoy an Eagles reference 😊

Post by "Don" of January 20, 2022 at 10:17 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Having said that though, I can't say if that's what Epicurus meant or if he was focused on a philosophical argument. However in practical day to day terms I think your conclusion is spot on

Thanks, [Godfrey](#) . In answer to your question, I think it could be both. It was definitely a response to the Cyrenaics (and possibly other schools); but it could have had practical application as well in light of:

Quote

For just as medicine is useless if it does not remove sickness from the body, so philosophy is useless if it does not remove suffering from the soul.

Post by “Cassius” of January 21, 2022 at 6:40 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

BTW I always enjoy an Eagles reference 😊

The old guys strike again.

I still remember when that came out, and how much I liked it, and how disappointed I was when the Eagles changed their lineup and their music format.

You're right peaceful easy feeling does need an entry in our music list. But I have to say back then I was probably partial to "Already Gone." 😊

Songs the Kalosyni and most of our people here have probably not heard!

Note:.. My gosh, after relistening to "Already Gone" I am immediately struck by the connection that comes to mind to a particular Vatican Saying! We could use Peaceful Easy Feeling as a background to any reference for Tranquility, but as a quiz, what Vatican Saying needs a particular type of song that fits Already Gone?

Post by “Don” of January 21, 2022 at 8:42 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Note:. My gosh, after relistening to "Already Gone" I am immediately struck by the connection that comes to mind to a particular Vatican Saying! We could use Peaceful Easy Feeling as a background to any reference for Tranquility, but as a quiz, what Vatican Saying needs a particular type of song that fits Already Gone?

LOL! I'm assuming "I will sing a victory song!" came into play in your connection? 😊

What about "Take it to the limit" for one of the PDs?

Post by “Scott” of January 21, 2022 at 9:04 AM

47?

Post by “Cassius” of January 21, 2022 at 9:17 AM

Of Course!

VS47. I have anticipated thee, Fortune, and I have closed off every one of your devious entrances. And we will not give ourselves up as captives, to thee or to any other circumstance; but when it is time for us to go, spitting contempt on life and on those who cling to it maundering, we will leave from life singing aloud a glorious triumph-song on how nicely we lived.

Sort of what you would say to the grim reaper when he comes looking for you:

But me, I'm already gone

And I'm feelin' strong

I will sing this vict'ry song

'Cause I'm already gone

Yes, I'm already gone
And I'm feelin' strong
I will sing this vict'ry song
'Cause I'm already gone
Yes, I'm already gone
Already gone

Post by “Scott” of January 21, 2022 at 10:07 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Of Course!

Awesome! How do I collect my prize?

.
. .
. .
. .

...oh wait. I got PLEASURE from that! [|||||]

Post by “Don” of January 21, 2022 at 11:31 AM

[Quote from Scott](#)

47?

Is that a *Philadelphia* Eagles reference? (I had to Google it)

Post by “Scott” of January 21, 2022 at 3:05 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

Is that a *Philadelphia* Eagles reference?

Actually, Don, no. I'm afraid I know nothing about that sports team (or any sports team, basically). I was just giving the VS# that I thought related to the Eagles song - where Cassius was asking:

[Quote from Cassius](#)

what Vatican Saying needs a particular type of song that fits Already Gone?

Post by “Don” of January 21, 2022 at 3:35 PM

LOLOL 😊 Okay, *that* makes sense!

This is what I had found: <https://www.nflshop.com/philadelphia-eagles/47/t-3444+br-479>

And I see '47 is the brand!

That's what I get for being sports illiterate 😊

Post by “Titus” of January 22, 2022 at 7:31 AM

Quote from Cassius

The Epicureans usually group the Canonicon with the Physics and state that it deals with the criterion of truth and the fundamental principles and contains the elements of the system.

I've just finished a reading, written by a guy called Cassius who deals with this subject at length

[The Tripod of Truth: An Introduction to the Book That Fell From The Heavens](#)

Post by “Cassius” of January 22, 2022 at 7:53 AM

[Quote from Titus](#)

I've just finished a reading, written by a guy called Cassius who deals with this subject at length

I shudder to check some of my old writing sometime. Hopefully it's still useful, but I continue to learn a lot every day.

Post by “Titus” of January 22, 2022 at 8:11 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I shudder to check some of my old writing sometime. Hopefully it's still useful, but I continue to learn a lot every day.

In my opinion this volume is still a great introduction to the Canon. It's especially important because many works don't put enough emphasis on the foundations of the philosophy and limit themselves to repeating Epicurus' sayings and focusing on ethics.