

Promising New Book ("Living For Pleasure") and Great New Article ("Are The Modern Stoics Really Epicurean?") Both By Emily Austin

Post by "Cassius" of November 14, 2022 at 7:00 AM

EDIT: The following article popped up in a google search for me, and so I initially posted this thread about "Are the Modern Stoics Really Epicurean?" However that article quickly led to the new book "Living for Pleasure" by the same author (Emily Austin) so this thread is now covering both the article and the book.

Great Article! <http://hnn.us/article/184389>

hnn.us
Are the Modern Stoics Really Epicureans?
Home of Home
1921 Philosophy, classics, Section: Epicureanism, Epicurus

by Emily A. Austin

Emily A. Austin is Professor of Philosophy at Middle Forest University, where she specializes in Ancient Greek Philosophy. She is the author of *Living for Pleasure: an Epicurean Guide to Life*, recently published by Oxford University Press.



Quote

Modern Stoicism has saturated the philosophical market—seminars, apps, podcasts, retreats, bestseller lists, psychotherapy. As a specialist in ancient Greek philosophy, I admit that I'm pleased to see so many people take an interest in what I study for a living. Stoicism has a lot going for it, and many of my students are powerfully drawn to its core commitments. All that is to say, I can see the allure.

My aim here, though, is to convince readers, especially those committed to evolutionary science and modern physics, to learn more about Epicureanism, Stoicism's oldest and greatest rival. Cards on the table—I prefer Epicureanism, and I have recently published a book on Epicureanism as a way of life. That said, I think even devoted, forever members of the Stoic caucus have good reason to study Epicureanism, if only because taking your rivals seriously is a sign of intellectual virtue, an indication that you have not grown complacent. As a more controversial point, I suspect that many Modern Stoics are already Epicureans, at least by the standards of the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Let me explain.

Let's work to give this one some exposure!

Post by “Cassius” of November 14, 2022 at 7:09 AM

Here's the page for her book at Oxford University Press:
<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/living-for-pleasure-9780197558324?cc=us&lang=en#>



An Epicurean Guide to Life

Emily A. Austin

Guides to the Good Life Series

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Post by “Cassius” of November 14, 2022 at 7:19 AM

Looks like there is a preview sample available here:
<https://nook.barnesandnoble.com/products/97801...n=9780197558348>

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2740-promising-new-book-living-for-pleasure-and-great-new-article-are-the-modern-stoi/>

And the listing at Amazon: https://www.amazon.com/Living-Pleasur...uct_top?ie=UTF8

Post by “Don” of November 14, 2022 at 7:25 AM

Yes! I encourage everyone to read the article. I've hit its Up vote button!

I'm also going to check out her book, just published Nov 1.

Good find, [Cassius](#) !

Post by “Eikadistes” of November 14, 2022 at 7:46 AM

Incidentally, it was this article from which I found the "be like Epicurus" quote by Marcus Aurelius.

Post by “Cassius” of November 14, 2022 at 7:52 AM

Nate have you checked out the book?

Post by “Cassius” of November 14, 2022 at 8:38 AM

I don't know how quickly I can read and absorb the full book but hopping around I am *very* encouraged with what I see:

Quote

As for living like an Epicurean, I have a few suggestions, some drawn directly from Epicurean texts, others extrapolated from ancient texts for modern purposes.

This one might sound a bit obvious, of course, but the first thing to do is to **read Epicurus**. Though his writing is terse, what remains of his work is not voluminous. Trying to read Epicurus, at least most Epicurus, is not like trying to read Kant or Hegel. The Hellenistic Philosophers, especially the Roman ones, wrote to be read. Epicurus intended the *Letter to Menoecus*, [Principal Doctrines](#), and *Vatican Sayings* to be clear and easy to consult. If Epicurus' prose disappoints, then choose Lucretius, who tries as best he can to faithfully reflect Epicurus' views, but with charm, meter, and a wit finely attuned to human foibles. Lucretius claimed that his poetry was like putting honey on the cup of a glass of medicinal wormwood to make swallowing it easier. Think of Epicurus as a whiskey neat, and Lucretius as a tasty cocktail. People tend to prefer one over the other, but they both serve their purpose.

Some critics of Epicurus thought he encouraged Epicureans to unreflectively memorize and recite his writings without concern for comprehension. Among the many uncharitable objections to Epicureanism, I consider that accusation the most unfair. Reading, even memorizing, Epicurus is insufficient. You need to take the philosophy apart and see how it works, develop a fuller understanding, reflect on how it applies to living, especially in the context of your own life. Thankfully, you can plow through Epicurus multiple times without losing a single month of your life—try that with Kant!

Less obvious is the Epicurean advice to **write some Epicurus** of your own. In his *On Gratitude*, Philodemus recommends that we write our own texts.²

Remember that Epicureans think we all have individual natural dispositions and that our life histories and circumstances make us who we are. Some of us struggle more with pride, others with self-effacement. Some with greed, some with parsimonious asceticism. Some with a desire for honor, some with a disdainful indifference to the approval of good people. Some of us express gratitude for people who harm us, while others of us are prone to ingratitude for those who help.

Post by “Don” of November 14, 2022 at 8:52 AM

I just downloaded the e-book. I'll try and read it and post thoughts. If [Cassius](#) is encouraged, that bodes well. 😊

Post by “Cassius” of November 14, 2022 at 8:53 AM

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2740-promising-new-book-living-for-pleasure-and-great-new-article-are-the-modern-stoi/>

I will move this thread into the "recent books" section and re-title it with the Book title. I now have a copy and while I am just skipping around I can already say that I think this is by far the best recent book I have seen on Epicurus.

Post by "Cassius" of November 14, 2022 at 10:11 AM

I am very pleased to see that she cautions against superficial use of the Tetracharmakon and explains the need to get behind it to its root! I can't imagine that this book isn't going to zoom toward the top ranks of my "recommended for new readers" list. (My underline below)

Quote

Epicurus himself did not condense his practical philosophy into something so brief and chantable as "despair is a vice," but his followers wished he had, so they did it for him. Drawing upon, among other things, a passage from the *Letter to Menoeceus* and a smattering of [Principal Doctrines](#), they produced "The Fourfold Remedy" (the "tetrapharmakos").¹ From Philodemus:

God presents no fears, death no worries; the good is easy to get, the bad easy to endure.

Imagine that I had opened the book by telling you that Epicurus espoused these four claims, rather than putting them here, at the end. I assume that every reasonable person would likely dismiss one or more claim out of hand. The Classicist Fiona Hill, for example, writes that "the third remedy may provoke a cynical snort in any reader struggling to make ends meet, unless they have no dependents and are temperamentally ascetic."² And in some sense she's clearly right. Taken in isolation, the Fourfold Remedy serves at best as a promissory note for difficult arguments, an IOU for a hefty sum unlikely to be met.

By this point, though, I hope you feel like you have the tools to piece together Epicurus' reasons for supporting all four claims. Not that Epicurus thinks you need such arguments ready at hand as you traverse the rocky path of daily living or that you must feel prepared to triumph in an argumentative battle of skill, but it helps to have confidence that such arguments exist. Let's briefly recap, then, the general outlines of the Epicurean commitments that undergird the Fourfold Remedy, somewhat like the greater part of the iceberg that lies below the surface of the water.

Absolutely phenomenal:

Quote

The Fourfold Remedy is the core of a much larger nexus of Epicureanism's philosophical commitments, the kind of complex nexus that undergirds any philosophy worth considering. We should never let anyone convince us of an overnight magic elixir, that a coin in our pocket with a catchphrase will make life manageable, that a quick fix will engender a fundamental life reorganization. Something like the Fourfold Remedy can only serve as a handy reminder of a deeper system of value and way of living that we fully inhabit and express.

True, you can remember distillations like the Fourfold Remedy in a way that you could never remember this chapter. It would prove fruitless, though, to chant it over and over in isolation of its argumentative context, and perhaps that is why the distillation does not come from Epicurus himself. Distillations are for people who already know the "why," and Epicurus was in the business of providing the "why." At this point, you know the "why," at least in broad outline and within the context of modern life. You have the tools to evaluate the project writ large as a system of value and decide for yourself.

Yet a philosophy is to be lived, not simply evaluated in the cold light of reason, or squabbled over among scholars in a stuffy hotel conference room. Epicurus does not think it is enough to merely chant the words, nor even to understand the arguments he uses to support his claims. We must also internalize and act on them.

Post by "Cassius" of November 14, 2022 at 10:32 AM

I am not going to trivialize this thread so rather than include this comment here, I will post it elsewhere so anyone so inclined can pursue the thought somewhere else ---- but the title of the book does remind me of a song..... 😊 [RE: Epicurean substitute for prayer](#)

Post by "Cassius" of November 14, 2022 at 11:33 AM

I think I want to memorialize this exchange over at [facebook](#) that occurred when I posted a link to the Austin article, to which Holly and then Elli replied, and to which I commented:

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2740-promising-new-book-living-for-pleasure-and-great-new-article-are-the-modern-stoi/>

Cassius Amicus

Ha - look at the comments so far. The article / book author is Emily, the first comment by Holly, the next by Elli. I think also of Catherine Wilson, and it seems to me that in recent years female writers are putting the male proponents of Epicurus to shame. Leontium and Plotina have their modern counterparts it seems and we need to find the modern Lucretians and Diogenes of Oionondeans to keep the score balanced! ☐☐

Elli Pensa

Admin

Cassius Amicus Women will change this world and the future that comes will be more pleasant. That's for sure. It is not by chance that there are many countries in theocracy that men are keeping women subordinated and in silence.

Women have to be the great rebels. And their rebellion has to be like the sea water that hits slowly on the rock. Women must born and nurture the new little epicureans. If this will not happen there is no future for mankind.

Cassius Amicus

I know Edward Gibbon blames the spread of Christianity in the Roman world to a significant extent on women, and there may or may not be some justification in observing that. But it's at least as fair to say that when women finally wake up from being manipulated by religion there will be Hell to pay! ☐☐

Elli Pensa

Cassius Amicus Please tell to mr. Gibbon that it's another thing to spread ideas with passion and specifically that passion that brings pleasure to you and the next people to you, and another thing is to spread ideas under the fear to NOT have kicks and punches from your master that was that patriarch figure of father, brother and husband inside your home. Those figures that were following the instructions by the greatest double spy of all the spies with the name Apostle Saul-Paul. For this reason, I said to my comment for a rebellion that comes by women. Yes, women have to prepare their Hell to pay all the lies and so much PAIN which they have spread around for many centuries! And of course, to not forget that the material that they found was inside Plato. Plato is the father of illusions, myths, allegories, imagination and the fog that is eaten by the spiritually hungry. Plato still borns theocracy, authorities and tyrants everywhere... and the stoics that were following Plato, and still are following him in our days, are the slaves that support Plato and all the tyrants around. ☐☐

Post by “Cassius” of November 14, 2022 at 11:42 AM

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2740-promising-new-book-living-for-pleasure-and-great-new-article-are-the-modern-stoi/>

I spent the morning looking for and skimming the book without finishing [the article that prompted this thread](#). I have now finished the article. It's outstanding! She drives right to the heart of the difference between Stoicism and Epicureanism (the theism embedded in Stoicism) ***and she embraces the Epicurean side!***

Quote

I have good friends, students, and close relatives who fall on opposing sides of the providential creation divide, and I understand that people have their own reasons for choosing one commitment over the other. Modern Stoics, though, cannot simply set aside the fact that the Stoics fell squarely on the side of providence without risk of undermining some of Stoicism's core tenets. Stoicism's emblematic acceptance of suffering follows from their ability to reconceive it as divine providence, as God working in "mysterious ways." Marcus writes that someone who suffers something "unpalatable" should "nevertheless always receive it gladly" because Zeus designed individual suffering "for the benefit of the whole." Even Stoicism's deep, admirable commitment to caring for all humankind, the notion that we are all "citizens of the cosmos," is fundamentally grounded in the view that all human beings are manifestations of God.

Epicureans, by contrast, build their practical philosophy on a natural science that denies a cosmic significance to suffering, and they see their endorsement of hedonism as an outgrowth of treating humans as sophisticated animals rather than as expressions of a divine rational nature. Epicurus was not an atheist, but he denied a providential God who created the universe or intervenes in its events. Perhaps, then, many Modern Stoics should consider reading more about Epicureanism, since Marcus admired Epicurus' resilience, temperance, and approach to death, which all grew out of a science many Modern Stoics already accept (and that the Stoics vehemently opposed).

Post by "Pacatus" of November 14, 2022 at 12:29 PM

I just got the Kindle edition. It will take me awhile to read it all, I'm sure, with my piecemeal-patchwork, easily redirected brain.

I already like her style, using modern images/memes to relate to the ancients - e.g. Seneca comparing Epicurus to "a drag-queen at a festival." (Probably there were drag queens back

then, but comedy drag shows are certainly in the contemporary culture wars.)

Post by “Charles” of November 14, 2022 at 1:49 PM

It's pretty good so far, very simple and glossing over some finer points, such as putting far too much trust in the Vatican Sayings. Though that is to be expected for a casual introductory book. My biggest issue though, are her chapter(s) concerning politics.

Post by “Cassius” of November 14, 2022 at 2:02 PM

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

I already like her style,

Yes she does write very well!

[Quote from Charles](#)

t's pretty good so far, very simple and glossing over some finer points, such as putting far too much trust in the Vatican Sayings. Though that is to be expected for a casual introductory book. My biggest issue though, is her chapters concerning politics.

Charles it sounds like you have read further than I have, but I picking up hints of a similar vibe. It doesn't strike me as pronounced an issue as with Catherine Wilson, but if I had one wish I would recommend to everyone that they stay as far away from modern political allusions as they possibly can. It works great to cite examples that are rooted deeply in human psychology, as in referring to children, but taking sides on contemporary hot-button political issues probably scores very few points, and at the cost of rubbing some people the wrong way for reasons that have nothing to do with the philosophical reason for her writing the book in the first place. That being said I haven't gotten to "chapters concerning politics" so I will weigh in on that later.

Post by “Cassius” of November 14, 2022 at 2:08 PM

I don't want any hint of negativity to come out at least at this point. I keep coming across passages like this which make me incline to think this is the best book I've read in a long time - she goes right to the heart of many issues:

Quote

Epicurus thinks the key to unlocking our tranquility is a sober evaluation of our desires. Now, you might be thinking that a tidy solution to anxiety would be to adopt a scorched earth approach to desire. If desires produce anxiety, then just stop all that anxiety in its tracks by wanting as little as possible! Some philosophers encourage that kind of austerity, but Epicurus does not. He thinks extreme parsimony is as worrisome as excessive indulgence.¹

Post by “Don” of November 14, 2022 at 2:39 PM

I jumped ahead and read her first politics chapter. I think it's one of the best interpretations of "live unknown" that I've read anywhere. Short on time right now, but wanted to share that.

Post by “Don” of November 14, 2022 at 4:05 PM

And the social media chapter also seems spot on!

Post by “Cassius” of November 14, 2022 at 4:50 PM

For what it is worth I am now on chapter 12. I continue to be impressed that this is a very useful book. The one germinating idea that I am maybe carrying over from Catherine Wilson is that I personally think that it is a bad idea to tie ones own credibility for the philosophic system to high-profile contemporary examples. I strongly agree with many and maybe most of her formulations, but I wince at the implication that one's assessment of John Kennedy or John McCain is a good way to make a point. I see the merit of talking to people at their own level, but

just to muse on the subject I doubt that it's the best general way to proceed. A central part of the philosophy is the absence of a universally correct viewpoint, so assuming that we share specific viewpoints about specific people is fraught with danger. Even the references to Cicero are sometimes hard to evaluate - even though I strongly dislike his distaste for Epicurus he was still a complex character.

But in sum after 11 chapters it's still by far the best introductory book I have read in a while.

Post by “Cassius” of November 14, 2022 at 7:18 PM

OMG wait til you get to chapter 22 and see what she suggests Lucretius might have intended to do to close the poem! She states that she doesn't claim the point is original to her but I agree I have not read it either and it is ingenious!!!

If she is correct then it is indeed easy to imagine that Cicero (or someone else) might indeed have "emended" the text to delete it!!!

This section is worth the price of the book and may be near genius (at least in my initial enthusiasm for it)! 😊

Post by “Cassius” of November 14, 2022 at 7:27 PM

I will defer further praise for that last point only because now that I am convinced that she is right, the inquiry does not stop but only gets going. As she hints this is not in print in English anywhere (that I too have seen), but in two thousand years it cannot fail to have been previously noticed. No doubt others have indeed noticed it and probably commented - in German or Latin or French. We very likely to find out that this point - which really puts an exclamation point on the argument of the poem - has been withheld from us, and not just (if at all) by Cicero, but in the form of later writers who have seen it but whose work has not come down to us. Detective work is needed!

I don't recall this even in Dewitt, which is saying something, given his classical background and otherwise creativity in interpreting Epicurean texts. I don't recall his direct comment on the issue of the end of the poem so it's possible that he hinted at it in an article somewhere, but surely Emily Austin deserves credit for bringing it front and center.

Post by “Don” of November 14, 2022 at 7:32 PM

LOL! If y'all don't stop calling attention to interesting bits, I'm never going to finish this in the right order 😊

Post by “Cassius” of November 14, 2022 at 7:37 PM

With apologies to Don, I have to also note that it opens up the possibility that someone creative with Latin and in tune with the Eoicurean viewpoint might actually be able to reconstruct the thrust of what might have been included at the end of Book Six.

Maybe at some point Austin herself could take a stab at it, or even someone like David Sedley or Martin Ferguson Smith 😊

Post by “Cassius” of November 14, 2022 at 7:59 PM

Don you're not finished when you finish the chapters - then you have to read the notes or you will miss this GEM - she even cites Gosling & Taylor on the k-k issue!

. "This is a non-specialist text, so I have chosen not to wade into the dispute about katastematic and kinetic pleasures in the body of the text. A specialist will recognize that I am adopting a view roughly in line with Gosling and Taylor (1982) and Arenson (2019). On my reading, katastematic pleasures are sensory pleasures that issue from confidence in one's ability to satisfy one's necessary desires and an awareness of one's healthy psychological functioning; choice-worthy kinetic pleasures are the various pleasures consistent with maintaining healthy functioning, and those pleasures vary, but do not increase healthy psychological functioning"

Post by “Cassius” of November 14, 2022 at 8:32 PM

OK I have now finished reading the book. My basic opinion is unchanged: it is excellent. It's now probably first on my list of recommendations for a newer / younger reader who isn't really into philosophy at all and who might have an open mind about Epicurus. It's really targeted at a different audience than DeWitt's book, so I really don't see them in competition with each other. After you read "Living for Pleasure" you'll know the type person who will do best to start with one book versus the other. The type person who I might normally have suggested read one of Catherine Wilson's books I would definitely now refer the Austin book, to some extent because it gives a lot more "philosophy" and a lot less "political justification" than does Wilson's books. Wilson's work is good too, but if I recall correctly Austin's citations and examples from the text are much more detailed. (Now that I think about it I bet Austin read Wilson's book, and future writers can build on both of these as they extend the work in the same direction.)

Does it have shortcomings? In my humble view I would say yes, but they pale in comparison to the good work that the book achieves. Two things I would point out:

(1) The book is entirely devoid, if I read it correctly, of any discussion of canonic / epistemology. I think that's a significant omission, and I would love to have seen her intellect applied to that issue in the same way she attacked many others. Unfortunately I think the absence of that discussion plays into my point two:

(2) If she had taken to heart more of Epicurus' advise as to "waiting" and consideration of "multiple causes," she might not have been so quick to cite some of her contemporary examples on what she takes to be matters of "fact" that not everyone will agree with. The constant temptation of current writers seems to be to want to justify their interest in the subject by wrapping in contemporary political positions, and given the nature of these as controversial, I think the tactic detracts from the overall persuasiveness of the philosophy as a whole. I do agree with most of her example applications, but I wouldn't myself want to suggest that Epicurus would have had a specific position on the World Economic Forum, John McCain, John F. Kennedy, or many of the other contemporary hot-button examples she uses. I understand the desire to make books relevant, but sometimes getting too far into contemporary details can be off-putting, especially given Epicurus' own apparent disposition to keep his advice general rather than personally specific. No doubt there are Epicurean aspects to the World Economic forum and non-Epicurean aspects of the forum, but the political controversy that surrounds it tugs on the emotions and risks distortions in ways that less political examples would not involve. If I recall correctly she does a lot less of this than does Catherine Wilson, but it's still a shame to risk diluting the attractiveness of Epicurus according to one's current political persuasion. Gosh knows my own views have changed over time but I've always tried to keep an open mind on the deepest philosophical ideas. At this point I no longer feel it's a good idea to label contemporary figures as "Epicurean" or "non-Epicurean" given how many factors are involved and how complicated situations can be. She's at her best when she cites "evergreen" examples like children or nature or other situations that really do speak for themselves.

And as per the comments already in this thread, I think Emily Austin is more "in tune" with Epicurus than most anyone else I have read in a very long time. Of course that comes across as implying that she's "in tune with Cassius" but I really don't mean to describe it that way. As I see it she takes a very DeWittian approach of looking at each of the major controversies about Epicurus (from marriage, children, gods, etc) and she finding a very reasonable and persuasive sympathetic position. Of course she fails my standard test of "if they don't cite DeWitt in the notes then they're probably no good!" but at this point in Academia that's par for the course, and if she cited him for anything she would probably get herself banned from polite academic company 😊

Anyway I look forward to the comments of others. This is a REALLY good book to use from here on out in reaching out to new people. And in terms of things like her suggestion as to what Lucretius intended for the end of book six, she's pointing in new directions that will be fascinating to explore.

When the day started I had no idea this book existed and found it by accident. It's been a great day reading it!

Addenda: In relation to the epistemology comment above, it occurs to me that might have been a good idea to include in the physics discussion the observations of her fellow North Carolina professor Gellar-Goad that we mentioned recently as to Epicurus' position on the size of the sun. That would have at least introduced the topic of Epicurus's hesitance to embrace theories that contradict appearances even when those theories end up being found to have merit when the technology to analyze appearances improves later. For reference that [is discussed here](#).

Post by “Cassius” of November 15, 2022 at 6:02 AM

This is the "review" I [posted to the Epicurean Philosophy Facebook page](#):

Yesterday I came across Emily Austin's book "Living for Pleasure" for the first time, and I mentioned I would check it out. Today I want to report back that I have now finished reading it, and that I can strongly recommend it as a "popular" introduction to the philosophy of Epicurus. Ms. Austin is both an engaging writer and an experienced teacher-scholar, and she combines many great references with what I believe to be an excellent eye for interpreting Epicurus in almost every major area of controversy you might wish to examine.

The book is aimed at intelligent but non-specialist readers, and so it's suitable for almost everyone. It is one of the most thorough and well documented current popular books on

Epicurus that you will find anywhere, but it is so good it left me wishing it were even longer. I would like to have seen it spend more time on subjects such as Epicurus' canonic / epistemology, but what we might wish for as perfect is not the enemy of the good, and this book is very very good. It includes insights that I have not seen anywhere else, such as her suggestion for how Lucretius might really have intended to close his poem, all very well documented with cites to the ancient texts.

I do want to include a caution that the book (like Catherine Wilson's work) contains a number of opinions on current political issues with which not everyone will agree. Those might not eventually prove to be as "evergreen" as the great majority of the rest of the book, and I personally would have been happier if the book had contained more on canonic / epistemology and less on difficult topical issues in which it might be better to "wait" or consider Epicurus' view of multiple possibilities. Readers should not think that they should measure their personal fidelity to Epicurus based on their current evaluations of John McCain or John F. Kennedy, or on where they stand on the many similar "cultural" issues that she mentions as her own application of Epicurean views.

But I am sure that Ms. Austin would say that her book was intended to be just a starting point for someone interested in Epicurus, and from that perspective it's easy to see why a writer would want to supply personal potential applications. She is surely right that Epicurus did not shy away from political engagement when warranted, and it's up to us to evaluate the facts and take the positions that suit our own circumstances, just as Epicurus did on issues such as the size of the sun and various other difficult questions where evidence is limited. Epicurean philosophy doesn't guarantee that we will be "right" in every decision we make in life, but it does give us the best path toward the best quality decisions we can make with the evidence available to us.

This book is a great addition to the arsenal of books for those who want to "strike a blow for Epicurus," and I highly recommend it to all readers of the Epicurean Philosophy Group.

Post by “Don” of November 15, 2022 at 8:31 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

With apologies to Don, I have to also note that it opens up the possibility that someone creative with Latin and in tune with the Epicurean viewpoint might actually be able to reconstruct the thrust of what might have been included at the end of Book Six.

Maybe at some point Austin herself could take a stab at it, or even someone like David Sedley or Martin Ferguson Smith 😊

For those interested, here is Thucydides's account of the plague. Open the Year 2 section on the linked page:

[History of the Peloponnesian War/Book 2 - Wikisource, the free online library](#)

Post by “Charles” of November 15, 2022 at 9:38 AM

Quote from from Chapter 16

The scholarly impulse to portray him as an ascetic sometimes seems like an interpretive overcorrection to the long-standing, much greater misunderstanding that he was a sex-crazed glutton.

Finally, someone said it.

Post by “Cassius” of November 15, 2022 at 9:44 AM

[Quote from Charles](#)

Finally, someone said it.

And refreshingly, in this case, someone with very good scholarly credentials and the ability to marshal for mainstream use many references and cites to support her position.

Post by “Cassius” of November 15, 2022 at 9:47 AM

Thanks Don so there we can see exactly what she is referring to in context. It's not as extensive as I had hoped to form a basis for reconstruction, but it surely does, as she indicates, form a

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2740-promising-new-book-living-for-pleasure-and-great-new-article-are-the-modern-stoi/>

basis from which a rousing conclusion to the chapter could have been constructed. No way he's going to follow the preceding sections so closely and leave THIS out!

Quote

⁵³Nor was this the only form of lawless extravagance which owed its origin to the plague. Men now coolly ventured on what they had formerly done in a corner, and not just as they pleased, seeing the rapid transitions produced by persons in prosperity suddenly dying and those who before had nothing succeeding to their property. So they resolved to spend quickly and enjoy themselves, regarding their lives and riches as alike things of a day. Perseverance in what men called honour was popular with none, it was so uncertain whether they would be spared to attain the object; but it was settled that present enjoyment, and all that contributed to it, was both honourable and useful. Fear of gods or law of man there was none to restrain them. As for the first, they judged it to be just the same whether they worshipped them or not, as they saw all alike perishing; and for the last, no one expected to live to be brought to trial for his offences, but each felt that a far severer sentence had been already passed upon them all and hung ever over their heads, and before this fell it was only reasonable to enjoy life a little.

Post by “Cassius” of November 15, 2022 at 9:52 AM

I was about to make another slam at Cicero to accuse him of "emending" it out, but there's no reason not to think that a conclusion based on this was in the version that Cicero had available to him, and that it wasn't cut out by some "helpful" church fathers long after Cicero's death.

In fact that's probably more likely, because Cicero likely couldn't trust that he had the only copy of the poem and that his version would become the official one.

So it's entirely possible that something like this was there and just added to Cicero's frustration.

And if so then that would leave the book, if not the whole poem, ending on much the same note that Frances Wright chose for "A Few Days In Athens"

Post by “Cassius” of November 15, 2022 at 9:55 AM

Hmm I wonder if we won't eventually find a better translation than this one. And "not" just as they pleased, or "did just as they pleased...." And given the tone and circumstances I wonder if "lawless extravagance" captures the meaning...

⁵³Nor was this the only form of lawless extravagance which owed its origin to the plague. Men now coolly ventured on what they had formerly done in a corner, and not just as they pleased, seeing the rapid transitions produced by persons in prosperity suddenly dying and those who before had nothing succeeding to their property. So they resolved to spend quickly and enjoy themselves, regarding their lives and riches as alike things of a day. Perseverance in what men called honour was popular with none, it was so uncertain whether they would be spared to attain the object; but it was settled that present enjoyment, and all that contributed to it, was both honourable and useful. Fear of gods or law of man there was none to restrain them. As for the first, they judged it to be just the same whether they worshipped them or not, as they saw all alike perishing; and for the last, no one expected to live to be brought to trial for his offences, but each felt that a far severer sentence had been already passed upon them all and hung ever over their heads, and before this fell it was only reasonable to enjoy life a little.

Post by “Charles” of November 18, 2022 at 12:11 PM

[Quote from Charles](#)

My biggest issue though, are her chapter(s) concerning politics.

I forgot to elaborate on this. Her issue with politics in the philosophy is that she spends so much time focusing on ethics, specifically the categorization of desires and that section from Torquatus about reform being insufficient, rather than justice and the inherent individualism found within Epicureanism. If I remember correctly, she does briefly bring up the flexibility of the philosophy in the face of Athens facing sieges and blockades, but over the few years I've come to see some of the wisdom in Will Durant's criticism: "...it provides an excellent design for bachelorhood, but hardly for a society."

I feel déjà vu in saying an Epicurean *Government* may be an unfeasible concept. However, an Epicurean society is perhaps much easier to adopt, envision, or mold into than many other philosophies or ideologies. When we think of Epicurean morality, we (as in the forums here) tend to focus on the fact that there is no absolute pleasure. I think the desires are categorized because of this. What may be unnecessary for some is necessary for others. What is unnatural in one culture may be necessary in another to conform without risk of greater pains. Which leads us to the phrases "Live unknown" and "Escape all culture", of which we all know their

meaning. Yet Epicurus himself approved of the religious festivities in Athens, and partook in them, while living outside the walls of the city. There are other examples of social conformity such as the advice of paying court to a king, if need be, fulfilling an obligatory military conscription, or engaging with the conventions and customs of marriage by providing dowry, etc.

An Epicurean society is political in the sense of caring for the well-being and health of their country. Its citizens would not be ignorant or secluded from the world around them, on the contrary, they would have knowledge of the various figures and events around them. Epicurus was well read on Plato and his contemporaries; he could not have rejected them and devised the system of the garden had he chosen to completely and utterly withdraw into isolation.

The same applies to civic government and culture. The only difference is that our activism is within the interest of the garden and the safeguarding of our pleasure, not partisan issues that ebb and flow with each week and month. I think focusing on the desires in the scope of a political society is a bit tunnel visioned. What matters more is the culture that surrounds an Epicurean, and whether their pursuance of pleasure is admonished, encouraged, or ignored. The doctrines concerning justice and no absolute pleasure are the remedy to this. That's the key to flexibility and ultimately the answer of politics within the philosophy.

Edit: I brought up the Will Durant quote to emphasize why the question of an Epicurean society is so hard to answer satisfactorily. It's a question that has been bothering me for years now. I think Austin struggled with it too in her scope of interpersonal ethics applied en masse.

Post by "Cassius" of November 18, 2022 at 12:53 PM

Charles I agree with the points you are making but - maybe I am distracted as I read this - do you think Austin disagrees with you?

Maybe you are saying that she should have talked further about these issues and you're not so much saying you disagree with what she wrote as that you think she did not deal with this aspect?

I am gathering that is your point but I am not sure whether you are saying that she gives the wrong impression on what she does say, or just that she left out an important aspect?

Post by "Charles" of November 18, 2022 at 12:58 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I am gathering that is your point but I am not sure whether you are saying that she gives the wrong impression on what she does say, or just that she left out an important aspect?

I think she left out an important aspect, namely justice and moral relativity and how specific Epicurus' advice can be applied to his own time period versus their application to today's world. That's something she did bring up though with the fear of death and increased scientific understanding. But other than that, I can't really quite comment on what her thoughts may or may be aside from just the contents in the book which is a casual introductory into the philosophy. Maybe that'd be something to ask her.

Post by “Pacatus” of November 18, 2022 at 1:09 PM

[Quote from Charles](#)

An Epicurean society is political in the sense of caring for the well-being and health of their country. Its citizens would not be ignorant or secluded from the world around them, on the contrary, they would have knowledge of the various figures and events around them. Epicurus was well read on Plato and his contemporaries; he could not have rejected them and devised the system of the garden had he chosen to completely and utterly withdraw into isolation.

The same applies to civic government and culture. The only difference is that our activism is within the interest of the garden and the safeguarding of our pleasure, not partisan issues that ebb and flow with each week and month. I think focusing on the desires in the scope of a political society is a bit tunnel visioned. What matters more is the culture that surrounds an Epicurean, and whether their pursuance of pleasure is admonished, encouraged, or ignored. The doctrines concerning justice and no absolute pleasure are the remedy to this. That's the key to flexibility and ultimately the answer of politics within the philosophy.

Yes. I think this is spot on, and provides an Epicurean grounding for social activity and political participation. Thank you.

Post by “Cassius” of November 18, 2022 at 3:33 PM

[Quote from Charles](#)

I think she left out an important aspect, namely justice and moral relativity and how specific Epicurus' advice can be applied to his own time period versus their application to today's world.

Yes I agree that she is definitely light on that aspect, and that probably also explains her willingness to be very free with her commentary on contemporary issues that are at least partly or even wholly political (as I have mentioned in regard to the John F. Kennedy and John McCain issues). I am reading into this that because she didn't highlight and bring out the "moral relativity" (or maybe calling it context-dependency would be accurate too) she is too free in implying that her own view of such issues is necessarily what every Epicurean would conclude. So yes I think that you're commenting on something I agree with.

Personally I have a pretty low expectation for this kind of thing, since I see it done so frequently. Seems like half the articles that get written about Epicurus are more psychology or political opinion that just brings in Epicurus as a justification for decisions the writer has already reached. That's the way I see the modern Stoics - they are really just CBT/pyschotherapists but they want to wrap their conclusions around some ancient writers for prestige purposes.

But I think in this case we're mostly coming up here with observations that might help serve as a preliminary comment to someone setting out to read it. Once you understand the point it's pretty easy to dismiss personal judgments as personal without undermining the credibility of the rest.

At this point in my thinking my attitude is still that we're going to come up with some preliminary comments that would be good for new readers to bear in mind as they read the book, but that the issue is not as serious as it often occurs, and its something that makes for a good discussion while reading the book.

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 18, 2022 at 9:31 PM

I've barely started the book, and I am reading the chapters out of order... chapter 16 - the label of "extravagant desires" doesn't seem quite right to me.

Quote

Nevertheless, Epicurus thinks sexual pleasure and committed romantic relationships are natural, but unnecessary, desires (or so I argue). In the terms of this book, they are extravagant desires, and all extravagant desires can adorn the tranquil life if you do them right.

If you live in a location where everyone surrounding you is in a committed romantic relationship, then you will be the odd one out. If you live in a location where everyone is not in a committed relationship but you are, then you will be the odd one out in that situation. Your environment and the culture that surrounds you will affect you, as it does to any animal. What we need to be happy should not be labeled extravagant. But if we try to get something we want and can't achieve it after giving it a considerable effort, then we eventually say: okay I tried and move on to something else, or move to a different environment.

Post by “Cassius” of November 18, 2022 at 10:28 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

the label of "extravagant desires" doesn't seem quite right to me.

That's an interesting reaction - I wonder if you would have had it if you had read straight through. I am tempted to say you might not have.

I am still absorbing and thinking about the book, and considering that we who are pretty well-read in the subject might get a different impression from people who are probably her target subject and less well read. It's as if there is a multiple layer discussion going on here. When she says "in the terms of this book" I am thinking that those of us who have talked a lot about the necessary and natural categories will immediately think of the different ways we have seen this issue expressed, and we haven't generally seen "extravagant" used - although that sort of reminds me of the "fancy pleasure" term that Elayne used in her past article her on the forum.

I still see issues with clarity in the whole subject. Is necessary being referred to as necessary for life (water, air, etc) or "necessary for happiness" which seems to be a very broad and ambiguous approach in the first place ("what does happiness mean?")

I could imagine the possibility of her commenting about this subject in a similar manner to what she said about the tetrapharmakon - that it's a useful memory device but easily confusing without significant context and grounding in the details.

Post by “Don” of November 18, 2022 at 10:37 PM

I will say I really like Austin's terms natural, extravagant, and corrosive desires. Granted, "extravagant" may not be exactly correct, but, as it gets at the "not necessary" aspect of this category, I endorse her choice.

I'm currently on chapter 15, and I have found Austin's work spot on and fully endorse the work as a great starting point.

As for [Cassius](#)'s Kennedy misgiving, I see Dr. Austin only using his book as an example of what is meant by courage with Kennedy's book *Profiles of Courage*. I don't see this as political at all, simply a literary allusion.

I have completely enjoyed the book so far, and wish I wrote it myself.

Do I wish she covered some topics in more depth? Yes. Am I satisfied with how she's covered the topics she does cover? Yes!

Post by “Cassius” of November 19, 2022 at 3:04 AM

Good to hear Dons comments so far.

Quickly: I've tended to use the Kennedy and McCain names more because they are easy for me to remember rather than because she dwells on them. The general point is to me as Charles is stating it - it's important to keep saying that many assessments in life are personal,

and different people will evaluate their pleasure and pain reactions differently. The more complicated the issue the more opinions will vary.

In a better world we would have 50 or 100 books like this which give their own personal takes and wording on how they apply Epicurus. As it is, we have this one and maybe a small handful of others, with this probably the most successful by a good distance. For that reason I am happy to dwell on the positive aspects and mainly use any "negative" comments to hopefully contribute to what she or others may write later. We've needed something like this for a long time and I am very happy it exists. What she has done will allow us to do better in the future and keep improving the quality of our presentations.

Post by “Don” of November 19, 2022 at 7:00 AM

Just as an example where I'm at right now (emphasis added):

Quote

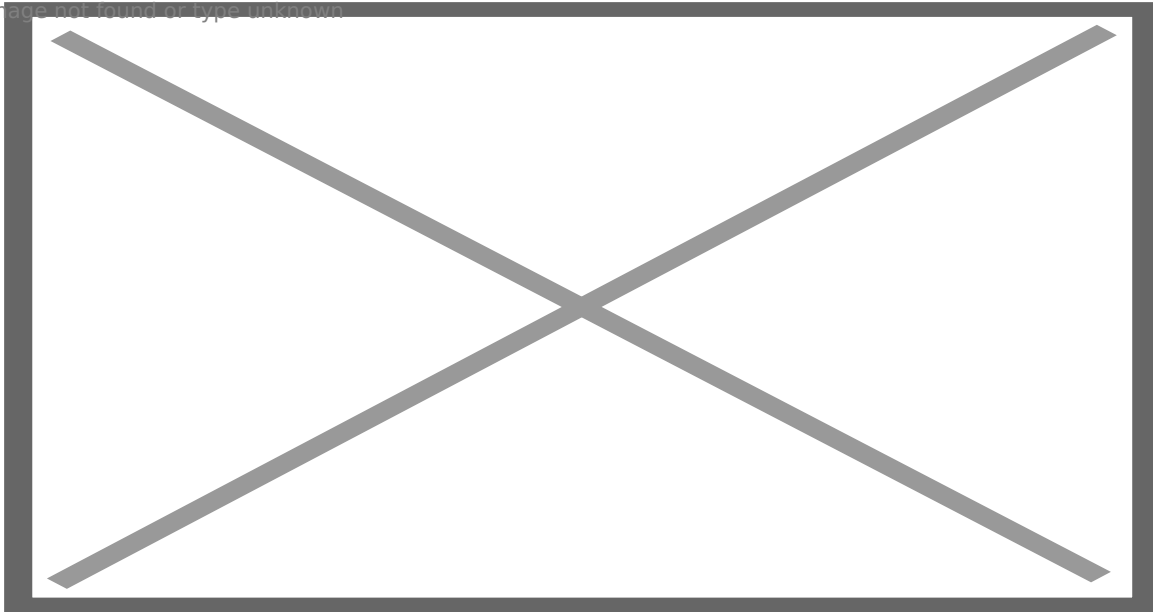
Many scholars have argued that while Epicurus recognizes that sex is pleasant, he is actually largely hostile to sex, even more so to love. If you find it difficult to make sense of how Epicurus could reject sex and love and still have said what Athenaeus claims, then you are in the good company of me, at least. I think Epicurus' concerns about sex and love have been overstated. That Epicurus thinks sex and love should be selected prudently makes complete sense, especially given the many ways it can cause and sustain anxiety. Nevertheless, Epicurus thinks sexual pleasure and committed romantic relationships are natural, but unnecessary, desires (or so I argue). In the terms of this book, they are extravagant desires, and all extravagant desires can adorn the tranquil life if you do them right.

Her calling out academic assumptions and "common knowledge" that she sees as erroneous or misguided is both refreshing and well reasoned! Her analysis, to me, takes in the scope of Epicurus's philosophy instead of trying to impose a perspective on it like many academics seem to try and do. That is a breath of fresh air.

Post by “Don” of November 19, 2022 at 7:07 AM

If we have positive things to say, we all should individually leave reviews on Amazon. No one seems to have reviewed it yet:

Image not found or type unknown



[Living for Pleasure: An Epicurean Guide to Life \(Guides to the Good Life Series\)](#)

Living for Pleasure: An Epicurean Guide to Life (Guides to the Good Life Series)

www.amazon.com

Post by “Cassius” of November 19, 2022 at 7:14 AM

Yes her analysis is far better than we generally get. Might she have gone even further? Echoing Kalosyni's concerns about extravagance, I recall this from Menoecus:

"We must consider that of desires some are natural, others vain, and of the natural some are necessary and others merely natural; and of the necessary some are necessary for happiness, others for the repose of the body, and others for very life."

Focusing on that language, does "extravagance" advance the ball as far it should go? When you look at the variations of "necessary" from "necessary for very life" vs "necessary for happiness" that is a huge degree of separation.

Sure romantic love might not be "necessary for life" but for a lot of people it might well be "necessary for happiness."

So if "extravagant" is elevated to a title in itself, where does romantic love fall? If it is necessary for happiness for a lot of people then it's not "extravagant."

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2740-promising-new-book-living-for-pleasure-and-great-new-article-are-the-modern-stoi/>

So to repeat her analysis is a lot better than we generally see, but there's room for making these issues more clear. We can't blame Epicurus himself for this ambiguity -- he makes it clear in Menoeceus that "necessary" itself has a context, and he doesn't (in a letter of general advice) start giving us a long detailed list of where things should fit.

Just as Austin says that Epicurus didn't write something as condensed as the tetraphmarkon, but that his followers wanted it, I think we have to be very careful with natural and necessary talk not to condense Epicurus too far and thereby muck things up.

Post by “Cassius” of November 19, 2022 at 7:37 AM

I didn't really finish my thought did I?

So when she says *Epicurus thinks sexual pleasure and committed romantic relationships are natural, but unnecessary, desires (or so I argue). In the terms of this book, they are extravagant desires, and all extravagant desires can adorn the tranquil life if you do them right.*

...that's a departure and an improvement from the standard academic implication that Epicurus was an ascetic and advised against sexual pleasure and romantic relationships completely.

But she still leaves open and in fact embraces the conclusion that they "can adorn the tranquil life if you do them right" which is less than a full-on endorsement of considering the possibility that for some/many people they may be not only natural but "necessary for happiness."

That's where the terminology is an improvement from the standard awful academic implications, but still leaves further to demolish the ascetic implications of the academic perspective entirely, which aren't justified in what we have from Epicurus himself in Menoeceus.

"can adorn the tranquil life" needs to proceed further to open the door to "*depending on the person, necessary for happiness.*"

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 19, 2022 at 7:38 AM

All of this brings up for me the importance of not creating an exact list of what brings pleasure and what brings happiness -- because it will depend on the environment and culture that one is living in.

Metrodorus, as quoted in the book:

Quote

I hear from you that the movement of your flesh is abundantly disposed toward sexual intercourse. As long as you do not break the laws or disturb noble and settled customs or vex any of your neighbors or wear out your body or use up the things necessary for life, indulge yourself in any way you prefer. However, it is impossible not be constrained by some one of these things. For sex never profits, and one must be content if it does not harm.⁵

The idea that "sex never profits" is no longer true, as studies have shown it is good for the health of the body -- And there is birth control, and the [consent movement](#).

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 19, 2022 at 7:45 AM

Labels shape how we think, and so I don't like the word extravagant one bit:

From the [Merriam-Webster Dictionary](#):

extravagant

adjective

ex·trav·a·gant [ik-'stra-vi-gənt](#)

1 a : exceeding the limits of reason or necessity extravagant claims

b : lacking in moderation, balance, and restraint extravagant praise

c : [extremely](#) or excessively elaborate an extravagant display

2 : extremely or unreasonably high in price an extravagant purchase

3 a : spending much more than necessary has always been extravagant with her money

b : [profuse](#), [lavish](#)

Post by “Cassius” of November 19, 2022 at 7:45 AM

As to the Metrodorus comment I would go further and even question the accuracy of the quote.

As usual with such fragments, we don't have the full context, and to say "sex never profits" we have to ask what is the original wording and what is really meant by "profit."

So far as we know the Epicureans were not in the habit of talking capitalist theory, but they were in the habit of finding pleasures to be pleasing. That sex is generally pleasing goes without saying, and we aren't in the habit of condemning pleasures unless more pain than pleasure results. It would not be accurate or consistent with Epicurus to say that "sex always produces more pain than pleasure" so far as I can tell from the overall surviving texts.

So I would not take this quotation as sufficient cause to question that sex was being carved out as an exception and was intended to be labeled as a pleasure that always produces excessive pain. It's much more likely that there is missing context, or translation issues, or even intentional slanting of the way the text has been transmitted.

Post by “Cassius” of November 19, 2022 at 7:58 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Labels shape how we think, and so I don't like the word extravagant one bit:

Yes I agree.

Seems to me this is a prime example of perspective.

From the point of view of "Thank goodness she's doing better than most academics and not making Epicurus a total ascetic" the phrase *extravagant desires can adorn the tranquil life if you do them right* seems a great relief and improvement.

From the point of view of "Do we really want to convey to new readers that Epicurus thought all romantic love is an 'extravagance'?" I think the answer is clearly "No!"

So my view is to both appreciate that her wording is an improvement, while at the same time resolving that there is a lot further that she / we / all Epicurean writers needs to go to improve this wording.

The real problem here is that the Academics have Epicurean discussions in a total box and that box needs to be demolished, not just lifting the lid up around the edges.

And by the way, the ultimate aim and description of the goal is not "the tranquil life." The proper wording is "the PLEASANT life."

And she knows that. The title of the book is not "*Living For Tranquility.*"

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 19, 2022 at 8:25 AM

Quote from Cassius

And by the way, the ultimate aim and description of the goal is not "the tranquil life." The proper wording is "the PLEASANT life."

And she knows that. The title of the book is not "Living For Tranquility."

Good to point that out. And thinking further about "unnecessary" desires -- I don't like that word "unnecessary" either, lol.

We don't label a desire as unnecessary until for a particular individual they see for themselves that it is so -- when they see that it brings more pain than pleasure, causes way too much pain to acquire it, or is impossible to acquire -- and this can only be determined by that individual AND at a later time that person may be in a different situation and decide to pursue that desire.

So in some sense "unnecessary" is really an artificial label used as a "coping mechanism" -- there are no absolutely unnecessary desires.

Do you think this is correct?

Post by “Cassius” of November 19, 2022 at 8:41 AM

As to whether it's a "coping mechanism" I really think it's more a "thinking mechanism." In my view that the best way to understand the entire necessary and natural discussion is to put it in the context that Torquatus presents it, as a subtext of the discussion of wisdom. To me the key is to focus on what he says is "the principal of the classification" and see the discussion as a way not to cope but to think toward the future result rather than just blindly engage in every momentary pleasure:

Quote

The great disturbing factor in a man's life is ignorance of good and evil; mistaken ideas about these frequently rob us of our greatest pleasures, and torment us with the most cruel pain of mind. Hence we need the aid of Wisdom, to rid us of our fears and appetites, to root out all our errors and prejudices, and to serve as our infallible guide to the attainment of pleasure. Wisdom alone can banish sorrow from our hearts and protect its front alarm and apprehension; put yourself to school with her, and you may live in peace, and quench the glowing flames of desire. For the desires are incapable of satisfaction; they ruin not individuals only but whole families, nay often shake the very foundations of the state. It is they that are the source of hatred, quarreling, and strife, of sedition and of war.

Nor do they only flaunt themselves abroad, or turn their blind onslaughts solely against others; even when prisoned within the heart they quarrel and fall out among themselves; and this cannot but render the whole of life embittered. Hence only the Wise Man, who prunes away all the rank growth of vanity and error, can possibly live untroubled by sorrow and by fear, content within the bounds that nature has set. Nothing could be more useful or more conducive to well-being than Epicurus's doctrine as to the different classes of the desires. One kind he classified as both natural and necessary, a second as natural without being necessary, and a third as neither natural nor necessary; the principle of classification being that the necessary desires are gratified with little trouble or expense; the natural desires also require but little, since nature's own riches, which suffice to content her, are both easily procured and limited in amount; but for the imaginary desires no bound or limit can be discovered.

In any situation where choices are involved, being wise means you're going to have to decide which desires to pursue based on the expected return in terms of pleasure and pain. Things that are "necessary" are gratified with little trouble or expense; things that are "natural" are also generally easily procured and limited in amount; but for the "imaginary" desires no bound or limit can be discovered.

To me the whole exercise is mainly a way to visualize and predict the expected the cost-benefit analysis. I don't see it as retrospective coping as much as I see it as a means of prospective anticipating the results so you can make wise decisions all the way through toward the goal of maximizing pleasure.

Post by “Cassius” of November 19, 2022 at 8:52 AM

Don (or others) I wonder if there is a precedent for the "natural and necessary" classification in the writings of Plato or Aristotle such as you found for the bread and water discussion. If there is that might also place this in context.

Post by “Don” of November 19, 2022 at 9:07 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Don (or others) I wonder if there is a precedent for the "natural and necessary" classification in the writings of Plato or Aristotle such as you found for the bread and water discussion. If there is that might also place this in context.

[Selected Fragments, by Epicurus](#)

Quote

471] In the second chapter of the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle characterizes desires as groundless and trifling (κενήν καὶ ματαίαν) if they are not related to or subsumed under an overarching goal of life; in this fragment and in Fragment 442, Epicurus applies the same terms to certain kinds of desires.

Just a quick response for now.

Post by “Don” of November 19, 2022 at 9:39 AM

Several thoughts on topics brought up above:

If we struggle with words like natural, necessary, "not necessary," and "empty" to describe desires, we're struggling with Epicurus. Those are his words.

The reason I like "extravagant" is that it's slightly over the top but, for me, evokes Epicurus's own sometimes-playful use of language. The "extravagant" = "not necessary" also evokes the idea of "It's possible to find pleasure in the barest circumstances such as while eating the simplest of meals: barley bread and water, and in the midst of the most dire of straits like at the point of dying in great pain. But it IS nice to have those other pleasures, and we include

them all in our definition of the good." That is why I harp on Epicurus, Metrodorus, and Philodemus stating that the internal pleasure of tranquility (ataraxia) is a more secure source of pleasure than pleasure arising from external sources. We always have the pleasure of tranquility readily available in our minds - if we work at achieving it, nurturing it, maintaining it. That's why they place a high value on tranquility.

Stepping back a minute: There are several places where the necessary desires are discussed:

Letter to Menoikeus:

on the one hand, there are the natural desires; on the other, the 'empty, fruitless, or vain ones.' And of the natural ones, on the one hand, are the necessary ones; on the other, the ones which are only natural; then, of the necessary ones: on the one hand, those necessary for eudaimonia; then, those necessary for the freedom from disturbance for the body; then those necessary for life itself. [128] The steady contemplation of these things equips one to know how to decide all choice and rejection for the health of the body and for the tranquility of the mind, that is for our physical and our mental existence, since this is the goal of a blessed life. (My translation)

[PD26](#)

26The desires that do not bring pain when they go unfulfilled are not necessary; indeed they are easy to reject when they are hard to achieve or when they seem to produce harm. (Saint-Andre)

[PD29](#)

29Of our desires, some are natural and necessary; others are natural, but not necessary; others, again, are neither natural nor necessary, but are due to groundless opinion.

[Epicurus regards as natural and necessary desires which bring relief from pain, as e.g. drink when we are thirsty ; while by natural and not necessary he means those which merely diversify the pleasure without removing the pain, as e.g. costly viands ; by the neither natural nor necessary he means desires for crowns and the erection of statues in one's honour.--Scholia](Saint-Andre)

Cicero

But how says our philosopher? 'The desires are of three kinds, natural and necessary, natural but not necessary, neither natural nor necessary.' To begin with, this is a clumsy division; it makes three classes when there are really only two. This is not dividing but hacking in pieces. Thinkers trained in the science which Epicurus despised usually put it thus: 'The desires are of two kinds, natural and imaginary;11 natural desires again fall into two subdivisions, necessary and not necessary.' That would have rounded it off properly. It is a fault in division to reckon a species as a genus. 27 Still, do not let us stickle about form. Epicurus despises the niceties of dialectic; his style neglects distinctions; we must humour him in this, provided that his meaning

is correct. But for my own part I cannot cordially approve, I merely tolerate, a philosopher who talks of setting bounds to the desires. Is it possible for desire to be kept within bounds? It ought to be destroyed, uprooted altogether. On your principle there is no form of desire whose possessor could not be morally approved. He will be a miser — within limits; an adulterer — in moderation; and a sensualist to correspond. What sort of a philosophy is this, that instead of dealing wickedness its death-blow, is satisfied with moderating our vices?

Post by “Don” of November 19, 2022 at 10:49 AM

<https://philarchive.org/archive/BREEOS>

"Epicurus on Sex, Marriage, and Children" PDF

Opens with an explanation of the proposed mistranslation of pertinent passage.

Post by “Todd” of December 19, 2022 at 3:46 PM

I'm not done reading it yet, but here are the things I want to say so far.

BTW, I think the book is outstanding, so my criticisms should be considered in that context

1) My biggest complaint: while I believe the author is making an honest effort to be non-political, I don't think she does a great job of it. Granted, it is a tall order nowadays to say meaningful things without offending someone. But it makes the book less useful as a tool for introducing people to Epicurus.

2) My next biggest complaint is that she seems to be putting words in Epicurus mouth at times. She'll say, "Epicurus believed X," and I'll think to myself, "Well, maybe, but that's new to me." Footnotes, or explanations would have been appreciated.

3) My favorite quote so far: "If you are always satisfied, then you do not die dissatisfied." This quote, and her chapter on desiring endless life made a lot of sense of to me, regarding why you shouldn't fear death. The previous arguments I'd heard always fell kind of flat.

4) Another thing that caught my attention...I'm paraphrasing here, and probably reading a bit more into it than what she actually said, but, "Unhappiness manifests in behavior, and thereby makes it possible to analyze objectively." This seems like an interesting way of getting from

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2740-promising-new-book-living-for-pleasure-and-great-new-article-are-the-modern-stoi/>

formal ethical principles to concrete advice for how to live. It was new to me, anyway.

5) I noticed some previous comments about her use of "extravagant desires". I also think that has too much of a negative connotation. I will note in her defense, that she says in a footnote that she had misgivings too. FWIW, inspired by her use of extravagant, I am using "luxurious desires" in my notes. You're welcome. 😊

Post by “Cassius” of December 19, 2022 at 4:24 PM

Great first post and welcome again Todd!

Post by “Cassius” of March 22, 2023 at 9:58 PM

I am delinquent in mentioning this but better late than never:

It would be great for those of us here who have bought Emily Austin's book to write a review for her on Amazon --

Here's the link:

<https://www.amazon.com/Living-Pleasure-Epicurean-Guide-Guides/dp/0197558321>

Post by “Cleveland Okie” of April 12, 2023 at 12:07 AM

Everybody's comments have been great, but I want to make one more point: Although the book is put out by an academic press, the publisher made it affordable (I bought a Kindle for about \$11). This is a contrast to the common university press practice of "Oh, you think this book sounds interesting? Screw you, it's \$100."

Post by “Kalosyni” of April 12, 2023 at 2:42 PM

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2740-promising-new-book-living-for-pleasure-and-great-new-article-are-the-modern-stoi/>

I am putting together a few discussion questions based on the first four chapters, and aiming to post them next week, so they will be ready in time for the first meeting of the book study group on April 30th (will post in that thread).

Thread

["Living for Pleasure" Book Study Group - Starting April 30, 2023 - Via Zoom](#)

Hi Everyone,

We are starting up a new book study group on Emily Austin's book: "Living for Pleasure: an Epicurean Guide to Life" - via Zoom.

This is open to all forum members -- and -- it will be especially geared for newer members who are just starting out in their study of Epicurean philosophy.

epicureanfriends.com/wcf/attachment/3640/

We will discuss 4 chapters per meeting which will take a total of 6 weeks (since there are 24 chapters).

This is a heads up so that you can purchase your book in...



Kalosyni

March 31, 2023 at 3:10 PM