

Training book/framework for new Epicureans

Post by “Cassius” of May 17, 2023 at 7:01 AM

That is a great suggestion and we talk about it frequently. Several of us are working on something similar but unfortunately nothing I am aware of is ready for production. But this is a goal that is very high on our list.

Aside from the forum posts you mentioned, I would also recommend the Lucretius podcast. We'll incorporate that in whatever written materials we come up with, but I think an important part of any curriculum is personal participation and discussion with other like-minded people, and the podcast can help simulate that until we have more programs available.

I expect us to want to track Lucretius very closely (at least in the big picture) as we do this. If you have not spent quality time with Lucretius I think finding a good annotated translation (the Martin F. Smith version for instance) would be a good idea. Lucretius was presenting to Memmius pretty much exactly what you are looking for - a step by step introduction to the philosophy.

And here is an important point: Lucretius' focus on the physics is a feature, not a bug. I think Lucretius starts and emphasizes exactly where the philosophy presentation needs to start, and he goes over these big picture in a logical order. Here's a summary I've been working on recently:

- **Nature:** Everything that exists has a physical basis, and there is nothing that is supernatural. [Nothing can be created from nothing.](#)
- **Gods:** No supernatural gods exist, but it is useful to remember that intelligent life with physical bodies exists elsewhere in the universe, and to think about and seek to emulate those which have achieved perfectly pleasurable lives without any pain.
- **Death:** The soul is physical like everything else and cannot exist without the body. There is no life after death, and therefore no punishment or reward after death.
- **Anti-Determinism:** Human life is neither fated nor determined by forces outside itself.
- **Knowledge:** The five senses, the feelings of pleasure and pain, and the pattern-recognition faculty of anticipations provide a reliable basis for knowledge.
- **Pleasure:** The feeling of pleasure is the guide to a life of pleasure which is the goal of human life. Pleasure is a wide term that includes everything mentally and physically desirable in life. In contrast, "virtue" is a label that describes not an end in itself but whatever is an effective tool for the obtaining of a life of pleasure.

Lucretius mentions pleasure throughout, and he incorporates it into the opening of the poem and the interesting starting points of each book, but he starts the deep discussions with the fundamentals of how nature works, how death is the end, how humans have free will, and how

knowledge is based on the senses.

This sets the stage properly from the beginning, and when you establish these fundamentals - such as how short life is and yet how pleasure is the driving force of all life - it seems to me you are much less likely to fall into the trap of thinking that "running from pain" is the focus of what life should be all about.