

How To Convert A Neo-Epicurean Into A Classical Epicurean

Post by "Cassius" of January 15, 2020 at 8:33 AM

This is a stub to be rewritten into a long article. For the time being:

1. I am convinced that if a young person and/or someone who knows very little about Epicurus first reads [DeWitt's "Epicurus and His Philosophy"](#), then followed by [Lucretius](#), [Diogenes Laertius](#), [Diogenes of Oinoanda](#), and the Epicurean sections of Cicero ([Torquatus](#), [Velleius](#)), without reading any Wikipedia articles, books written after 1960, or Youtube videos, they would never become a "NeoEpicurean" in the first place. They would be grounded in Epicurean fundamentals and would never be tempted toward [the Stoic / Eclectic / Neo-Epicurean approach](#).

For those however who have already been "corrupted" by the modern non-DeWitt academic consensus, and that includes probably 95% of the people who find their way to Epicurus because they are looking for "tranquility," there needs to be a path of study and rediscovery of what [classical Epicurean philosophy](#) was all about. That path would probably be something like this:

1. Read the Boris [Nikolsky](#) article "[Epicurus on Pleasure](#)" to see that there is a credible academic opinion which deviates from the "orthodoxy," and which holds that the katastematic/kinetic distinction is not Epicurean but a Stoic overlay.
2. Read the [chapters devoted to Epicurus in the Gosling and Taylor book "The Greeks On Pleasure"](#) to find a credible and thoroughly documented treatise which will explain in detail how Epicurus was focused on ordinary pleasure and not some ineffable "absence of pain" (which is essentially what is entailed in most "katastematic" arguments). (Note: the link is to only part of one chapter; the book is hard to find except in a library but well worth finding, because it traces the full history of philosophical debate about pleasure from the beginning of Greek philosophy up through Epicurus and slightly beyond. This is an excellent way of extending DeWitt's observation that Epicurus is essentially the ultimate anti-Platonism.)
3. Read the Wenham article "[On Cicero's Interpretation of Katastematic Pleasure](#)" for emphasis on how all goals of any significance to Epicurus must have been based on sensory experience (because absence of sensory experience is death).
4. These first three well-researched, well-documented, and academically-respectable sources ought to be sufficient to convince any fair-minded person, *even in academia*, that the academic consensus may be monolithic but ultimately is fatally flawed. With this new open-mindedness, it is then time to proceed back to DeWitt, who the academic reader would likely never have found previously, since he is effectively blacklisted in academia.

5. Now start at the beginning with [DeWitt's "Epicurus and His Philosophy"](#) and observe primarily how Epicurus was in rebellion against Platonism and Skepticism, and how these aspects - the erection of a logical argument derived from physics and canonics (epistemology) to identify and defend pleasure as the goal of life - are the true heart of the philosophy and the necessary prerequisite for understanding the ethics.
6. Then read Frances Wright's "[A Few Days In Athens](#)" and [Thomas Jefferson's letters referencing Epicurus and Plato](#) to see that some great past minds saw things much the same way (no obsession on "absence of pain" as the key to Epicurus).
7. Then go back into [Lucretius](#) and study the details of the analysis to see that as the Epicureans presented the philosophy to themselves, the key is physics, canonics, and pleasure as ordinarily understood, with no hint that "absence of pain" or "katastematic pleasure" is front and center in the philosophy, but rather how the methodology (a deductive process tied tightly to the observations made through the senses/feelings/anticipations) is the key to the entire structure.
8. From there I would include the warning to always be on the lookout and on guard against anyone who is shrinking back, or inventing reasons for, avoiding the word "pleasure." Unless the writer is embracing "pleasure" and defending it boldly, you can bet that the writer does not really either understand or endorse the Epicurean system, and that he or she is leading you down the path of NeoEpicureanism.