

"Philosophize This" - A Statement of the Position That Ataraxia is "True Pleasure" and that Epicureans Should Have No Ambitions Other than to Remove the Desire For Ambition - Your Focus is the Complete Removal of Pain - Agree or Disagree?

Post by "Cassius" of February 14, 2018 at 8:49 AM

The "Philosophize This" podcast has [an episode devoted to Epicurus](#), and transcript shows that it is an excellent statement of the "mainstream" position. I am posting this here not because I agree with it, but that it serves as a good clear statement of this version of interpretation of Epicurus.

Here's an excerpt that states in conclusory terms how an Epicurean would live:

"So I want you to imagine yourself as an Epicurean...your life would be a simple one...living in the commune on the outskirts of Athens...away from the hustle and business of the city...with no ambitions other than to remove your desire of ambitions and increase your ataraxia. It was Athenian Culture to have aspirations of one day... making a bunch of money...or gaining military prestige...or succeeding in politics and making a difference...you know it was all about being a citizen and contributing to society. That's just what you did. But as an Epicurean, you wouldn't care about any of that stuff...you would focus on the complete removal of pain and all you needed for that were your basic needs met."

Here is another very important statement from the article:

"Remember, the goal of life is pleasure...but the only way you can achieve true pleasure, ataraxia... is by first understanding the nature of things."

So "ataraxia" is TRUE PLEASURE, which other pleasures are presumably false pleasures. That is definitely one of the conclusions that this analysis leads to, and if accepted that "true pleasure / false pleasure" distinction would have profound implications.

Another very clear summary point:

"Elimination of mental fears is the ultimate form of pleasure, and thus the goal to life."

So the ultimate form of pleasure, and goal of life, is reducible to "elimination of mental fear."

And the last I have time for at the moment: "*Epicurus thinks that a wise person would want a couple bites of super high quality life...as opposed to an eternity of dissatisfaction.*"

Perhaps true enough if those were the only two choices, but are they? And if they are not, does the framing of this question correctly convey Epicurus' point as to our proper viewpoint on length of life?

Just in case the page disappears, I will paste the rest of it here:

Posted on [April 28, 2014](#)

Episode 10 Transcript

This is a transcript of [Episode 10 on Epicurus](#).

Have you guys ever heard of a stoa? A stoa was a common structure in ancient Greek architecture that served a wide variety of purposes...but most of the time it was just a place that people gathered. Imagine Two huge lines of Big...Doric or Ionian Columns holding up a massive roof usually hundreds of feet long and positioned right in the middle of town...offering people a little shelter from the elements while they do business...merchants would sometimes set up shop...artists would lay out their work for people to see...people would sometimes hold religious ceremonies or hold a gathering in honor of some local prestigious war hero. In the second century AD there was a guy named Diogenes, and he was incredibly rich. The richest man in the town of Oenoanda...the Mitt Romney in fact. He was so rich and believed so much in the philosophy of a guy named Epicurus who lived almost 500 years before him...that he paid to have a giant wall built onto this stoa that was right in the middle of town. He built it where he knew everyone would be walking past it and they'd all have have no choice but to look at it all day long...and on this wall he carved in 25,000 words...that's about 260 square meters of text...and the text he chose to carve into this wall was the philosophy of Epicurus.

Metaphysics...epistemology...ethics...imagine going about your daily business and constantly having to look at some antiquated view of how to be a happier person written by a guy that never knew you and lived hundreds of years ago who is telling you that you're doing everything completely wrong. Must have seemed pretty pretentious by whatever guy thought ...yeah I'm gonna carve some stuff into this WALL...that's a good idea. On one of the sections of the wall...at the very beginning there was a sort of prologue written by Diogenes explaining why he even put up the wall in the first place. He writes about being extremely troubled in his youth and that by studying Epicurus and his philosophy, he turned his life around... he achieved a level of tranquility he didn't even know was possible. He writes that the older he got, the more gratitude he had for the teachings of Epicurus and it was this gratitude that drove him to put up this wall...He said he did it "to help also those who come after us" and "to place therefore the

remedies of salvation by means of this porch.” because the wall he built was adjacent to a portico of this stoa. He said that if there were only one or two people who were lost or had been led astray in this human existence... He would just go and talk to them personally about Epicurus. Instead, he built a giant wall in the middle of a public place...because as far as he saw it, everyone was lost.

Hello Everyone, I am Stephen West, this is philosophize this! and today we return to western philosophy, at least for a while...and this episode is part 1 of a mini-series that months from now people will probably see as one block. And if you're listening to this months from now, in sequence, one after another...this next part may seem kind of repetitive or contrived, but please be considerate of the fact that we're releasing one episode every...two weeks almost and I need to re-up my gratitude for the love and support of the last two weeks. This show is growing rapidly and this audience is the nitrate fertilizer. Thank you for the donations. Thank you for following me on twitter and posting kind words on Facebook...Thank you for the emails. Just know that I'm constantly trying to find ways to become a more efficient person and shave time off of other obligations so that I can spend MORE time improving my craft and trying to bring you guys better shows. Your compassion makes me want nothing else in this world.

Ten episodes ago we started talking about the Presocratic philosophers...this group of really strange guys... with really strange ideas even by today's standards. None of them really knew what to think of this whole “philosophy” thing. Nobody really had anything figured out that well. You had all different kinds of approaches...Some of them like Thales just taught people informally, Pythagoras started a cult and super restrictive lifestyle...Heraclitus buried himself in up to his neck manure for god's sake... but despite all their different methods of philosophizing and the different results they arrived at, they were all, generally speaking, talking about the same stuff...the building blocks of metaphysics and epistemology. Then Socrates was born... and for the first time in the west you had someone using this tool of philosophy to try to discern what the most effective way to live life was. Then came Plato and Aristotle, two polymath geniuses, diametrically opposite in most ways but similar in the sense that philosophy as they pursued it was nearly impossible for the layman to relate to. There wasn't much salvation from your everyday problems in Plato telling you that there is a magical world of forms where a perfect form of everything exists...you know...some ruthless dictator may have just rode into town and sold you into slavery...but don't worry! somewhere up in the sky there is a perfect form of that shovel you're gonna be using for the rest of your life...

Keep in mind...it really helped the longevity of your philosophy as well as it's ability to even get off the ground in the first place if it had a popular following...and not just popularity among aspiring philosophers of the day, but of the average person. And really... part of what makes Plato and Aristotle so remarkable today is just how foreign the things they talked about were from the average thought process. I mean, Both of them had schools you needed to attend for years to fully grasp some of these concepts they were talking about. When it came to philosophy being useful to the average person, it must have seemed like it skipped a couple generations. So goes the infamous quote by Cicero that:

“Socrates however (was the) first (who) called philosophy down from heaven, and placed it in cities, and introduced it even in homes, and drove (it) to inquire about life and customs and things good and evil.”

But When Aristotle died in 322BC, he wasn't the only supremely important figure to keel over and die recently. Just one year earlier, Alexander the Great died...ending an uncharacteristically stable time in the life of the average citizen of Athens. The life of the average citizen was changing. Philosophy was changing. and the Hellenistic Age was beginning.

The death of Alexander the Great is one of those moments in history where it's crazy to think about what history would look like today if things went down differently. He died very mysteriously and unexpectedly. And apparently Alexander the Great wasn't watching much daytime television in his day...or he definitely would've seen the hundreds of commercials from insurance companies and law firms telling him ...hes gonna fall off a ladder a die someday...so make sure your family is protected. nope...he died so suddenly, he hadn't even named a successor...and nobody knew what to do. In the year 323 BC, suddenly the LARGEST and most powerful empire known to man at the time was just...up for grabs...and everyone was scrambling just trying to hold on to this really good thing they had going. Opinion was divided on what to do...some people thought Alexanders half brother was the best way to go...other people thought they should wait around for his unborn child to come of age...long story short...some people got murdered and chaos ensued. Constant War. Four Giant Dynasties made up of many kingdoms each, many of which just grasping at straws in this battle for succession. Even a couple hundreds years later, people were still reeling from the death of Alexander and jockeying for their own geo-political position.

The life of the average person during this time period changed dramatically with the death of Alexander. I mean...depending on where you lived...you might have a guy ride into town one week who tells you...you guys are all under my rule now...you are subservient to me. and the people would say OK...and then the guy would leave and a few weeks later someone else would come into town and say, I killed that guy...now I'm your ruler you're all subservient to me now...and so on and so forth. Things were very uncertain...and uncertainty breeds fear. People were scared...they didn't know what their future was gonna look like. And when this paradigm of the average life changed, so too did philosophy. This whole period is known as the Hellenistic age...Philosophy was shifting from a focus on metaphysics and epistemology to a focus on ethics. Philosophy was changing from something that resembled the works of Plato and Aristotle to something that more resembled the work of Socrates. Remember, Socrates was the guy that didn't have time for all those pointless abstract questions about what the universe is made of...he was more concerned with finding what the best way to live life was or how to be happy. With all the stress of the political climate of the time, Its no wonder why all of these new schools of philosophy that were cropping up were much more heavily influenced by Socrates than Plato or Aristotle.

There were three main schools... but also a fourth which is worthy of note. These were Stoicism, Epicureanism, Skepticism and later, Cynicism. Much like the four dynasties of the political

landscape...these four schools were constantly battling with each other trying to assert their dominance. Throughout this Hellenistic Age series...we're gonna be talking a lot about the relationships and battles between these schools. And in the end.. when we're left with the winner, the king of the Hellenistic Age hill, we'll realize just how important the politics of the day are in determining which Philosophical Schools emerge victorious and which fail. A concept that will be crucial in understanding the next 1500 years or so.

There aren't many people throughout history that can claim to be as misunderstood as Epicurus. I think most people think of Epicureanism as being synonymous with a life of indulgence, but this actually is very far from the truth. The entire goal of his philosophy was to increase your "Ataraxia", it was a word at the time that meant tranquility or more specifically a complete freedom from pain. For Epicurus, it was a very literal struggle against pain. Apparently he spent most of his life with chronic severe pain in his stomach and gut and it's commonly thought that he died of very bad kidney stones. I mean, he writes a letter on his death bed where he tells his friend that he knows he is going to die and that he's unable to urinate and he is in EXTREME pain. It's terrible.. But the freedom of pain that he talks about in his philosophy...the freedom of pain that someone could relate to very well in the Hellenistic age, was a completely different kind of pain.

Seven years after the death of Plato, Epicurus was born...341 BC. Every account seems to agree that he was born and raised by poor parents on a small island in the Mediterranean sea that would have been considered a relatively insignificant colony of Athens at the time... so it's important to note that for all of his childhood...all of his formative years...Epicurus lived a...maybe not a constant poverty stricken existence...but definitely a very modest and humbling existence. And much like Siddhartha Gautama... both spent their malleable years in a place that would offer an invaluable insight into what happiness truly is when developing their philosophy later. Both had access to an extreme end of the spectrum that they could contrast... their future more realistic lives with, so as not to fall victim to the common delusions about what people think they're lacking...Palaces and riches for Siddhartha...abject poverty for Epicurus...and when he finally left the island he spent all those years on...it's interesting to consider that he studied under philosophers who were direct students of two people...Plato and Democritus. When you compare the two as philosophers...they're not even in the same galaxy...If you compared innovating philosophy to the task of getting off a deserted island...Plato would be Tom Hanks in Cast Away...and Democritus would be his volleyball friend Wilson. Plato did EVERYTHING...and Democritus just kinda...floated there with that creepy smile...

But for Epicurus, it was the opposite. Democritus was the guy that he really attached himself to...he laid the groundwork for all of his metaphysics. Now, just to recap, Democritus is the guy that believed that everything we see in the world consists of atoms and void. Epicurus agreed with him. They both believed that because things we see are able to move around...they must be moving into empty space right? or else they wouldn't be able to move. So they call this empty space...Void. They also both believed that the things we see around us are composites...they're made up of many things smaller than the thing itself...because if they

weren't, then we wouldn't be able to break them into smaller pieces or cut them down to size. But on that same note, they both don't think that that process of cutting things in half can go on forever...and there must be some fundamental, unchanging, eternal building block of stuff that can explain the uniformity of the world and everything in it. That building block is the atom.

So they love each other. They agree on many things. But obviously not everything...and the differences between the Metaphysics of Epicurus and Democritus, as far as atoms go... lie in three main areas. The first one is that Epicurus believes atoms have a weight, and naturally move downward. There's all sorts of multi-generational drama at work here...let me bring you up to speed though...Previously on General Hospital: Democritus said that ALL atomic motion...all movement of atoms throughout the void...is the result of previous atomic collisions...like this atom got his by that atom and they collided and hit that atom that went flying over there...etc....then years later Aristotle threw Democritus a curve ball and said...well...that's great and all, cool story but how did they begin moving in the first place? Then Epicurus responds to Aristotle by saying that atoms have a weight, and therefore...in this pre-sir Isaac Newton world they are living in...atoms naturally would travel downward...so this explains why they started moving at the beginning of time.

But then you gotta be thinking...and I'm sure Aristotle WOULD have been thinking...well why didn't the atoms just move perfectly downward and never collide into each other? How do you explain them running into each other in the first place? Well the answer to this is the second of three differences between epicurean metaphysics and Democritean metaphysics...The swerve.

Simply put, the swerve is Epicurus's way of explaining how atoms originally collided with each other... and its just that every so often...at random times...in random intervals...an atom will kind of "swerve" to the side a bit.....That's it. Now everyone tries to compare this to modern quantum physics and how there is some infinitely small percentage chance of an atom shifting position on its own...I think it's safe to say Epicurus didn't stumble across this in 300 BC...but that's not to say there is nothing profound about this idea. The implications behind the swerve theory fueled a philosophical debate that still exists to this day.

Here's what I mean...Democritus believed in a sort of cosmic determinism...he thought that based on his theory of the universe...pick an atom...if you followed that atom...right now somewhere in the universe...and it is moving...eventually that atom is going to run into another atom and combine with it and maybe those two atoms will run into a rock or something.....the universe is so constant and predictable that you could've known the future of that atom...you could've known it was going to combine with the rock...and for that matter...you could know EVERYTHING that was EVER going to happen to that atom if you were willing to do the calculations far enough out. Humans, like rocks and planets are ALSO made up of just atoms...so everything, including human action, to Democritus were just atoms colliding and moving around in space...and in that sense that everything was already pre-determined.

But Epicurus didn't agree...he agreed that our bodies are made up of the same atoms that celestial bodies are made up of...but if this determinism was true, we would all be hopeless spectators to our bodies and their actions...passengers not in control.... You know...you'd just be hopelessly watching your atoms go to the bathroom and forget to put the toilet seat down...MILLIONS OF MEN AROUND THE WORLD WOULD HAVE AN EXCUSE...and you can't really be held accountable. And not just that... this would make morality absolutely pointless because you could never hold anyone accountable for any of their actions...it was just an unfortunate sequence and collision of atoms...he agreed with most of what Democritus said...but he held that there must be at least some small amount of free will at work here...and that's how he rationalizes the "swerve" doctrine...

A Roman Poet and staunch Epicurean named Lucretius puts it well in his poem *De Rerum Natura*

"Again, if all movement is always interconnected, the new arising from the old in a determinate order - if the atoms never swerve so as to originate some new movement that will snap the bonds of fate, the everlasting sequence of cause and effect - what is the source of the free will possessed by living things throughout the earth?"

The third difference between their theories of atoms involves his thought that the causes of our sensations come from something outside of the sensations themselves, but I think it will make the most sense and be the most memorable if we cover it in a future episode.

Let me just say...the first half of his philosophy is natural philosophy...or what in modern times we would probably just call science...and even though he got a lot of things wrong...he didn't do too badly...considering...but make no mistake his aim was to find a rational way of understanding the world that had nothing to do with gods or supernatural forces...this was extremely important to him...and if he didn't have one, ALL THE REST of his philosophy becomes much less effective. Throughout the years epicureans railed against any sort of magical or supernatural or fate driven account for some phenomena happening. Sometimes they got a little carried away. Just how you can stagnate scientific progress by blindly accepting that a supernatural force is behind something you don't understand...You can also stagnate scientific progress by prematurely accepting a rational account for why something happened without any evidence...simply because you want SOME explanation that's not supernatural. The epicureans were definitely guilty of this.

Just to make this clear...The two halves of Epicurus's philosophy fit together beautifully, but in order for the second half to work properly, Epicurus thought you NEEDED this rational explanation of the world without gods. So he naturally approached it more comprehensively than just making a few updates to Democritus and his theory of atoms.

He was an empiricist. On one hand he had to refute the rationalist descendants of Plato...and on the other he had to refute one of the major rival philosophical schools of the time...the skeptics. In other words, not only did he have to make a case for why information gathered through the senses is the BEST way to arrive at truth, but he also had to make a case that

TRUTH was something that could be obtained at all. Not exactly an easy task...but he came up with some pretty interesting ideas.

He believed that we COULD arrive at the truth, but in order for us to get there...we needed three things: sensations, preconceptions and feelings. He thought when we see any object...that object is constantly sending off a layer of atoms...one atom thick...think ripples in a pond...except the ripples are atoms and they are moving in every possible direction...and those atoms...SLAM up against our eyes or into our body...and our sense organs READ this layer of atoms and create a picture in our minds of what the world around us is. But he made it VERY clear that we need to proceed with caution. He heard the arguments from people...He heard when they said that the senses lie to us and are crude, biological instruments that deceive us all the time...why should we trust them? Well, Epicurus thought that it wasn't the SENSES that were deceiving us...our MINDS were deceiving us. And this is where the preconceptions and feelings come into play...the way Epicurus saw it...how can we blame the sense organs? The eyes or ears or nose are just transmitting information...it is purely mechanical...the EYES aren't making judgments that the world IS a certain way or ISNT a certain way. That's YOU doing that. That's your mind.

At the same time, he recognized that the senses weren't perfect...he just thought it was dumb to go against EVERYTHING the senses tell us...because if you went extreme and discounted EVERYTHING the senses told you...you would have no reference point to relate other information to...He says it in number 23 of his [principal doctrines](#):

"If you fight against all your sensations, you will have no standard to which to refer, and thus no means of judging even those sensations which you claim are false."

He gives a great example about seeing a tower in the distance...If you were half a mile away from that tower and it looked round...you would assume based on that input that the tower was round in shape...but then if you walked towards the tower and it slowly started to change...and eventually when you were only a couple hundred yards away the tower looked square...at which point were your senses lying to you? Well, he gives us an atomic explanation for distortions between your senses and the waves of atoms coming off of an object and gives us a general rule of thumb that the CLOSER you are to something the more accurate of a representation you are getting...but that's probably delving too far into it...the important rung on the ladder of epistemology is that...yeah...the senses are far from perfect...but he thought they're the best and most reliable thing we have...so really what you should do is realize the faults and limitations of them and the things they are good at. No matter what the senses tell us there is at least SOME basis in reality...they're never COMPLETELY lying to us.

And THIS is the nexus of epicurean philosophy. This is the JUNCTION STATION of the two halves of his philosophy that we were talking about earlier...we perceive the world in a flawed way because of our mind...our mind's flawed way of interpreting what the senses tell us. In the same exact way, we perceive our happiness in a flawed way because of our mind...our mind's flawed way of interpreting the situations we live in. It's not the input...it's the mind's

interpretation of that input. and if you ask me...THIS is what Epicurus should truly be remembered for. I mean...people have this misconception that Epicurus was a guy that preached constant indulgence and vice...these people have this idea that the guy was walking around telling everyone to drink a thermos full of clam chowder everyday...become 900 pounds...come on...really? It couldn't be further from the truth...but in a way he suffered the same fate of rampant gossip that Pythagoras did years earlier...because after Epicurus studied under and wasn't really happy with the way he was teaching...he set up his own philosophical schools in and then in before finally settling back down in Athens at the age of 34 where He bought a house on the outskirts of Athens and started the school he would become famous for...the Garden.

Now the Garden was very special...it accepted women and slaves as members and advocated a very communal simple life...a collection of friends all reveling in the production of Epicurus's teachings...leaving behind all the politics and ambitions that come with being a citizen living in the busy city that lead to nothing but disappointment or dissatisfaction. The only problem was...it was precisely that...a commune. The secretive cult-like atmosphere where they secluded themselves from the population... led to tons of gossip and over-simplifications of what Epicurus taught. It was kind of a perfect storm of several things all coming together. People love to draw comparisons between Epicureanism and Hedonism...they love to attach the two. Hedonism is a school of thought where pleasure is seen as the only intrinsic good and not only was it not CREATED by Epicurus...it would have been well known by the time of Epicurus...I mean Hedonism goes all the way back to even Ancient Sumeria in the Epic of Gilgamesh. You know...it says "Fill your belly. Day and night make merry. Let days be full of joy. Dance and make music day and night. These things alone are the concern of men." The problem is that the definition of pleasure varies between all of the hedonist philosophers, so it is unfair to classify Epicurus with people like the Cyrenaics and think of them all as the same. But years later, the hedonism of Roman times...when they were conquering and looting the world, would have been associated with Epicureanism. But he wasn't an advocate of just ANY pleasure, or anything anyone could possibly perceive to be pleasure.

He thought it was OBVIOUS that PLEASURE is the goal of life...i mean we all start from birth with the knowledge that pleasure is a positive experience and pain is one we should avoid, but the important distinction he makes is that there are two kinds of pleasure. Kinetic pleasure and Static Pleasure. Kinetic pleasure is also known as "Moving" pleasure...and it's what most people think of when they think of pleasure...an example of kinetic pleasure would be like eating a half gallon of ice cream when you're hungry...you experience kinetic pleasure when you are actively in the process of satisfying a desire...like hunger in this case. Your senses are stimulated in a pleasurable way...most people see this as pleasure.

But once you've actually ladled the half-gallon of Rocky Road into your stomach... you aren't hungry anymore...once your desire has been fulfilled... a certain state of being overcomes you. You are satisfied. You are no longer DESIRING that thing anymore. Epicurus says that this state of tranquility is also a type of pleasure...a static pleasure...and whether we realize it or not, it is the BEST kind of pleasure and the kind we should strive for. So in other words, pleasure in its

purest form is just the absence of pain...and when we desire something, we see ourselves as lacking in some way...which also counts as a form of pain. As humans were constantly thrown back and forth on a crazy ride between these two states. In number 8 of his principle doctrines he says:

“No pleasure is a bad thing in itself, but the things which produce certain pleasures entail disturbances many times greater than the pleasures themselves.”

On this same note, he thought a lot of people wrongly believe that once they've reached this tranquility...this static pleasure...that by treating themselves to a kinetic pleasure... THAT will increase their level of happiness. For example...lets say it's really cold outside...and you want a jacket. You desire warmth. What Epicurus is saying is that once that warmth is satisfied...lets say with a 20 dollar jacket from Target...there's not much difference in pleasure between that 20 dollar jacket from Target and a \$3000 jacket from Nordstrom. There's a point of diminishing returns, and for Epicurus it is that point of static pleasure...the absence of pain.

If you don't agree with the jacket example...if you're thinking it's not true...just think of how ridiculous it would seem if you tried to increase your pleasure with a kinetic pleasure while you were in pain. Imagine if you were riding your bike...and a car hits you and breaks your leg in six places. You're just lying on the ground writhing in pain...screaming for help. And then the ambulance comes...the EMT comes up to you on the ground...looks at your leg and says “I know what you need...here's a nice vanilla ice cream come little guy there you go!” and pats you on the head.....NO! that's not what I need...I want to go to the hospital! I want this pain to go away...In the same way the kinetic pleasure is USELESS when it comes to actually increasing your level of pleasure in THAT context...Epicurus thinks it is equally as useless at actually increasing your pleasure when nothing is wrong. He expands on which desires are good and bad in number 26 of his principle doctrines:

“All desires that do not lead to pain when they remain unsatisfied are unnecessary, but the desire is easily got rid of when the thing desired is difficult to obtain or the desires seem likely to produce harm.”

So, pleasure is really about removing things that cause pain. And we have to be careful about choosing what we THINK will bring us pleasure that might in the long run bring us pain. And besides...all these physical pleasures and pains are secondary anyway. The really important part is achieving a state of MENTAL static pleasure...or mental tranquility. It is the more powerful, more useful and ultimate form of pleasure. The goal of life. Now when we have the broken leg...its very obvious to us which pain needs to go away...but how do we figure out what is preventing us from MENTAL tranquility?

Epicurus thought that people live in a constant state of irrational fear, anxiety and superstition. The biggest causes of these fears are the fear of death or the fear of being trapped in some really terrible afterlife for all of eternity...a fear of the gods. But Epicurus wasn't too worried about the gods...as far as he saw it...for some reason everyone thinks of these gods as existing in some blissful...tranquil state of being...but also believes that they are perpetually concerning

themselves with all the troubles and woes of humans living on planet earth. He thought that the gods must exist, but they just...don't want anything to do with humans...too much trouble. And it certainly explains why they're working so hard to conceal themselves from everyone all the time. We should view the lore surrounding them as a lifestyle to emulate...not as something to fear after death. So great...we don't have to fear the gods anymore...that's a weight lifted off of our shoulders. But what about death? Certainly were justified in being anxious and scared about death right?

Well...no. And this is why understanding his metaphysics and epistemology is so important, because having that knowledge, the rational explanation for the mechanics of the world works so well with his ethics and his view on "what is the best way to live life?" According to principle doctrine number two of Epicurus:

["Death is nothing to us"](#); for that which has been dissolved into its elements experiences no sensations, and that which has no sensation is nothing to us."

[Death is nothing to us](#). Human beings consist of only atoms. The human mind or soul is just another component of a human, and must also consist only of atoms. So therefore...when you die...the atoms that make up your mind...just like the ones that make up your body...will disperse and all go their separate ways...and you have no sense organs...so you are incapable of sensing anything. See... people got it all wrong....the STATE of death isn't unpleasant...maybe the PROCESS of dying will be...but once were dead... we don't exist anymore...[Death is nothing to us](#)...the Roman poet Lucretious would later say:

"the mind must be made of matter and suffer same fate as the body"

Epicurus says in his principle doctrine number 10 that:

"If the things that produce the pleasures of profligate men really freed them from fears of the mind concerning celestial and atmospheric phenomena, the fear of death, and the fear of pain; if, further, they taught them to limit their desires, we should never have any fault to find with such persons, for they would then be filled with pleasures from every source and would never have pain of body or mind, which is what is bad."

Remember, the goal of life is pleasure...but the only way you can achieve true pleasure, ataraxia... is by first understanding the nature of things...the rational explanation for the physical structure of the universe. Then once you realize that you're just atoms and void like everything else...and you're not going through some... obstacle course constantly trying to earn your spot into Andy's toy Box in the sky...you know...like in toy story...because the gods have new toys to play with, alive on planet earth...and you're just a relic of the past in a constant state of limbo...I thought it was clever...once you understand all that...then you can ACTUALLY set out to achieve happiness in this life. We don't NEED immortality to have a good life...in fact...constantly worrying about it just wastes time in the short stint we DO have on this planet. It's really interesting how as humans we agonize over the quantity of our life so much. I was talking to a woman from France one time and she told me that Americans and French

people see food in two completely different ways. In France, it's about having just a couple bites of the most high quality, delicious, most excellently prepared food possible...and in America its about eating as much low-quality, overly salted fat filled stuff we can...we love to feel stuffed. Now obviously both are generalizations, but in the same way a wise person would want a couple bites of really high quality food as opposed to a mountain of french fries...Epicurus thinks that a wise person would want a couple bites of super high quality life...as opposed to an eternity of dissatisfaction.

Elimination of all these mental fears is the ultimate form of pleasure, and thus the goal to life.

And to experience these fears and superstitions is a form of pain. The medication for this pain...was philosophy. When we think about anxiety and fear we don't really see it as a form of pain...but Epicurus did. He almost approached his philosophy as though it was medicine. He famously said:

"Empty is the word of that philosopher by whom no affliction of men is cured. For as there is no benefit in medicine if it does not treat the diseases of the body, so with philosophy, if it does not drive out the affliction of the soul."

His medical themed approach to ending pain and achieving a state of tranquility completely devoid of fear and anxiety was called Tetrapharmacos...directly translated it means...The four fold remedy...Don't pay attention to the similarities between his plan to end pain and achieve tranquility by following his four fold remedy and Siddhartha Gautama plan to end suffering and achieve tranquility by following his eightfold path.

He thought philosophy was medicine for the soul. he thought if we can understand four things, it would dramatically help us on our quest towards a happy life.

The four were God holds no fear...Death holds no worries...Good can easily be attained...and Evil can be endured. The first one... God holds no fears we've talked about this one... once you realize the nature of the universe...you realize that no God living in a state of bliss would ever be worried about you as a mere human.

The second one...Death holds no worries..Again we already touched on this...the soul is made of atoms and... just like the body...will find itself in a state of dissolution. [Death is nothing to us.](#)

The third one...Good can easily be attained...If the only intrinsic good is pleasure...and pleasure is just the absence of pain and the satisfied feeling you get when your basic natural desires are met..then it seems... pretty easy to feel pleasure.

The last one is that evil can be endured...or more specifically...pain can be endured... remember I said maybe the PROCESS of dying might be terrible...well this is the contingency plan if that's the situation you find yourself in. There are a few different strategies...some involve reliving good times in your past but the more fool proof one is to realize that the more severe the pain is...the less time it's going to last. Basically he's saying you know that stabbing

pain in your chest? Don't worry about it! If it's bad enough...you're gonna die soon anyway!
Hooray!

So I want you to imagine yourself as an Epicurean...your life would be a simple one...living in the commune on the outskirts of Athens...away from the hustle and business of the city...with no ambitions other than to remove your desire of ambitions and increase your ataraxia. It was Athenian Culture to have aspirations of one day... making a bunch of money...or gaining military prestige...or succeeding in politics and making a difference...you know it was all about being a citizen and contributing to society. That's just what you did. But as an Epicurean, you wouldn't care about any of that stuff...you would focus on the complete removal of pain and all you needed for that were your basic needs met. He says in his principle doctrine number 15:

"The wealth required by nature is limited and is easy to procure; but the wealth required by vain ideals extends to infinity."

Remember the example from before...if you've already had dinner and you aren't hungry and you decide to have a bowl of ice cream, it doesn't increase your level of pleasure much at all...well just like that, Epicureans would focus on meeting their basic needs and not worry about changing the world or making tons of money...all that stuff is really just like a bowl of ice cream...it's not increasing your pleasure much at all. It's actually really consistent with the way statistics seem to be heading in modern times...Have you guys ever seen those studies where it's like a happiness index...and the difference between the level of happiness people experience in relation to their income? The ones I've seen always show the difference in happiness between \$0 in income per year and something like \$50,000 a year in income is MASSIVE...no comparison between the two...but the difference in happiness between \$50,000 a year and \$50 million a year is almost nothing. The point of the study is that once people make enough money to pay for their basic needs, it doesn't matter how many cigars you light with \$100 bills...you don't get that much happier. This seems to be the idea that Epicurus had when he set up the Garden. As an Epicurean...Politics and Prestige were not important...in fact Epicurus often said things like "withdraw from public life and focus on a private group". And this "private group" he was referring to...were the fellow members of the commune...your friends! If meditation was the way you cultivate happiness in Buddhism...then in Epicureanism...friendship was the way you can cultivate the steady and long lasting joys that counter the inevitable pain of life. He famously said:

"Before you eat or drink anything, carefully consider with whom you eat or drink rather than what you eat or drink because eating without a friend is the life of the lion or a wolf"

See, pleasure was the goal of life...and Epicurus thought that friendship is one of the greatest ways to gain pleasure. Friends contribute in a number of ways to the complete removal of pain from our lives. Firstly, they make us feel secure, not just emotionally secure...but they always have your back. I remember when I was thinking about getting married, I was asking people, "In today's modern society, in a world where your church doesn't label you as a social pariah for NOT getting married...and in a world where women are perfectly capable of being self-

sufficient...in a world where there's no risk of dying of Typhoid Fever at the age of 25...other than a slightly increased tax return...why would anyone get married?" And everyone I talked to said the same thing...it's just nice to know that no matter what happens...no matter how bad things get or seem, you can ALWAYS count on SOMEONE being there for you. Epicurus saw that level of security as one of the perks of having friends. Another way friends help to remove pain from your life is that they help you to reason properly. Throughout your day to day life...when you become emotionally attached to things...it is really easy sometimes to deceive yourself and convince yourself that something is true that isn't. If Epicurus was alive today and saw the show American Idol, he would DEFINITELY think that the first few weeks of the show...the audition phase...is full of people that don't have very many good friends. One of the biggest mysteries of the known universe...right next to finding a link between quantum physics and string theory...one that I'm sure Stephen Hawking is working on right now...is how these people go from singing in the shower to singing on national television completely unscathed. I mean, does anyone love these people? Don't these people have mothers that care about them? These people are a good example of when friends in the epicurean sense could help out. They've convinced themselves they can sing, and a true friend can shine light on their delusions and help remove or prevent the future pain of Simon Cowell telling them "that was dreadful". Friends, in this way, provide an objective interpretation of ourselves. In Buddhism, it was a life of constant self-reflection...removing yourself from your own ego and thus removing the delusions we cloud ourselves with or at least finding which ones were destructive. In Epicureanism, our friends act as a neutral third party that calls us out when we're fooling ourselves. But the type of friendship Epicurus is talking about is not the type of friendship we are accustomed to in modern times...in order to truly benefit from friends...you couldn't just...send them a text every now and then...or see them sporadically...you needed to LIVE with them...be with them all the time...and that was the life you would have lived in the commune. Friendship was about trust, and you needed to consider the well-being of your friends as equal to your own well-being. I mean, after all, sometimes being a good friend means sacrificing yourself in some small way so that your friend receives benefits. And this is one of the most controversial points of Epicurus's philosophy...and one I'm sure countless academics over the years have wished they had more of his work to dissect to... find, authoritatively, his true feelings on the matter. It all centers around an interpretation of one quote...principal doctrine number 5:

"It is impossible to live a pleasant life without living wisely and honorably and justly, and it is impossible to live wisely and honorably and justly without living pleasantly. Whenever any one of these is lacking, when, for instance, the man is not able to live wisely, though he lives honorably and justly, it is impossible for him to live a pleasant life."

On one side of the fence you have people that say that Epicurus was completely amoral...meaning that there are no good things or bad things in themselves...just things that add to or detract from your level of pleasure...or ataraxia. So...in this case...the idea of altruism wasn't his favorite thing...because if you're making sacrifices or forgoing potential pleasure so that someone else, even your friends, can be better off for it...then you are by definition...at

least in some small way...in pain. And based on his egoist hedonistic philosophy, if you are in pain, you are doing the wrong thing. And I'd like to direct your attention back to the quote by Dr. Epicurus..."it is impossible to live a pleasant life without living wisely."

On the other side of the fence you have people that respond to this with principal doctrine number 8...we said it earlier "No pleasure is a bad thing in itself, but the things which produce certain pleasures entail disturbances many times greater than the pleasures themselves." You can smoke a cigarette now, and maybe it will relieve stress and make you look super cool in the short term...but eventually...years from now you will get lung cancer and die. Epicurus would not condone this behavior because the pain you receive in the long term completely overrides the pleasure you get in the short term. Conversely, the sum total of ALL the benefits that having close friends give you in the long term, completely override whatever insignificant amount of pleasure you would get in the short term from not acting altruistically. These people argue that Epicurus really thought that acting altruistically is a self-serving venture and that the benefits of having friends actually increases your net pleasure overall. For Epicurus, all the different forms of virtues that other philosophers laid out are actually all forms of prudence, or expertly choosing what is best for you.