

Charles' Personal Outline

Post by “Charles” of September 3, 2019 at 4:04 PM

Here is my personal outline of my Epicurean Philosophy, a bit messy though, with some slight deviations.

1. The Nature of Things and of The Universe

1. Nothing comes from nothing, and that nothing leads to nothing.
2. When I die, my body and its elements will return to the earth and the universe, my soul and mind with it.
3. Everything within the universe is comprised of physical materials called matter (Atoms<-Quarks), and the lack of matter or its specific properties acting as a catalyst: *void*.
4. This matter exists within reality and of the void.
5. The void allows matter to move across the universe, like a fabric supporting water droplets or bits of pollen moving end to end.
6. The laws of nature, are predisposed to exist through some mechanism of the moving and properties of matter.
7. Because of these two substances, we can do away with religious or supernatural explanations for understanding the laws of nature.
8. Since we have done away with those two, we can rule out any credence in their eligibility.
9. Since [nothing can be created from nothing](#), the universe must have always existed in some fashion or another.
10. While it may be easy to say that matter is infinite, it may just be infinite in our comprehension.
11. The universe is ever expanding, but will one day collapse on itself when all matter is exhausted.
12. However, because of the complex nature of higher beings (humans, dolphins, elephants, pigs, etc.), the movement of atoms/matter is not always perfect and its path is determined by probabilistic causes that are bound to collide (*Atomic Collision*) or conversely, "swerve".
13. The swerve of atoms in higher beings is precisely what gives us and complex animals the agency of free will.

2. How we are sure of our knowledge and other epistemological canons

1. Since we have ruled out the idea of the supernatural, superstitious, or religious means. We rely on our senses to determine the nature of the universe for us.
2. Our senses do not mislead us, it is our minds that can misinterpret the truth of our senses.

3. We are not born with innate knowledge of our surroundings or of the universe, upon birth our minds are like a blank slate to be filled through direct sensory experiences, much like Locke's *tabula rasa*.
4. What we are fed from our sensory experiences is thus interpreted through reason, leading to knowledge to be stored away in our minds.
5. Through mathematics, we have set up a system of defining universal principles and measurements of certain objects/concepts, such as the circumference of Earth being 24,901 mi or its surface area being 196.9 million mi².
6. There are three initial criterion for the validity of truth: sensations, preconceptions, and feelings.
7. A fourth criterion can also be applied: "presentational applications of the mind", for discussing things which we cannot observe, but can perceive directly but strictly in our minds.

3. Epicurean Ethics: or how I learned to stop worrying and love the Tetrapharmakos

1. Since the concepts of religious afterlife and divinity are brushed off, our conduct and attention must be grounded in reality and where we live (Earth, ISS, etc.).
2. Part of that conduct, includes virtue and its purpose, the purpose of living pleurably, not as a reward to live in the afterlife.
3. To live pleurably alongside virtue, one must use virtue as a stepping stone when one sees fit, not the other way around.
4. Since there are no gods, the only other limiting factor to our way of life is death itself.
5. However we must not fear death, as the fear of death is enhanced by superstitions of punishment or banishment.
6. To counter this fear we must acknowledge the following: "*[Death is nothing to us. When we exist, death is not; and when death exists, we are not. All sensation and consciousness ends with death and therefore in death there is neither pleasure nor pain. The fear of death arises from the belief that in death, there is awareness.](#)*"
7. In addition to acknowledging that quote, we must dispel the fear that we will not accomplish what we have wanted prior to dying.
8. To dispel that fear, you must acknowledge that if you regret what you have not done or what will be done in the future, ask yourself if you regret not being a part of the past and the discoveries/activities of yore.
9. If you do, then think why you are in a constant negative-feedback loop of never being satisfied with what you can do right now within your lifespan.
10. To achieve a pleurable life, you must derive pleasure from the most basic desires in life: that is both natural and necessary.
11. In addition, you must resist and avoid the desires that are both; natural and unnecessary and unnatural and unnecessary.
12. However, there may be some leniency towards desires that are natural and unnecessary such as having a healthy sex life or going out with friends to a nicer

- restaurant.
13. Remember that bodily pleasures are intense, but an over indulgence in certain bodily pleasures will lead to harm over time or as a result.
 14. To even obtain the corresponding mental pleasures, one must first engage in the activity that sparked the pleasure to begin with, such as having a fond memory of a conversation with a friend.
 15. It is also worth noting that what is terrible in life is easy to endure.
 16. Setbacks are bound to happen to everyone, and from that pain (or any other sort of pain) we learn and can do our best to avoid it in the future.
 17. Intense physical pain, while difficult to bear, will likely not last long.
 18. Intense physical pain that is chronic and lasts long, is rare and more often than not will lead to death, or becomes something you become used to. In my case, I have painful chronic migraines with no cure or remedy to truly avoid them, thus I have accepted it as a part of life and embrace the fact that there are worse pains to avoid.
 19. In order to live a more pleasurable life, we must take a look at each of our actions to determine their outcome, and if it means pain in the present for pleasure in the long term, then it is advisable to accept that.
 20. It is often easy to lose sight of the balance between living frugal and modestly, and living the excess life of a hedonist, but as long as you can balance both, you will be fine. VS 63 states: *"There is also a limit in simple living, and he who fails to understand this falls into an error as great as that of the man who gives way to extravagance."*
 21. It is also important to be ambitious and challenge adversity when you see fit, for the opposite is to sit idly and be "content with what you have". Epicurus was an extremely ambitious person who took the risk to found a school to teach his controversial teachings right between Plato's Academy and the Stoa. He also wrote over 300 books on various subjects, we should strive to always work or produce something.
 22. While also being productive and ambitious in a quiet matter, we should avoid the unnecessary strife that is political argumentation or a toxic friendship or relationship, for these are incompatible with living a pleasant life and having a tranquil mind.
 23. If someone close to you is suffering, it is up to you to do whatever it is in your power to help them, the same can be said of a suffering world.
 24. As always: philosophy's first and primary objective should be to alleviate human suffering and provide clarity and betterment for ourselves.
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Post by "Cassius" of September 3, 2019 at 6:10 PM

Wow that is a great and elaborate outline Charles. You've really given some thought to each aspect of Epicurus. Is this recent with you, or have you been studying the physics and the epistemology in addition to the ethics?

There are many many details that can be discussed and I will start with just a few:

[Quote from Charles Edwins](#)

We are not born with innate knowledge of our surroundings or of the universe, upon birth our minds are like a blank slate to be filled through direct sensory experiences, much like Locke's tabula rasa.

Rather than disagree with you on this, let me ask you: (1) Have you read DeWitt's material on Anticipations? (2) What do you perceive Anticipations to be?

[Quote from Charles Edwins](#)

A fourth criterion can also be applied: "presentational applications of the mind", for discussing things which we cannot observe, but can perceive directly but strictly in our minds.

This you presumably read in Diogenes Laertius. What is your understanding as to why Epicurus had only three criterion, and what is your understanding as to why other/later Epicureans added the fourth category?

[Quote from Charles Edwins](#)

Part of that conduct, includes virtue and its purpose, the purpose of living pleurably, not as a reward to live in the afterlife.

To live pleurably alongside virtue, one must use virtue as a stepping stone when one sees fit, not the other way around.

On these two items, how do you define "virtue" and how does one determine what is virtuous in any particular set of circumstances?

Post by "Cassius" of September 3, 2019 at 6:13 PM

[Quote from Charles Edwins](#)

In addition to acknowledging that quote, we must dispel the fear that we will not accomplish what we have wanted prior to dying.

To dispel that fear, you must acknowledge that if you regret what you have not done or what will be done in the future, ask yourself if you regret not being a part of the past and the discoveries/activities of yore.

If you do, then think why you are in a constant negative-feedback loop of never being satisfied with what you can do right now within your lifespan.

This is a very interesting thought that I have not seen made before. I want to think about this one but I pulled it out in hopes that others can comment to. No doubt we want to avoid being in a constant negative-feedback loop. However I think I am wondering whether sentences two and three really address the same point.

Can or should we entertain a sense of urgency about what we want to accomplish before we die separately and apart from the question of whether we regret being a part of history before we were born?

Post by “Cassius” of September 3, 2019 at 6:16 PM

[Quote from Charles Edwins](#)

In addition, you must resist and avoid the desires that are both; natural and unnecessary and unnatural and unnecessary.

However, there may be some leniency towards desires that are natural and unnecessary such as having a healthy sex life or going out with friends to a nicer restaurant.

As you note here there is a tension involved. I was also going to ask you "What sections, if any, of this outline do you think are the "weakest" or need better articulation. I personally think the "natural and necessary" division is helpful for analysis to the extent that it reminds us that pleasures that require great effort will probably entail great pain, but if we then turn that into an absolute standard by thinking that the same same pleasures are going to entail the same difficulties for everyone, then we risk erecting a false standard that falls into the same trap as thinking that "virtue" is the same for everyone everywhere.

Post by “Cassius” of September 3, 2019 at 6:24 PM

[Quote from Charles Edwins](#)

It is also worth noting that what is terrible in life is easy to endure.

And this formulation is why I am so careful not to overuse or apply the Tetracharmakon too broadly. On its face this statement would be perceived by many people to be ridiculous, uncaring of their suffering, etc. And since this statement does not come from Epicurus himself, but from an uncertain author in a Herculaneum papyrus without surrounding context, I would be very careful applying it too broadly.

My personal view is that the best way to deal with this issue is to cite the full PD4 -

"4. Continuous bodily pain does not last long; instead, pain, if extreme, is present a very short time, and even that degree of pain which slightly exceeds bodily pleasure does not last for many days at once. Diseases of long duration allow an excess of bodily pleasure over pain." -

...While at the same time remembering that this is part of a sequence of philosophical positions that are (IMHO) clearly intended to address anti-Epicurean talking points (Plato's [Philebus](#) in particular) that concerned the viability of pleasure as the theoretical highest goal.

I find it very difficult to believe that Epicurus ever looked at a suffering friend and said "What is terrible in life is easy to endure" or anything like that.

The Tetracharmakon is an easy to use formulation for those who understand the theory, but IMHO this formulation is the worst of the four, with "don't fear the gods" coming in second, "what's good is easy to get" third, and the least offensive (because it is most true to the sense of the PD from which it comes) being "don't fear death."

Post by "Cassius" of September 3, 2019 at 6:26 PM

[Quote from Charles Edwins](#)

It is also important to be ambitious and challenge adversity when you see fit, for the opposite is to sit idly and be "content with what you have". Epicurus was an extremely ambitious person who took the risk to found a school to teach his controversial teachings right between Plato's Academy and the Stoa. He also wrote over 300 books on various subjects, we should strive to always work or produce something.

Oh my, you have won hundreds of bonus points with me for that one!

If you recognize that then I can't imagine you'll ever decide that living in a cave on bread and water would be the ideal life, or that we fail at being good Epicureans if we don't choose to do so!

Post by “Joshua” of September 3, 2019 at 8:04 PM

Quote

In addition to acknowledging that quote, we must dispel the fear that we will not accomplish what we have wanted prior to dying.

I like the echo of Montaigne here;

"I want death to find me planting my cabbages, but careless of death, and still less of my unfinished garden."

Montaigne was a brilliant Latinist (it was his first language, due to an unusual education prepared for him by his father), and was an early Renaissance figure to not only read Lucretius but praise him highly, and quote him liberally in his own essays.

Post by “Charles” of September 4, 2019 at 10:44 AM

Thanks everyone for the replies.

[Cassius](#) I'll get back to you later today when I'm off work. There's a ton to unpack there.

Post by “Hiram” of September 4, 2019 at 1:54 PM

[Quote from Charles Edwins](#)

The universe is ever expanding, but will one day collapse on itself when all matter is exhausted.

Can you explain what you mean by this one?

Matter can not be "exhausted" because it can't be turned into nothing, only into energy / other matter--nothing comes from nothing.

For that reason, cosmological theories of this sort are still very speculative. I think one of the theories I've read is that black holes may swallow all matter eventually, but if this happens, then the matter will still be there (just gravity won't let it escape), or black holes may eject the matter into other universes following whatever laws of nature we have yet to discover regarding black holes. But we know that matter swallowed by black holes does not disappear because otherwise, they would not have the gravity to keep in all the light in them (and we already have photographic evidence of this, as of a few months ago).

Post by “Cassius” of September 4, 2019 at 2:05 PM

Yes I agree with Hiram there. The key problem is the word "universe" which I take to mean, in the older conventional sense - "Everything that exists."

In Epicurean theory it is not "Everything that exists" that will collapse upon itself, but only a localized solar system / star system / galaxy or whatever wider astronomical term floats your boat as long as that term reflects something less than the whole. This is part of the issue that "everything that comes together eventually splits apart" but that can't contradict the "nothing comes from nothing" first premise.

The universe as a whole would not collapse into nothing because it is eternal and time (never came from nothing) as well as boundless and there is no space "outside it" or "beyond it" from which it could collapse.

Now of course I know there are modern theories that might contradict this, but we're first concerned about understanding what Epicurus taught. I personally agree with the Epicurean model of the universe, but of course I can still acknowledge that others might want to dispute that. What's important is to stay precise and keep distinction between (1) what we think, what (2) Epicurus taught, and (3) what some segment of modern theoretical physicists might allege.

Post by “Hiram” of September 4, 2019 at 2:17 PM

[Quote from Charles Edwins](#)

1. In addition, you must resist and avoid the desires that are both; natural and unnecessary and unnatural and unnecessary.
1. However, there may be some leniency towards desires that are natural and unnecessary such as having a healthy sex life or going out with friends to a nicer restaurant.

Can I ask why you feel we must "resist and AVOID" pleasures that are natural, yet unnecessary? I am including PD 26 and 30 for reference at the bottom, but concerning "resist and avoid", the founders of Epicureanism argued that **we must sternly reject only HARMFUL desires**, not unnecessary ones (VS 21).

21. We must not force Nature but persuade her. We shall persuade her if we satisfy the necessary desires and also those bodily desires that do not harm us while sternly rejecting those that are harmful.

In other words, it is not in our nature to shun pleasure (PD 20). We should enjoy them, but do so intelligently.

Quote

26. All such desires as lead to no pain when they remain ungratified are unnecessary, and the longing is easily got rid of, when the thing desired is difficult to procure or when the desires seem likely to produce harm.

30. Those natural desires which entail no pain when not gratified, though their objects are vehemently pursued, are also due to illusory opinion; and when they are not got rid of, it is not because of their own nature, but because of the person's illusory opinion.

Post by "Hiram" of September 4, 2019 at 2:40 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

This is a very interesting thought that I have not seen made before. I want to think about this one but I pulled it out in hopes that others can comment to. No doubt we want to avoid being in a constant negative-feedback loop. However i think I am

wondering whether sentences two and three really address the same point.

Can or should we entertain a sense of urgency about what we want to accomplish before we die separately and apart from the question of whether we regret being a part of history before we were born?

Concerning what we accomplish prior to death, this is from my reasonings about Philodemus' scroll on death (I remember also a portion on the death of a youth, whose name I don't remember now, and how his death was unfortunate because he hadn't lived long enough to study philosophy and live pleasantly, and know the things that make life worth living--so it seems like a certain age and maturity is considered a sufficient natural lifespan to have lived well):

<http://societyofepicurus.com/reasonings-abo...demus-on-death/>

Quote

Unfinished Business

We all have projects that we would like to see concluded. Many people feel that they wish to leave a lasting legacy, but Philodemus says that very few great men achieve this and that this is an empty and vain desire. If fame while alive is empty, then fame after one is dead is even less of a source of true pleasure.

Sometimes it's not death, but necessity or fortune that impedes us from achieving our goals in life and materializing our plans. Therefore, if we are concerned about dying prior to seeing one of our goals achieved, we should apply the same consolations that we apply in life to these troubles. If we know what matters (the chief goods), we're unaffected and enjoy the good things in life, the things that make life worth living, unperturbed. It is here that Philodemus speaks of how the prudent man lives ready for his burial.

38.14 The sensible man, having received that which can secure the whole of what is sufficient for a happy life ... goes about laid out for burial, and he profits by (each) day as if would by eternity.

One naturally feels concern for those close to us that have problems or who lack an art of living and haven't learned to be happy. But these are things that are outside our control. Philodemus argues that the man who has lived well should not lament others' miseries after he has escaped his own: he should go to his death happy that he lived well.

Post by “Cassius” of September 4, 2019 at 4:39 PM

This last part gets back to the issue that since life is desirable, it is always desirable to live longer if it can be done net pleasantly. I think all deductions that would contradict that are on conflict with what Epicurus intended and derive from intrusions from ascetic viewpoints.

Post by “Elayne” of September 4, 2019 at 5:25 PM

I am confused by #12 under Physics, that the swerve is a consequence of biological complexity rather than that the universe has always been probabilistic. I don't think there's evidence for that, but if you have evidence can you cite it? Also, the use of the word "perfect", with swerves as a deviation from perfect, implies an ideal-- I understand the Epicurean position as saying ideals are nonexistent rather than that the material universe fails to achieve them.

Post by “Elayne” of September 4, 2019 at 5:47 PM

The tabula rasa is not generally thought to be accurate these days-- there are a few holdouts, but they are regarded as similar to flat-earthers. Like other species, humans appear to have some innate pattern recognition. Some of these innate "programs" are online at birth and others appear in developmental sequence as the brain matures-- but just because the pattern recognition shows up later doesn't mean it is empirical, vs innate. Linguistics has provided some of the supporting research... also, babies in all cultures, independent of variations in experience, show specific behaviors and understandings at specific ages. Smiling, object permanence, sharing behaviors, and specific fears of snakes despite no past exposure, the dark, being left alone (reliably by 6 months old) appear on a schedule. Babies even have rudimentary physics expectations, at the same ages, not thought to be only from observation. This makes sense because evolutionary pressure would select for these patterns supporting survival to reproduce. If we had to learn everything from scratch that would be inefficient and risky.

It appears that we have an innate sense of justice that may be based on symmetry, as we would expect from the tit for tat models. And think about partnership preferences which may be influenced by the expected health of the partner/ child bearing/raising potential-- these are likely not learned only by observing other partnerships and outcomes, because there wouldn't

have been sufficient data by the time of sexual maturity. Instead, evolution has done that slowly.

Epicurus' prolepses fit these findings perfectly IMO!

Post by “Elayne” of September 4, 2019 at 5:58 PM

23 and 24 ... if someone is "close" to me, meaning I love them, of course my pleasure will naturally be tied up in theirs. But a "suffering world" concept may not wind up being helpful to your happiness. You may find that Epicurus' way of treating humans as specific individuals is a better route to pleasure. The other might lead you into idealist social utilitarianism, which doesn't follow from the philosophy.

#24 My advice-- if clarity doesn't cause pleasure, who needs it? But if clarity on a certain issue increases pleasure, then it's a useful tool. What is "betterment"? Something different from pleasure?

Your philosophy has several elements in common with Epicurus, and a few that might pull you away from a life of pleasure.

Post by “Hiram” of September 5, 2019 at 8:44 AM

On tabula rasa, I never delved too deep into the subject but I do know that babies recognize mothers' nipples 😊 and social instincts are innate, and that Darwin observed tiny birds in the Galapagos that experience panic and call out for their parents whenever they see a plane flying over them. This in spite of the lack of birds of prey that eat them in galapagos, but their South American ancestors did get eaten by condors. This means that this panic instinct was not learned but inherited, and it's difficult to imagine that 1000's of species survived for millions of years without similar inherited instincts.