

# Discussion of the Society of Epicurus' 20 Tenets of 12/21/19

Post by “Hiram” of December 22, 2019 at 12:14 PM

## Admin Edit

### ADMIN NOTE BY CASSIUS 01/07/20:

This is a thread for discussion of the [Society of Epicurus' 20 Tenets posted on 12/21/19](#). The thread is now closed, but it is retained here for historical interest as it touches on many aspects of the issues involved in forming an Epicurean (or any other) organization.

As stated in the description of this forum, the Society of Epicurus is a project led by Hiram Crespo which is independent of and separate from Epicureanfriends.com. The positions taken by Hiram and/or the Society of Epicurus should not be presumed to be the same as those of the moderators of Epicureanfriends. As this thread will illustrate, there are instances of agreement and there are also instances of dramatic differences of opinion. Also, note that this set of 20 Tenets is labelled with 12/21/19 as a reference to the original list. As I understand it the list is subject to revision and is likely to be different as of the date you are reading this post. Finally, there are many excellent points made by many people in this thread - my own point by point commentary is [here](#).

## The 20 Tenets of Society of Friends of Epicurus 12/21/19

[Lea en español.](#)

In the initial years of forming groups of friends and intellectual peers with the goal of studying, applying, and teaching Epicurean philosophy, we have frequently considered that it might be a good idea to have a concise, summarized set of clear Tenets to facilitate the process of teaching, to connect theory with practice, and to more clearly explain what it is that we believe in.

This has not been easy. We do not wish to risk over-simplifying ideas that, when summarized, lose either their potency or some aspect of them that requires further qualification in order to avoid grave errors. We also wish to keep a big tent that allows for opinions that are varied, yet orthodox enough to still be coherent with EP. Hence, for instance, the “three acceptable interpretations” of Epicurean theology in Tenet 12.

Ancient and modern Epicureans have always been encouraged to write down Outlines of their personal philosophy. This actually has great benefits: it helps to cognitively organize and make sense of what we believe, to find the coherence between our values and ideas, and to articulate them clearly. The Tenets are roughly based on the Outline that I (Hiram) wrote some time ago, edited and expanded.

The first five Tenets relate to the Canon (or, epistemology). The next five relate to the Physics (or, the nature of things). The final ten relate to the Ethics (or, the art of living). These are the three parts of Epicurean philosophy. In the notes section, you will find Epicurean sources and essays cross-referenced for each Tenet.

1. **“Objective” nature is knowable via the sensations.**
2. **“Subjective” nature is knowable via the value-setting pleasure and aversion faculties, by which we know what is choice-worthy and avoidance-worthy.**
3. **While sensations tell us that something IS or exists, it does not tell us WHAT it is. For THAT cognitive process, we must rely on a faculty tied to both language and memory. The faculty of anticipation helps us to recognize abstractions and things previously apprehended.**
4. **We may infer the unseen / un-apprehended based on what has been previously seen / apprehended by any of our faculties; and we may re-adjust our views based on new evidence presented to our faculties.**
5. **Our words and their meanings must be clear, and conform to the attestations that nature has presented to our faculties.**
6. **All bodies are made of particles and void.**
7. **Bodies have essential properties and incidental properties.**
8. **Nothing comes from nothing.**
9. **All things operate within the laws of nature, which apply everywhere.**
10. **All that exists, exists within nature. There is no super-natural or un-natural “realm”; it would not have a way of existing outside of nature. Nature is reality.**
11. **The end that our own nature seeks is pleasure. It is also in our nature to avoid pain.**
12. **There are three acceptable interpretations of the [Epicurean gods](#): the realist interpretation, the idealist interpretation, and the atheist interpretation.**
13. **The goal of religion is the experience of pure, effortless pleasure.**
14. **[Death is nothing to us](#) because when we are, death is not and when death is, we are not. Since there is no sentience in death, it is never experienced by us.**
15. **Under normal circumstances, we are in control of our mental dispositions.**
16. **Choices and avoidances are carried out successfully (that is, producing pleasure as the final product) if we measure advantages/pleasures versus disadvantages/pains over the long term. This means that we may sometimes defer pleasure in order to avoid greater pains, or choose temporary**

**disadvantage, but only and always for the sake of a greater advantage or pleasure later.**

- 17. To live pleasantly, we must have confident expectation that we will be able to secure the chief goods: those things that are natural and necessary for life, happiness, and health. Therefore, whatever we do to secure safety, friendship, autarchy, provision of food and drink and clothing, and other basic needs, is naturally good.**
- 18. Autarchy furnishes greater possibilities of pleasure than slavery, dependence, or relying on luck; The unplanned life is not worth living, and we must make what is in our future better than what was in our past.**
- 19. Friendship is necessary for securing happiness. It is advantageous to promote Epicurean philosophy in order to widen our circle of Epicurean friends.**
- 20. Human relations should be based on mutual benefit.**

Notes:

1. *"The doctrine of the first leg of the canon: sensations". PD 23. [The Epicurean Canon](#).*
2. *"The second leg of the canon: pleasure and aversion". [The Pleasure / Aversion Faculty: an Introduction](#).*
3. *"The third leg of the canon: anticipations". The canon is known as the "tripod" because it stands on three legs. [Epicurus and His Philosophy - Chapter VIII - Sensations, Anticipations, and Feelings](#).*
4. *"The doctrine of inference". [Review of Philodemus' On Methods of Inference. Philodemus: On Methods of Inference - A Study in Ancient Empiricism](#).*
5. [Epicurus: Against the use of empty words](#).
6. *"Fourth, Nothing exists in the universe except bodies and space. We conclude that bodies exist because it is the experience of all men, through our senses, that bodies exist. As I have already said, we must necessarily judge all things, even those things that the senses cannot perceive, by reasoning that is fully in accord with the evidence that the senses do perceive. And we conclude that space exists because, if it did not, bodies would have nowhere to exist and nothing through which to move, as we see that bodies do move. Besides these two, bodies and space, and properties that are incidental to combinations of bodies and space, nothing else whatsoever exists, nor is there any evidence on which to speculate that anything else exists that does not have a foundation in bodies and space". - [Letter to Herodotus, Section 2](#)*
7. *"We must distinguish particles, which have eternal and essential properties, from bodies, which are combinations of particles and void, and which have qualities that are merely transitory while they are so combined. These temporary qualities we call "incidental" to the bodies with which they are associated. As with the permanent properties of particles, transitory incidental qualities of bodies do not have material existences of their own, nor can they be classified as incorporeal. When we refer to some quality as "incidental," we*

must make clear that this incidental quality is neither essential to the body, nor a permanent property of the body, nor something without which we could not conceive the body as existing. Instead, the incidental qualities of a body are the result of our apprehending that they accompany the body only for a time. Although those qualities which are incidental are not eternal, or even essential, we must not banish incidental matters from our minds. Incidental qualities do not have a material existence, nor do they exist independently in some reality that is beyond our comprehension. We must, instead, consider the incidental qualities of bodies as having exactly the character that our sensations reveal them to possess". - [Letter to Herodotus, Section 7](#)

8. "First, nothing can be created out of that which does not exist. We conclude this to be true because if things could be created out of that which did not exist, we would see all things being created out of everything, with no need of seeds, and our experience shows us that this is not true. Second, nothing is ever completely destroyed to non-existence. We conclude this because if those things which dissolve from our sight completely ceased to exist, all things would have perished to nothing long ago. If all things had dissolved to non-existence, nothing would exist for the creation of new things, and we have already seen that nothing can come from that which does not exist. Third, the universe as a whole has always been as it is now, and always will be the same. We conclude this because the universe as a whole is everything that exists, and there is nothing outside the universe into which the universe can change, or which can come into the universe from outside it to bring about change". - [Letter to Herodotus, Section 2](#)
9. [PD 10-13](#).
10. "To talk of immaterial existences is to talk of nothings. To say that the human soul, angels, god, are immaterial, is to say they are nothings, or that there is no god, no angels, no soul. I cannot reason otherwise . . . without plunging into the fathomless abyss of dreams and phantasms. I am satisfied, and sufficiently occupied with the things which are, without tormenting or troubling myself about those which may indeed be, but of which I have no evidence". - Thomas Jefferson ; "I conjure you, my brethren, remain true to the earth, and believe not those who speak unto you of superearthly hopes! Poisoners are they, whether they know it or not. Despisers of life are they, decaying ones and poisoned ones themselves, of whom the earth is weary: so away with them! Once blasphemy against God was the greatest blasphemy; but God died, and therewith also those blasphemers. To blaspheme the earth is now the dreadfulest sin, and to rate the heart of the unknowable higher than the meaning of the earth!" - Nietzsche, in [Thus Spake Zarathustra](#)
11. "The doctrine of the telos, or the end". "[I call you to constant pleasures!](#)" - Epicurus.
12. [The third way to look at the Epicurean Gods. Philodemus On Piety: Critical Text with Commentary](#)<sup>in?title=ataraxia0c-20&hl=amz&oi=1&a=0198150083</sup>
13. [Epicureanism as a Religious Identity](#); "We all regard our views as the true cause of our tranquility. ... In *On Holiness*, he (Epicurus) calls a life of perfection the most pleasant and most blessed, and instructs us to guide against all defilement, with our intellect

*comprehensively viewing the best psychosomatic dispositions for the sake of fitting all that happens to us to blessedness ...” – Philodemus of Gadara, On Piety; [Philodemus On Piety: Critical Text with Commentary](#)*  
[ir?t=ataraxia0c-20&l=am2&o=1&a=0198150083](#)

14. [Review of Philodemus' On Death. Letter to Menoeceus, third paragraph. Philodemus: On Death \(Writings from the Greco-Roman World 29\)](#)  
[ir?t=ataraxia0c-20&l=am2&o=1&a=1589834461](#)
15. [Diogenes' Wall: on PD 20.](#)
16. “The doctrine of hedonic calculus”. [Back to the Basics. On Choices and Avoidances.](#)
17. “The doctrine of confident expectation”. See the Metrodorus portion in the essay [In Memory of the Men.](#)
18. “The doctrine of personal sovereignty”. See the Metrodorus portion in the essay [In Memory of the Men; How Epicurean Principles Can Help You Transform Your Financial and Personal Life. Vatican Sayings 36, 47, 65, 67; PD 15, 16](#)
19. “The doctrine of friendship”. [On Friendship. Organization and Procedure in Epicurean Groups](#) (PDF file), by Norman DeWitt.
20. “The doctrine of mutual advantage”. See [PDs 31-40.](#)

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**The Remainder of this post was posted by Hiram on 12/22/19:**

[Quote from Elayne](#)

When I read Hiram's recent writing about Buddhist forms of introspection being a way to learn about the self, for instance, I know clearly that our versions of Epicurean philosophy are different. Buddhists do have some variations, but a core feature is the assertion that by closely introspecting on oneself, a person will experience directly that there is no self and that our ordinary experience of self and reality is a delusion. There are neurologic events that cause this and are related to what the brain does when typical environmental stimuli are removed. A concerning number of people without prior psychiatric disturbances have suffered long lasting dysfunction from this, anything from dissociative symptoms to psychosis.

I will be interested in seeing the Society of Epicurus' statement. I am expecting it to incorporate elements that I will find to be structurally unsound. If it does not, I will be thrilled!

And those of us who adhere to the classical teachings of Epicurus will continue to clarify our position, sometimes by contrasting it with alternate views, just as Epicurus did.

Hi Elayne. The English translation of our Tenets is live here:

<http://societyofepicurus.com/the-20-tenets-of-society-of-friends-of-epicurus/>

I don't expect you to agree with all of them, but maybe the admins from Epicurean Friends can create their own version for their own use based on their own outlines. Ours is meant to connect theory with practice, to facilitate teachings and cross-reference with key sources, and to potentially guide us in our future endeavors and teaching mission. It worked out to a total of twenty, but I also probably also chose to stick to twenty subconsciously in order to have another excuse to call ourselves "twentiers" 😊

RE engaging Buddhist ideas, I am happy that you are doing so. Secular Buddhism is advocated by Sam Harris, who has a huge influence in many intellectual circles, particularly among atheists, and he is sold on the Buddhist doctrine of no-self. These ideas are gaining a lot of currency in the West these days.

I believe that those of us in EP who are versed in Buddhist philosophy of no-self have a unique opportunity to articulate an alternative that is self affirming and that views the self as an emergent property of the body, but there's a lot of work to be done in articulating these views clearly. I have begun this work and am curious about what you make of this, particularly I cite from an essay by a feminist intellectual who wrote an amazing piece in defense of an interdisciplinary theory of self for Aeon magazine, which I hope you will read. Hers is a very well written and well argued piece.

[A Concrete Self | Society of Friends of Epicurus](#)

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### **Post by “Elayne” of December 22, 2019 at 6:59 PM**

Hi Hiram-- thank you, I got the link to the Tenets this morning. I am going to think through my responses, but for now I can say that I am not aware of Epicurus categorizing the senses as objective. We experience subjectively through our senses as well as our feelings. In fact, we have no option other than subjective experience. Scientists tend to call data objective when it has been repeatedly measured by different people using different equipment in different labs, etc, but our sensory experiences are still always subjective. Your references for 1 and 2 do not include any division into subjective and objective. Prolepses are also subjective. I think much of my response will be about what is not included, but that will take me a while. For now, I am curious about why you say Epicurus said the senses were objective.

Your book review I agree with, but I would just add that the Buddhist conclusion is not based on reason. They use reason to try and explain it-- to say the self is not legit because it is temporary, which I have always thought was silly. But that is just their explanatory overlay, which is based on what life feels like if you have altered your brain function through meditation.

There is a fairly high rate of dissociative states in long term and/ or heavy meditators. Sometimes this sensation of depersonalization and/or derealization is permanent. They literally experience a sensation of having no self. I think there is some evidence meditation reduces activity of the default network, which is necessary for self-monitoring/ awareness, and there is a lot we don't know about how various practices alter brain function

This is a desirable outcome for some. For me, it sounds like brain damage. I guess the most that can be said is that for these people, they feel like they have no self. For the rest of us, we mostly feel that we are selves. No way to really argue over that one, right? But what they propose is that all of us will find out we are no-self, if we introspect through meditation. All that means to me is that my brain would become damaged, but they see it as current delusion on my part--that I'm already no-self and just don't know it. When they go that far, I think I can say they are incorrect about my current experience of self.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of December 22, 2019 at 7:05 PM**

I have not had a chance to look at these Tenets yet. I think this deserves a thread of its own so I will set one up and move these posts there.

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### **Post by “Elayne” of December 22, 2019 at 8:08 PM**

For 1 and 2, the footnotes are to articles by Hiram and not to primary source material. The second article, by Hiram, says at the end,

"Our hedonism is not about us being subjective, or whimsical, it's what we mean what we say that nature is our guide: if we ignore our faculties, it's only to our detriment and to our harm. If we heed them, it's to our advantage.

Our natural goods are all pleasant, and pleasure is always good." But no quotes are given from Epicurean sources.

The statement that hedonism is not about us being subjective is in contradiction to Tenet #2, which says pleasure and aversion are about subjective nature. There seems to be, as I suspected from the inaccurate division of our perceptions into subjective and objective, a disdain for subjective experience creeping in, perhaps unconsciously. Why would it be a problem if pleasure seeking was subjective? It IS subjective. It can't be experienced other than

subjectively.

I also thought I read in Tenet 2 a hint of a standard other than pleasure-- a suggestion that pleasure and pain are useful for a more important purpose, survival or health perhaps. This initial impression is strengthened by the quote above.

While this is of course the way evolution works-- faculties that lead to survival and reproduction persist-- that is not the same thing as making survival and reproduction our primary goal. Any time you start bringing up evolutionary causes as conscious goals, then you ought to include reproduction, not just survival, to be internally consistent. This leads to saying pleasure is good because it leads to survival and offspring, and if there is a circumstance where pain leads to survival and more offspring, we ought to choose that instead.

Pain and pleasure are not just value-setting faculties, which sounds abstract-- they are primarily \_feelings\_-- sensations. Pleasure is always good simply because pleasure is the only good-- it is the definition of good. Good is a meaningless word unless you are talking about the feeling of pleasure. And I don't think your article makes that clear-- it makes pleasure and pain sound primarily instrumental. This is an entirely different slant on things than what you get from reading Epicurus.

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### **Post by "Elayne" of December 22, 2019 at 8:18 PM**

For 3, I think he is talking about something a little different but related to what you are saying. We don't have enough info to be sure, so it is hard for me to see making that a Tenet. When you say "what it is", this seems to be verging on calling the prolepses conceptual, and Epicurus was opposed to including reason/ concepts in how we know what is true. But since you didn't say that outright, it may not be what you meant.

This is an example of a time when I am not afraid to put forth a proposal for what, in my personal philosophy, the prolepses are. Whether Epicurus thought the same, we will never know, but when I read what he said, it sounds like my understanding of prolepses are coherent with his.

For me, prolepses are innate pattern recognitions, which perform functions as simple as organizing visual input so that different objects have boundaries and are seen as separate from each other and as complex as the innate tit for tat sense of justice. There are no concepts in my Canon-- a pattern recognition is different from a concept or even a "what it is". Pattern recognition could certainly help predict "what it does or will do", but that isn't a concept either. I wish I could ask Epicurus, but I think if we spoke the same language and he had access to

current developmental research, he would agree with me. I just can't prove it or insist on it.

Because this one is trickier, I would personally not pin it down in a list of things my fellow Epicureans needed to agree on.

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### **Post by “Elayne” of December 22, 2019 at 8:20 PM**

4 - 11 seem fine.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of December 22, 2019 at 8:22 PM**

I am afraid I am pulled in too many directions to systematically go through each one in one post, but having read Elayne's comments I would also add my own as to One and Two. I see that "objective" and "subjective" are enclosed in scare quotes to indicate presumably that the meaning is more than superficial, but I think if the issue of whether there is an "objective" reality is going to be discussed, then it's imperative to define what is meant by that. This is an issue that got Ayn Rand bogged down and I was never satisfied with either. If a boundless and eternal universe where there is no center or supernatural god to dictate a single "correct" perspective, what does the word "objective" really mean?

The word "subjective" is pretty clear, and seems to without real trouble indicate that our perceptions and observations are relative / subjective to us, which is probably accurate enough.

But what does "objective" mean in Epicurean terms? I am not sure that a statement on objective reality can really be helpful unless the meaning of the word is made clear.

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### **Post by “Elayne” of December 22, 2019 at 8:26 PM**

12-- I know of no evidence that Epicurus promoted idealism in anything. How would an idealistic or imaginary version of his gods be coherent with his philosophy as a whole?

Also, you tend to give your own writing as a source material, but sometimes you link to a book. The end notes would be stronger if you followed the traditional format and gave a full citation,

including page numbers. It wouldn't be such a problem to use your own writing or YouTube videos as sources if those writings themselves contained the original source references, but generally they do not. However, this shouldn't be a big deal for you to tweak if you choose to.

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### **Post by "Elayne" of December 22, 2019 at 8:31 PM**

13-- I am not a religious person, so I would not be interested in endorsing this tenet. All I can say is that all activities should be chosen for how they produce more pleasure than pain. But I do not equate effort with pain. Effort can often be quite pleasurable. There is nothing about effortless pleasure that I prefer over effortful pleasure (such as, say, dancing), if the pleasure itself is equal. This Tenet seems like another endorsement of static over kinetic pleasure, and we've discussed that a lot here, so I won't rehash. I would just say that I don't think there is strong evidence that Epicurus made a big deal about this distinction, and I would not make it something members of a group had to agree to one way or another.

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### **Post by "Elayne" of December 22, 2019 at 8:39 PM**

14 is fine

15-- I am not sure what you mean by this. It is unclear, and it seems to leave the door open for Stoicism. Again you link to your own writing, which does contain original quotes this time, and you end with this "Consistent with what's been said before, in Fragment 112 Diogenes states that the "sum of happiness is our disposition, of which we are masters", by which he argues against choosing a career in military service—which produces dangers to our lives and health—or public speaking—which produces nervousness and insecurity. The idea is that we can more easily be self-sufficient in our pleasure if we retain our ability to control our mental disposition."

By arguing against military service, Diogenes is saying we control our disposition by taking action to control our circumstances. Similar to Epicurus advising not to commit crimes, because we will be anxious about getting caught. He doesn't say we can do what we want, because we can have control over our mental dispositions anyway.

With all the "new thought" stuff going around and the revival of the Stoic belief that external circumstances are of no consequence-- that something in us is controlling our attitude and feelings, unaffected by the world around us-- I think this is not a Tenet I would endorse. I would

say rather that we can act on the external world and thus create pleasure for ourselves.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of December 22, 2019 at 8:51 PM**

Participants in this thread will now see that a new subforum has been set up dedicated to the Society of Epicurus. The main reason I opened this is that if people start commenting on particular items in the list of 20, it may be impossible to follow what is being discussed without opening a new thread on the particular tenet. Please feel free to do that if it will help. If this is not helpful, I can always move this single thread back into the "General Discussion" forum.

I added this as the subforum description:

*"The Society of Epicurus is an initiative led by Hiram Crespo and headquartered at SocietyofEpicurus.com. There is no general or formal relationship between Epicureanfriends.com and the Society of Epicurus, or between participants in Epicureanfriends.com and members of the Society of Epicurus, except as individuals in either group choose to participate in the other. It should therefore not be presumed that participants in either group agree with or endorse any particular activity or statement of the other. However there is much obvious overlap in areas of interest, and this subforum is made available for use in discussion of particular aspects of the Society of Epicurus, such as its Twenty Tenets of December, 2019, or any other matters of particular relevance to the Society of Epicurus."*

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### **Post by “Elayne” of December 22, 2019 at 8:58 PM**

16 is harmed by the inclusion of advantage and disadvantage, as if there can be any standard other than pleasure and pain

17 introduces 3 goals-- life, happiness, and health. And since (according to our prior group PMs) you define happiness as being something different from pleasure, you have left pleasure entirely out of the picture of the chief goods. Although safety, friendship, autarky, etc, are conditions most typical humans will find pleasurable, they are not goods in themselves nor do they become absolute goods-- there will be exceptions, and there will be times when these conditions come into conflict with each other. So it is not true that anything you do to get one of these conditions will bring you pleasure. It will depend on the specifics of the situation, and pleasure is the deciding factor. This statement has made autarky and the rest an absolute.

18 is also too absolute. If an unplanned life is pleasurable, it is certainly worth living to the person living it. It is only that freedom and planning increase our chances of success at gaining pleasure, so it is wise to plan.

19/ 20-- you revert again to the term happiness here, and since I don't agree with your definition of it as something other than pleasure (or of anything but pleasure as a goal), I can't agree. I would say friendship is essential (for almost all of us) for pleasure. But you have quoted the justice PDs instead of the friendship PDs, and they are related but not the same. I would like to see you quote "All friendship is desirable in itself, though it starts from the need of help"-- and we know that if anything is desirable in itself, that means it is a pleasure-- friendship is a pleasure. I think you need to include the feelings here. It is not a cold calculation. It might help to have some kind of more clear introduction where you say something like "anytime I use the word advantage or benefit, I am talking about pleasure alone." Someone very familiar with Epicurus would know that, but I think it helps to make it clear to newcomers.

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### **Post by “Elayne” of December 22, 2019 at 9:01 PM**

There are essential things I believe you have omitted from the Tenets that make your group susceptible to intrusion by stoics and various idealists, such as our Not NeoEpicurean but Epicurean list. Your choice, but as I mentioned earlier, those elements are not coherent with EP, nor are they internally consistent.

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### **Post by “Hiram” of December 23, 2019 at 10:14 AM**

#### [Quote from Elayne](#)

For 1 and 2, the footnotes are to articles by Hiram and not to primary source material. The second article, by Hiram, says at the end,

"Our hedonism is not about us being subjective, or whimsical, it's what we mean what we say that nature is our guide: if we ignore our faculties, it's only to our detriment and to our harm. If we heed them, it's to our advantage.

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The statement that hedonism is not about us being subjective is in contradiction to Tenet #2, which says pleasure and aversion are about subjective nature. There seems to be, as I suspected from the inaccurate division of our perceptions into subjective and objective, a disdain for subjective experience creeping in, perhaps unconsciously. Why would it be a problem if pleasure seeking was subjective? It IS subjective. It can't be experienced other than subjectively.

[Elayne](#) (+ #Cassius ) Thank you in specific for your parrhesia re: objective / subjective. That's good feedback. I will bring up with others for editorial feedback.

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### **Post by “Hiram” of December 23, 2019 at 10:18 AM**

#### [Quote from Elayne](#)

For 3, I think he is talking about something a little different but related to what you are saying. We don't have enough info to be sure, so it is hard for me to see making that a Tenet. When you say "what it is", this seems to be verging on calling the prolepses conceptual, and Epicurus was opposed to including reason/ concepts in how we know what is true. But since you didn't say that outright, it may not be what you meant.

This is an example of a time when I am not afraid to put forth a proposal for what, in my personal philosophy, the prolepses are. Whether Epicurus thought the same, we will never know, but when I read what he said, it sounds like my understanding of prolepses are coherent with his.

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Anticipations is one of the doctrines that took me the longest to grasp. When I wrote my book, I was trying to relate it to epigenetics. I agree that all canonic faculties must be pre-rational. The verbiage I used is from the best explanation of the anticipations that I have found from a Spanish-language source:

[Canónica: criterios para la interpretación de la instalación del individuo en la realidad](#)

<http://holegon.net/wp-content/upl...n%C3%B3nica.pdf>

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## Post by “Hiram” of December 23, 2019 at 10:45 AM

### [Quote from Elayne](#)

12-- I know of no evidence that Epicurus promoted idealism in anything. How would an idealistic or imaginary version of his gods be coherent with his philosophy as a whole?

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12 - is an instance where post-Epicurus Epicureans posited their own ideas. The two interpretations accepted today by academics on the gods are realist (the gods are made of atoms) and idealist (the gods are not physical but have cultural / ethical utility as models). The third interpretation, which was originally advanced by Ilkka and then I supported, and is adamantly supported by people like Michel Onfray, is the atheistic one which calls for an atheology instead of a theology, which says that gods are neither justifiable by the canon nor

useful in ethics. Here is the original post from the Menoeceus blog (it also mentions the first two interpretations):

<https://menoeceus.blogspot.com/2014/08/epicurean-gods.html>

13- this quote on "pure, effortless pleasure", if I remember correctly, is cited directly from Epicurus in Philodemus' scroll on Piety (cited in the notes). I believe it comes from Epicurus' scroll "On Holiness" (there are a few quotes there), which is lost to us. Some of the other quotes:

*"We all regard our views as the true cause of our tranquility. ... In On Holiness, he (Epicurus) calls a life of perfection the most pleasant and most blessed, and instructs **us to guide against all defilement, with our intellect comprehensively viewing the best psychosomatic dispositions for the sake of fitting all that happens to us to blessedness ...**"*

It seems like the original Epicureans believe that pious practices have pleasant psychosomatic (both bodily and mental) health effects. Dispositions (diatheses) are an important concept in Epicurean ethics, also often neglected. But it is clear in On Piety that religious practices are meant as a tool for cultivation of happy and healthy mental and emotional dispositions (mental clarity, reverence, friendliness, kindness) in one's character. This is a neglected aspect of the tradition today, and I have not seen any consensus in our groups as far as carrying out "experiments in piety" following Epicurus' guidelines in modern times, so this remains unexplored.

However, I believe that in this we can furnish useful ethical guidance to any religious group that wishes to elevate their pious practices by applying Epicurean principles.

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## Post by "Hiram" of December 23, 2019 at 10:52 AM

### [Quote from Elayne](#)

14 is fine

15-- I am not sure what you mean by this. It is unclear, and it seems to leave the door open for Stoicism. Again you link to your own writing, which does contain original quotes this time, and you end with this "Consistent with what's been said before, in Fragment 112 Diogenes states that the "sum of happiness is our disposition, of which we are masters", by which he argues against choosing a career in military service-which produces dangers to our lives and health-or public speaking-which

produces nervousness and insecurity. The idea is that we can more easily be self-sufficient in our pleasure if we retain our ability to control our mental disposition."

By arguing against military service, Diogenes is saying we control our disposition by taking action to control our circumstances. Similar to Epicurus advising not to commit crimes, because we will be anxious about getting caught. He doesn't say we can do what we want, because we can have control over our mental dispositions anyway.

With all the "new thought" stuff going around and the revival of the Stoic belief that external circumstances are of no consequence-- that something in us is controlling our attitude and feelings, unaffected by the world around us-- I think this is not a Tenet I would endorse. I would say rather that we can act on the external world and thus create pleasure for ourselves.

(This tenet also implies that we are free + responsible to develop our characters)

So the source of that is Diogenes' "'sum of happiness is our disposition, of which we are masters", but Philodemus also discusses our disposition, so this is not a Stoic idea, it comes from more than one source and seems central to how Epicureans discussed the art of living. In On Piety, it's discussed in terms of the psychosomatic effects of pious practice. In On Anger, it's discussed in terms of how a furious disposition makes us ugly and disliked, how it's bad for our relationships and creates many other disadvantages. In On Arrogance, a similar treatment is given to the vice.

Sentience is very important to us, the quality of the sentient experience, and disposition (unlike mere "states of mind or emotion" which come and go) is HABITUAL, steady, stable and crucial for [moral development](#). So any science or art of happiness would have to concern itself with it.

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## Post by "Cassius" of December 23, 2019 at 10:58 AM

Of the list, here are the ones that I can pretty much endorse without reservation:

6. All bodies are made of particles and void.

8. Nothing comes from nothing.

10. All that exists, exists within nature. There is no super-natural or un-natural "realm"; it would not have a way of existing outside of nature. Nature is reality.

14. [Death is nothing to us](#) because when we are, death is not and when death is, we are not. Since there is no sentience in death, it is never experienced by us

19. Friendship is necessary for securing happiness. It is advantageous to promote Epicurean philosophy in order to widen our circle of Epicurean friends.

The others I have varying degrees of concern about and I will address them separately, trying also to incorporate comments made by others too.

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## Post by “Hiram” of December 23, 2019 at 11:04 AM

### [Quote from Elayne](#)

16 is harmed by the inclusion of advantage and disadvantage, as if there can be any standard other than pleasure and pain

17 introduces 3 goals-- life, happiness, and health. And since (according to our prior group PMs) you define happiness as being something different from pleasure, you have left pleasure entirely out of the picture of the chief goods.

16. Epicurus used both pleasure / discomfort as well as this in the Letter to Menoeceus when he discussed hedonic calculus:

*"Yet by a scale of comparison and by the consideration of advantages and disadvantages we must form our judgment on all these matters."*

So hedonic calculus involves the calculation of feelings, and of advantages and disadvantages.

17. Epicurus and the other founders established three criteria to determine what is necessary in the Letter to Menoeceus:

**"of the necessary some are necessary for happiness, others for the repose of the body, and others for very life"**

The doctrine of the "chief goods" (kyriotatai) is in Philodemus' "Choices and avoidances" scroll.

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## Post by “Elayne” of December 23, 2019 at 3:02 PM

When reading the texts, I think it is critical to take everything in context of the whole. I have no sense that Epicurus meant that "advantages" could be anything other than related to pleasure, since there is no other definition of good. It does make it hard for someone to grasp, if they don't get a feel for the whole philosophy. So I strongly recommend that any brief list of Tenets should stick closely to language of pleasure and not create confusion. I don't think Epicurus' words are confusing when read in the context of his whole work, but there are definitely some problems with proof-texting out of context. If you decide to leave these in, I think a reminder that there is no other standard but pleasure as the good is very important-- that you are never replacing it with these alternative concepts. Otherwise you are unnecessarily complicating something that is ultimately very simple and straightforward.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of December 23, 2019 at 3:31 PM**

As we talk about this I would be interested in more background about the purpose of the statement.

My key issue has always been knowing the framework of what is going on.

For example, this forum website has rules for posting that describe what is within limits (relating to the study of Epicurus) and off limits (current day divisive politics) but the website as a whole has no larger goal than promoting the study of Epicurus, and people can participate here so long as they stay within the rules, and they know (or should know) that there is nothing implied beyond that

In terms of the Society of Epicurus or any organization that appears to have a "membership" character, then there is implicit or explicit agreement that members agree to the terms of membership.

Are these 20 Tenets intended to serve that function? If so, then their formulation implies that they were prepared in a way that is endorsed by the group as a whole.

Some groups try to be democracies or representative republics in which officers are elected to set such terms. Or a group can have oligarchy or a dictatorship. I don't think Epicurus or his philosophy rules out any of those forms in proper situations, but as an individual we all have preferences about what we participate in.

If this is a statement prepared by Hiram as his own personal viewpoint he has no obligation to any of us to even consider modifying any part of it. In that case we all agree or disagree as individuals and wish each other well.

The trick in any organized activity involves being clear with others what they are getting into by that group activity. So its really presumptuous to say more than "I agree" or "I disagree" when there is no request or mechanism or idea that anything is open to change.

I am personally perfectly good with any decisions Hiram makes because the Society of Epicurus is his project. I have just always wanted to make clear where the lines are drawn so that no one misunderstands, and that's the reason I repeat that here.

So with that as additional background I will make more comments on individual issues without implying that the list itself should be changed, as I was not a part of formulating it or any kind of officer of the Society of Epicurus.

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### **Post by “Hiram” of December 23, 2019 at 3:35 PM**

#### [Quote from Elayne](#)

When reading the texts, I think it is critical to take everything in context of the whole. I have no sense that Epicurus meant that "advantages" could be anything other than related to pleasure, since there is no other definition of good. It does make it hard for someone to grasp, if they don't get a feel for the whole philosophy. So I strongly recommend that any brief list of Tenets should stick closely to language of pleasure and not create confusion. I don't think Epicurus' words are confusing when read in the context of his whole work, but there are definitely some problems with proof-texting out of context. If you decide to leave these in, I think a reminder that there is no other standard but pleasure as the good is very important-- that you are never replacing it with these alternative concepts. Otherwise you are unnecessarily complicating something that is ultimately very simple and straightforward.

That pleasure is the end that our nature seeks is in Tenet 11. The other tenets are not meant to replace the Telos tenet, but to expound on other matters, in this case the wording (advantages) is lifted from LMenoceus.

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### **Post by “Elayne” of December 23, 2019 at 4:10 PM**

Yes, I know, but the Tenets do not make it clear that advantage means pleasure the way the whole of the writings does. I don't suppose I'll restate that if you don't see my point, though.

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## Post by “Hiram” of December 23, 2019 at 4:11 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

As we talk about this I would be interested in more background about the purpose of the statement.

...

There's been a flurry of activity in the Spanish group and page, and a new member from Venezuela. This has brought up, again, the questions of how to best organize a few people who are willing to work together to promote EP in a more or less decentralized manner, and also WHO to include. We had decided years ago on the writing of three essays as requirement for membership, in order to ensure that a new member has a good basic grasp of EP before they can start writing as "member of SoFE", so that continues.

(Actually, Jesús' essay was extremely well written and reassuring, because it shows me that we now have enough content online in Spanish to produce a solid intellectual foundation in a sincere student).

I presented the Tenets in the SoE group with other admins, and to Charles before he joined, and had Jesús translate into Spanish and give feedback (my own Outline of EP served as first draft). Society of Epicurus has as a goal to continue the teaching mission of the Epicurean gardens and to ensure the continuity of EP for the benefit of future generations, so I'm mainly interested in creating group of peers who will be friendly to each other and will provide each other feedback in the process of content creation and translation--which is now becoming a major component of what we do. (We are beginning to work on translating DeWitt's "Procedures of Epicurean groups"). Ideally, I want to join forces mainly with other Epicurean content creators and translators, but obviously not everyone who thinks of themselves as Epicurean will be interested in being part of a group of peers like SoFE, or will agree with how we articulate our views.

The goals of the Tenets are also articulated in the opening statement (connect theory and practice, organize the teachings, which would help with a more focused study of specific aspects), and the closing tenets on friendship and mutual benefit deal with how we interact and "philos" (friendship) serves to justify the teaching mission.

So that would be the "framework" for the Tenets. Actually I remember that when we were working more closely together, you frequently encouraged the establishment of some sort of Tenets, but when proposed, we never were able to agree (I think at one point we were working on a "Constitution of SoFE"). Either way, I believe clear that there should be many separate

groups working separately based on separate guidelines in order to maximize efficiency (or, in the case of French-speaking people, to focus on Onfray, Vanaigem, and other continental intellectuals), and this is what my own "working group" is doing. The Tenets seems to me, mostly, common sense.

(Also, I've frequently raised the question of continuity, and after the death of Erik Anderson and of Iaako and all the things that happened after and the Facebook groups that disappeared after it became obvious that my concerns were legitimate)

As a non-SoFE-member, your feedback is obviously unnecessary, and I know that you will have disagreements w the Tenets, but I still welcome your feedback if you offer and I don't consider it disparaging of you to criticize them, just for the record.

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### **Post by "Elayne" of December 23, 2019 at 5:44 PM**

On 12, regarding the gods, I would not agree that idealist interpretations are coherent with Epicurean Philosophy. He was opposed to that kind of thing.

I would take him at his word, that he intuited the existence of material beings who experienced maximum pleasure.

For myself, here is my innovation, which I do not consider incoherent with the philosophy. I don't think whether those beings exist as he described or not is a structural pillar. If he had never said it, I don't think any of the rest would be damaged. I think it is sufficient to say that not having to worry about supernatural beings at all prevents me from worrying about the stuff people worried about in his time. I am not closed to the possibility of there being some ETs out there who live as he described-- I don't see what would make it impossible, and no supernatural magic would be necessary.

However, for me, the most important part is the reminder that the degree of pleasure of our lives is on a spectrum, and right in front of me I can see that some are more skilled than others at getting it. So the part about "living as gods among men" is the most relevant, and it is pragmatically achievable right here on our planet.

If I wrote any Tenet about it, it would be not to insult Epicurus by saying he might have been lying about the gods or that he meant something different than what he said. And I would not require any member to believe in the gods as he described them, despite that being a difference with Epicurus, but I would not allow the substitution of an ideal or a metaphor. The same as we now know more about the sun-- there's no need to say he was lying about that or

using a metaphor-- he was incorrect. I don't know that he was incorrect about his gods, but he might be, and I think that is acceptable to say.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of December 24, 2019 at 10:07 AM**

I am sorry that I am posting only sporadically due to travelling. As a "subtotal" of where we are at the moment, I am agreeing in full with Elayne's commentary as to the problems she sees, and the only ones of the list that I agree with in full are the ones I listed above.

It's going to take me time to list out each one and summarize my problems with them. That's one reason I posted the subheading to this forum to the effect that no one should presume that I agree with the Society of Epicurus position simply because Hiram and I have had a cordial relationship for many years.

Hiram and I have different perspectives about what is important in Epicurean philosophy and how to promote it. To a certain extent I am glad whenever anyone writes about Epicurus, but on the flip side there is a lot of dispute about what Epicurus meant in many aspects, so it's important to be clear.

[Much more to come.....]

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### **Post by "Cassius" of December 25, 2019 at 4:06 PM**

#### **SOE1: "Objective" nature is knowable via the sensations.**

Objection To SOE1: The relevant definition of "objective" in dictionary.com is: "not influenced by personal feelings, interpretations, or prejudice; based on facts; unbiased." In this context, the most likely way a normal person will interpret the phrase "objective nature," despite the scare quotes around "objective," is that this tenet is saying that there is a reality of nature that is knowable in a way that is not influenced by personal feelings, interpretations, or prejudice. While that can be interpreted in a reasonable way to mean that what you are talking about are observations of a factual nature that can be confirmed by repeated experiment, even that is very ambiguous and overbroad and does not define the context of the point being made. In a philosophic list like this the implication is going to be taken that there are abstract ethical principles existing in nature apart from and independent of human observation. That position is

the opposite of the position taken by the Epicurean texts. Per Epicurus the universe has no center, no organizing supernatural or outside force, and nothing exists eternally unchangeable within nature other than the elements and void. The most controversial issues in human life that Epicurus addressed is whether there are things such as "virtue" or "good" or "moral worthiness" or "supernatural gods" that exist for all people at all times and all places. This is where people like Catherine Wilson, and Hiram in many of his writings, get Epicurus wrong. Epicurus held clearly (explicitly in PD 30-40, and many other places implicitly) that there is no absolute or "objective" morality of any kind. Starting off the list with a sentence that can be read to imply that objective morality exists, or even that there is a single perspective from which any matter of any kind can be viewed as always the same over time and place, undercuts this key aspect of Epicurean thought.

**SOE2: "Subjective" nature is knowable via the value-setting pleasure and aversion faculties, by which we know what is choice-worthy and avoidance-worthy.**

Objection To SOE2: Much of my objection to SOE1 is relevant here because dividing observations between objective and subjective on an ambiguous and broad basis simply reinforces majority existing religious / secular humanist error that there is a single "good" or proper way to live that is valid for all people at all places and all times. Further, to the extent we are now talking in a way that acknowledges that people \*necessarily\* view nature through their subjective faculties, pleasure and pain are not the only faculties by which nature is knowable - Epicurus set out the full list of the five senses, the feelings (pleasure and pain) and the anticipations. In this context the word "value" can also be ambiguous, because it can be read to imply that pleasure and pain should be used to develop abstractions ("values"?) that then take the place of the feelings as an absolute rule. If Epicurus stood for anything in the field of ethics, it is that the faculty of feeling, which is purely contextual and changes over time and place and is never exactly the same between individuals, must always be understood to take precedence in choices and avoidance. Even the use of the terms choice-WORTHY and avoidance-WORTHY carries an implication that is non-Epicurean. There is no action or avoidance that is \*always\* to be chosen or \*always\* to be avoided regardless of context, and any description that implies that a course of action should be taken or avoided apart from the particular results that it brings is unEpicurean. The term "worthy" and "worthiness" is to my observation generally associated in most discussion with absolutist religious/secular humanist/idealist systems.

**SOE3: While sensations tell us that something IS or exists, it does not tell us WHAT it is. For THAT cognitive process, we must rely on a faculty tied to both language and memory. The faculty of anticipation helps us to recognize abstractions and things previously apprehended.**

Objection to SOE3: This formulation sounds uncomfortably close to Ayn Rand, and suffers from the same ambiguities. The issue is not that everything can be placed into an abstract Aristotelian or Kantian category that floats in the air and to which all must conform. The issue is

that "what" a thing is ultimately comes down to "how it relates to us." Language and memory and the faculty of anticipations do not put us in touch with a cosmic system by which we can categorize everything to tell us "what it is" apart from our own existence. The essential point here is that since we are talking about epistemology here, the fundamental must always be kept first that we perceive nature subjectively through our individual faculties, and that there is in fact no cosmic catalog of things or ideas to which we must conform our observations.

**SOE4: We may infer the unseen / un-apprehended based on what has been previously seen / apprehended by any of our faculties; and we may re-adjust our views based on new evidence presented to our faculties.**

Objection to SOE4: First I objection to the use of the word "may." We in fact "must" make judgments (or decide to suspend judgment) if we are going to survive, or hope to live pleasantly. In order to live happily in the face of religion and our questions about the nature of the universe and life after death, we must infer the nature of atoms and void, which are imperceptible, from those things which are perceptible. Also we "must" adjust our views to conform to evidence, and that means both being firm and confident about those things which we have observed to be reliable in the past, while also taking into account new evidence that may come to our attention. The point that this tenet is obscuring is the issue of dogmatism and confidence in our conclusions. Not all conclusions are likely to be subject to change and it is not appropriate to take the modern majority position that in almost any question "anything is possible." For all of human existence there is no reliable evidence that anything has ever been created from nothing, and it is not appropriate to fail to separate questions such as that from questions that are clearly beyond all human knowledge and on which we have no information whatsoever. As written SOE4 avoids that issue of when to have confidence in our opinions, which is the most important of all.

**SOE5: Our words and their meanings must be clear, and conform to the attestations that nature has presented to our faculties.**

Objection to SOE5: Of course we should be as clear as possible in using words. The issue is what is meant by clarity, and how we go about being clear. The issue that I detect in this tenet is that it carries the implication that nature has "testified" ("attested") some particular abstract truth that is the same for everyone. No, nature has not done that. Nature has simply provided us a set of faculties, including the ability to form abstractions (including words) and it is entirely up to us to convey meaning through the use of words or other methods that have been established in the past by agreement to be assignable to certain observations. Nature has not attested to anyone the meaning of "yellow." Nature has simply set up circumstances in a particular time and place that most humans visualize in a similar way under similar conditions, and to these conditions certain people have assigned the word "yellow" while certain others in

other languages have assigned other totally different words. The point that Epicurus was making about clarity, and avoiding going on infinitely without reaching any conclusions, is tied totally to the fundamental that observations are contextual and that different people experience things differently. Clarity comes through examples, not by connection with some abstraction made by supernatural gods, ideal forms, etc.

**SOE6: All bodies are made of particles and void.**

Objection to SOE6: There is a component to this that was essential to Epicurus and is controversial, and that is the issue about whether the elemental particles are themselves indivisible. Epicurus appears to have held that indivisibility is essential for a number of reasons, most apparently leading to the need to point to something that is ultimately unchanging in order for the regularity we see in the universe to be grounded in nature and not in supernatural gods. I agree with him that the issue of indivisibility is critical and needs to be explicitly stated.

**SOE7: Bodies have essential properties and incidental properties.**

Objection to SOE7: This one also is probably too broad. The Epicurean physics is explicitly that there are indivisible elemental bodies which are not composed of anything smaller, AND there are "bodies" which are composed of more than one elemental particle and void. Elemental particles don't really have "essential" properties and they certainly don't have "incidental properties. Elemental bodies have shape and size and the few other characteristics that Epicurus listed, but those properties never change. It might be ok to call those fundamental properties "essential" with some definitions to explain that, but elemental particles never have "unessential" properties so talking about "essential properties" of elemental properties is probably wrong. As I read the texts and commentaries the term "bodies" is generally used to refer to those combinations of elemental properties that eventually rise in size to become perceptible to our senses. It is at that level that "essential" and "incidental" really comes into play, at the point when you can add and subtract attributes to a thing and make decisions about what is "essential" or not. Freedom or slavery, war or peace, are definitely incidental qualities that can come and go without changing the underlying nature of the thing being discussed (such as society, individuals, groups, or whatever). But it is probably a very different question to evaluate "essential properties." We might say that water is wet and can't be made un-wet without changing its character, but who gets to say what is "Essential" and what is not? Is "essential" not a matter of human decision and definition? The word "essences" is regularly attached to Aristotelian discussions of "essences" as opposed to Plato's "ideal forms," but both "ideal forms" and "essences" are invalid concepts in Epicurean terms.

**SOE8: Nothing comes from nothing.**

Objection to SOE8: This is very close to the way it is stated in the texts and I see no reason to object to this. I will say that Lucretius attaches this to the statement "at the will of the gods" so

that he is emphasizing that "nothing comes from nothing at the will of the gods." I need to go back and look at Herodotus to see if the same thing is stated there, but definitely "nothing comes from nothing" is a correct Epicurean statement.

**SOE9: All things operate within the laws of nature, which apply everywhere.**

Objection to SOE9: The concept of "laws of nature" is very troublesome today. It is my opinion that this is regularly interpreted to be the equivalent of saying "laws of nature's god" or even "laws of god" in the sense that it implies that there is some being "Nature" which has adopted a set of rules about how everything must work. I think the proper statement is that the universe operates according to the properties of the essential particles, motion, and void, and that everything that we see arises from the interactions of those three things. There really is no such thing as a "law of nature" that applies everywhere; perhaps if you can somehow stipulate that under exactly the same conditions then the elements will respond the same way, but that seems very different from saying that "the laws of nature apply everywhere."

**SOE10: All that exists, exists within nature. There is no super-natural or unnatural "realm"; it would not have a way of existing outside of nature. Nature is reality.**

Objection to SOE10: I think this one is essentially a correct statement of the Epicurean position.

**SOE11: The end that our own nature seeks is pleasure. It is also in our nature to avoid pain.**

Objection to SOE11: "Nature" in general has no "end." The inanimate/nonliving part of nature has no relation to pleasure. The animate/living part of nature is guided by pleasure and repelled by pain. "Our own nature" -- does that mean we as individuals? If so yes, but that applies to all living things too.

**SOE12: There are three acceptable interpretations of the [Epicurean gods](#): the realist interpretation, the idealist interpretation, and the atheist interpretation.**

Objection to SOE12: What does "acceptable" mean? Acceptable so as to be a member of Society of Epicurus? Acceptable so as to not be considered an enemy of Epicurus? These categories listed here have no generally accepted definitions so would require explanation. I cannot imagine that any interpretation that implies that Epicurus was intentionally being less than honest with his statements on gods would be acceptable to a "Society of Epicurus." And Epicurus' statements were very specific -- he used the term "gods" to refer to naturally-occurring, non-supernatural, non-omnipotent beings which he held do exist somewhere in the universe, but not here on Earth, and having no concerns about us whatsoever, but about which we are able to either perceive or conceive aspects of pleasurable living that can serve as worthwhile things for us to contemplate and emulate. Obviously much has been lost and is unclear but no interpretation that does not accept that Epicurus meant what he said should be acceptable (in my opinion) to a society modeling itself after Epicurus.

**SOE13: The goal of religion is the experience of pure, effortless pleasure.**

Objection to SOE13: This statement seems to me to have no foundation in the Epicurean texts whatsoever. Are you saying "should be" rather than "is"? In that case the goal of a "proper" religion would be to promote pleasure and avoid pain, just as the purpose of every tool would ultimately be the same. But unless I am mistaken you are certainly not meaning to imply that this "is" the goal of every current world religion.

**SOE14: Death is nothing to us because when we are, death is not and when death is, we are not. Since there is no sentience in death, it is never experienced by us.**

Objection to SOE14: As stated I think this is a pretty accurate summary of the Epicurean position, especially the first sentence. The second sentence is also true, but we do experience death by observing it occur in other living things, and this would probably be the appropriate point to discuss something else that is extremely important: that the "issue of death" is hugely important to us (Epicurus was referring to "the state of being dead" not the many other issues surrounding death). Many many other texts tell us to live aggressively, not waste our time, think about death in the future, etc. with the point being that it is critical to remember that we are going to die so that we are properly motivated not to waste our time.

**SOE15: Under normal circumstances, we are in control of our mental dispositions.**

Objection to SOE15: The "under normal circumstances" probably is so ambiguous that it negates any benefit from this tenet. The Epicurean point in my understanding is that we should work to remain in control of our mental dispositions (like we work to control everything else) so that we maximize pleasure and minimize pain. By mentioning mental dispositions without really stating anything significant about them, the implication is that you are endorsing some kind of Stoic mind control that leads to suppression of emotions. Presumably you would only want to suggest that painful emotions should be kept under control, but even that would likely be a non-Epicurean interpretation, since it is recorded in Dlogenes Laertius that Epicurus said that the wise man feels his emotions more deeply than others, and this is no hindrance to his wisdom.

**SOE16: Choices and avoidances are carried out successfully (that is, producing pleasure as the final product) if we measure**

**advantages/pleasures versus disadvantages/pains over the long term. This means that we may sometimes defer pleasure in order to avoid greater pains, or choose temporary disadvantage, but only and always for the sake of a greater advantage or pleasure later.**

Objection to SOE16: I strongly object to the implication that there is a weighty Epicurean preference for "the long term" in general, over the short term in general. As stated in the Letter

to Menoeceus the wise man chooses of that which is best, not which is most plentiful. In Epicurean pleasure terms this is going to back to the point that "time" is not at all the only, or the most important, way to measure pleasure. Epicurus did not provide specific methods of measuring pleasure, presumably because Nature did not establish a uniform rule for doing so. We can say that we want to "maximize" pleasure or pursue the "most" pleasure, and minimize pain and pursue the least pain, but those words do not tell us anything about time or intensity or any other specific universal way to minimize pleasure. Is it "worth it" to climb to the top of Mt Everest if you die at the summit? There is no Epicurean universal answer to that question - it is an individual choice. In that case, you only get to make that choice once (if you die at the summit) so you better be right! But there is no Epicurean way to say that the person is "wrong" who chooses to make the climb knowing he will never return.

**SOE17: To live pleasantly, we must have confident expectation that we will be able to secure the chief goods: those things that are natural and necessary for life, happiness, and health. Therefore, whatever we do to secure safety, friendship, autarchy, provision of food and drink and clothing, and other basic needs, is naturally good.**

Objection to SOE18: "Chief goods" is not a term that Epicurus employed and implies that there is an outside ranking of pleasure which does not exist. The natural and necessary observations are helpful for analysis because it helps us consider the result, but WE weigh the result and make our own determinations of how much pleasure and pain is worthwhile - nature does not do that for us and there is no uniform rule established by nature. All of the things you have listed (especially / even autarchy and friendship) are tools that are generally useful in the pursuit of pleasure, but for every single one of these there are going to be times when we forgo or avoid these in our own pursuit of pleasure. Even food and water are to be avoided when fasting is necessary for survival or better health; air to be avoided when holding one's breath to escape danger is necessary; etc. And so it is explicitly wrong to imply that such things are "naturally good" in each and every circumstance. The only thing that Epicurus said is **\*\*always\*\*** desirable is pleasure itself, which is the result of activities that are themselves always contextual and sometimes to be chosen and sometimes to be avoided.

**SOE18: Autarchy furnishes greater possibilities of pleasure than slavery, dependence, or relying on luck; The unplanned life is not worth living, and we must make what is in our future better than what was in our past.**

Objection to SOE18: This formulation screams out for a "generally" qualification, for the reasons stated above. Yes these observations are generally seen to be likely to produce the most pleasurable results, but Epicurus was very clear in presenting his philosophy as contextual, and the elevation of social choices like autarchy or independence (which implies a kind of radical individualism to many people) is likely to lead to confusion on the broader point. the Epicureans

were careful even to evaluate "friendship" in terms of the pleasure it brings, and not as an end in itself.

**SOE19: Friendship is necessary for securing happiness. It is advantageous to promote Epicurean philosophy in order to widen our circle of Epicurean friends.**

Objection to SOE19: As just stated in relation to 18, it is perilous to imply that "friendship" as an abstraction is necessary for happiness. The Epicurean texts are clear that everything is contextual, even friendship, and this statement is not contextual - no individual example of "friendship" or any particular "friend" is stated in the Epicurean texts to be across-the-board necessary. The second sentence in this tenet seems to me to clearly be true, but it is a much more narrow statement than the first sentence.

**SOE20: Human relations should be based on mutual benefit.**

Objection to SOE20: This one pretty well sums up what I see as the major problem with the analysis behind most of the objections above, because it has "humanism" written all over it. Epicurus did not write in terms of "human relations" but in terms of humans pursuing pleasure individually and in groups. The last ten [PD10](#)'s make absolutely clear that while "justice" is an agreement not to harm or be harmed, it is also absolutely clear that there is no way to enumerate such agreements in absolute terms, and it is also clear that such agreements are to be broken immediately when they become disadvantageous to either party's pursuit of pleasurable living. The clear point of these final PD's is that there IS NO Epicurean "Golden rule" that we must always treat others as we would want to be treated ourselves because each decision is going to be based on the circumstances of the individuals involved: there are no ideal virtues, no supernatural morals, no across-the-board rules for which there is any authority to say that we should always follow them. In this formulation, "mutual benefit" is not only hopelessly vague, but the "mutual" part has absolutely no foundation whatsoever and in fact the clear thrust of many other doctrines is the opposite. [PD10](#) emphasizes that depravity has no absolute definition; that everything must be judged by its result, and the only standard that nature has set is that we find pleasure desirable and pain undesirable. This is the same issue where Catherine Wilson is hopelessly off base when she injects her on social preferences into Epicurean philosophy. In referring to her I give her credit in the recent podcast interview that she admits that she is outside Epicurean orthodoxy in doing so, but the matter isn't just being "outside" orthodoxy -- it turns Epicurean philosophy on its head for ANYONE at ANY TIME to suggest that their own moral or ethical preferences are anything but personal to them.

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**Post by “Hiram” of December 26, 2019 at 6:27 PM**

Thanks for the feedback. I removed the objective / subjective portion, and not sure when I'll have time to review the rest. Since you're not exactly "amenable to frank criticism" 😊 as Philodemus would put it, I will excuse myself from giving you parrhesia unless requested, but I WILL review the feedback as time allows later.

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## Post by "Cassius" of December 26, 2019 at 8:54 PM

### Quote from Hiram

Since you're not exactly "amenable to frank criticism" 😊 as Philodemus would put it, I will excuse myself from giving you parrhesia unless requested

I presume that is addressed to me and will say that of course I do not want you to hold back your "frank criticism." Obviously while we agree on a considerable number of things we disagree strongly on other things. The best way for everyone to move forward it to discuss things as clearly as possible to sharpen the differences. Yes those differences may lead us at some point to going totally (as opposed to partially) different ways, but if that were to happen then even that would still be for the best if it is due to legitimate differences rather than misunderstandings.

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## Post by "Elli" of December 27, 2019 at 11:25 AM

**Patriarchy, Matriarchy, Hierarchy, Oligarchy, Monarchy, Diarchy, Triarchy, Autarchy, Anarchy...and happy holidays for all.** 😊😊

I would like to comment here, for a few greek words such as : αυτάρκεια, αυταρχία, εγκράτεια & ευδαιμονία.

The greek word "**αυτάρκεια**" [pron. as aftárkea] consists of two words which are : "εαυτός" (thysself) + the verb "αρκώ" [pron. arkó] that means "It's sufficient or it's enough" i.e. **aftárkea** means the **self-sufficient**, but some persons that do not know the greek language at all, they transformed this word, in english, as "**Autarchy**"! 😊

However, as a greek Epicurean I thought to make for this specific word a small statistical research, and I made it on my personal FB profile. Well, the majority of my FB friends who know both greek and english very well, they understood (correctly) the meaning of the word **“autarchy”** as <<**the monarchy, the despotism and dictatorship**>>, since “autarchy” includes the word **“ευατός”** (thyself) + the verb **“άρχω”** [pron. árcho] that means oneself that rules/governs others. So, the word «αυταρχία» [pron. as **aftarchéa**], as it is used in greek language till our days, it means **oneself i.e. a man that rules/governs others;** and it's synonym with the word **“monarchy”** i.e. oneself that governs others.

Thus, the word "autarchy" has neither the meaning of the self-govern nor the self-sufficient actually, since there is already a similar greek word for the self-govern which is **“εγκράτεια+εγκρατής”** (pron. engrátia+engratis) and in english is **“self-restraint” or “temperance”**. Although, Epicurus has nothing to do with the self-govern or the self-restraint or temperance, of course. Epicurus just spoke clearly for self-sufficient - aftárkea - that is a mean that is measured - as any other mean - through hedonic calculus according to the circumstances and the consequences of the experiences for the achievement of the goal of pleasure.

In addition, and in the same way "autarchy" is being used to mean "self-sufficient," I would ask: Why not transform the Greek word "ευδαιμονία" [pron. as eudaemonía] in English as "eudaemon+archy" ("pleasure-archy")? Why not? Because the deepest purpose, above all, of "-archy/archo" is the meaning of governing others! Some people seem to want to use Greek words even when they change their meaning, because they do not consider their etymology at all. And when I say "they do not consider," I mean, above all, that they do not have a clue about the clarity that Epicurus was asking for!

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## Post by “Hiram” of December 27, 2019 at 12:30 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I presume that is addressed to me and will say that of course I do not want you to hold back your "frank criticism." Obviously while we agree on a considerable number of things we disagree strongly on other things. The best way for everyone to move forward it to discuss things as clearly as possible to sharpen the differences. Yes those differences may lead us at some point to going totally (as opposed to partially) different ways, but if that were to happen then even that would still be for the best if it is due to legitimate differences rather than misunderstandings.

I guess you've always made me feel like when I offer critique that you just use my words to build a bigger wall between us, so it feel so pointless and I don't feel like you will profit from anything I say anymore, and Elayne also. Her "people like Hiram" comment felt full of ill-will and like a personal attack, which goes against philodemus' instructions about parrhesia, which would require that people be committed to each other's character and happiness and that they use suavity. So it's probably no use to offer criticism considering there seem to be other issues, suspicion and hostility that impede the development of trust and friendship.

Also I suspect that the internet doesn't help because so many nuances of normal communication don't come through.

I was just translating DeWitt's Procedures in Epicurean groups, and here it cites Philodemus' Peri Parrhesias.

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### **Post by "Hiram" of December 27, 2019 at 12:32 PM**

Here is the quote from Philodemus:

Proper correction will come from one "actuated by good will, devoting himself intelligently and diligently to philosophy, steadfast in principle, careless of what people think of him, immune from any tendency to demagoguery, \*\*\* free from spitefulness\*\*\*, saying only what fits the occasion, and not likely to be carried away so as to \*\*\*revile, jeer, belittle, injure feelings\*\*\*, or resort to tricks of wanton acquiescence or flattery. - Philodemus of Gadara, On Frank Criticism I-b, 2-13

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### **Post by "Cassius" of December 27, 2019 at 6:41 PM**

#### [Quote from Hiram](#)

that you just use my words to build a bigger wall between us, so it feel so pointless and I don't feel like you will profit from anything I say anymore,

Hiram:

Building a wall between us is not my intent at all, and it is definitely not true that I do not profit from what you say.

As I see it, you have always had more of an emphasis on "building bridges to other traditions" while my emphasis has always been more on getting a more clear understanding of what Epicurus himself said without regard to bridges to other traditions.

I have been thinking about these issues in relationship to the sometimes competing goals of "truth" vs. "happiness." I think it is tempting for some people to start with "happiness" as their goal, and to think that it is not necessary to be concerned about whether the path to happiness aligns with "truth" or not. And then we have to overlay that with one of the issues we have discussed here, which is the issue of "objective" vs. "subjective" truth.

I cannot speak for other traditions, but I identify with Greco-Western traditions, and within that there is I think a dedication to the premise that while the "truth" may not always be happy, the best way to happiness is always going to be found by starting looking for the truth. That's why I think Epicurean philosophy starts with physics and epistemology (as did Lucretius) rather than by ethical conclusions. If it were "true" that the universe had been created by a supernatural god, then we would move heaven and earth to try to find out and conform ourselves to that divine will. And that is why Epicurus was considered a "dogmatist" -- even though we perceive the universe subjectively through our senses, we analyse the situation and have confidence that some observations (absence of a supernatural god creating the universe) are so well confirmed by the evidence that we can be "dogmatic" that we are correct on such issue.

It is only because we first start out by concluding that there ARE no supernatural gods that we conclude that feeling is the only proper goal. Now if that builds a wall between an Epicurean and all religious-based non-Epicureans, then so be it, as far as I am concerned. And to the best I can tell, that was Epicurus' attitude as well. It would be nice to expand our circle of Epicurean friends as far as possible, but not at the expense of the basic truth that the best path to happiness (a life guided by pleasure) comes by rejecting all pretence to the supernatural.

So while it is very tempting for me to stretch my understanding of the texts in an attempt to agree with you when I sense that we disagree, I think it is not a good choice to disguise the disagreement.

And that is where I think it is clear that I do profit from these exchanges with you.

As I see it, you frequently occupy an untenable middle ground between Epicurean philosophy and humanism, and I think that you sense that, but have simply decided to weigh in with humanism due to your personal preferences. I certainly have personal preferences myself, and at appropriate times and places I express them, but the reason we came together in the first place and collaborate has been the promotion of Epicurean philosophy in general, not particular applications of it with which you or I might personally disagree.

I hope for the future that we can have these discussions a thousand times over, with thousands of new people, because I think the issues we are confronting are crucial. And they are likely

inevitable for many years to come. Everyone is going to have to decide whether the "truth" (which is that nature does not endorse their personal sense of pleasure) is more important than first acknowledging that it is the **feeling of pleasure** (which is not experienced in the same way for everyone) that is the guide, not any personal application of a specific pleasure that is the same for everyone. It is easy to have an organization dedicated to the pleasure of fishing, and within that group there can be all types of fishing which virtually everyone in the group can appreciate. But Epicurean philosophy teaches "the feeling of pleasure" as a replacement for false ideas of supernatural gods and universal ideals, rather than "pleasure as experienced by Americans" or "pleasure as experienced by Russians" or "pleasure as experienced by Saudi Arabians." And on and on -- the point is easy to see, but not to accept within the framework of supernatural religion or of idealistic one-size-fits-all theories like "humanism."

I think I see this same tension in the work of Catherine Wilson, whose recent books in many ways hark back more to the DeWitt model than to the Okeefe "absence of pain" nonsense. Wilson seems to throw her weight behind a common sense interpretation of pleasure, and she is willing to state fairly clearly that she is an Epicurean, and not a Stoic, despite what is no doubt a lot of peer pressure to "just get along" with everyone.

And yet she laces her Epicurean writings with her own personal political preferences that contradict the core issue that we are talking about -- that EVERYONE has personal political preferences because everyone is an individual with a different experience of what is pleasing to them -- and Wilson undercuts her credibility and effectiveness by not acknowledging that.

Epicurean philosophy is not "humanism" and in many ways it is the \*opposite\* of humanism, which is just as "universalistic" and "absolutist" in nature as is Christianity, Judaism, or any variation of Abrahamic religion.

These are the issues that I see dividing us, but I don't take them personally and I hope that you will not either. We may well take them in different directions, which as I keep saying I think is inevitable since specific experience of pleasure is not the same for everyone. But let me be clear that when I say that I am not inviting a "split" -- what I am hoping for over time is that we will have communities of Epicureans worldwide who will acknowledge that while they have their own respective views of the happiest way to live, that the basic insights of Epicurus about the nature of the universe, and the pursuit of happiness being justified by nature, gives them truly a shared basis for working out their differences in a much better way than supernatural religion or absolutist humanism would ever allow.

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**Post by "Elayne" of December 27, 2019 at 11:02 PM**

Hiram, I don't have time for a long reply, since I am spending time with my daughter this weekend. There is a history here that is not being directly confronted. You recently published a very cutting and misleading article that you admitted was directed at this group, and you've been dismissive of me and others in our private group messages. You've made multiple public comments that were covertly aggressive, towards Cassius, Elli, and me. It doesn't really work to "nicely" insult people as you have. So I think it is disingenuous to say all this.

I am being straightforward here. I know nothing about you personally, so I am not making a personal insult. But your direction in philosophy is not consistent with science. It has a strong thread of idealism for which there is no basis in reality. I do think Epicurus' ethics was consistent with his physics. It does upset me that you are using your public platform to put Epicurus' name on a version that doesn't fit the physics. I think it hurts our chances of spreading a reality-based philosophy that leads to pleasure. I and others have tried to persuade you away from this course, but it has not worked. We have tried the friendly approach to no avail.

Epicurus was straightforward about his opponents. He called them names, like Plato "The Golden." I am not a name-caller, but I am not going to be fake with you. As long as you pursue the course you've chosen, I'm going to say I think you are making a tragic mistake. And I hope you change your mind.

Because idealism is so popular and familiar, you will have an easier time attracting fame and followers than someone who promotes the non-idealistic perspective. It sells, big time, because it's already the trend. You will have the appearance of speaking for Epicurus. This seems an utter disaster to me.

Speaking plainly about what I see you doing is not meant as a jibe at you. It is meant for the benefit of people who may be learning on this site, in hopes that they will choose a life of real pleasure instead of the idealism you are promoting. If I am not plain about it, they may miss the differences, simply because reality based philosophy is so radically unusual.

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### **Post by "Godfrey" of December 27, 2019 at 11:46 PM**

First, fwiw I find this discussion quite valuable in challenging and clarifying my understanding.

[Elli](#) as one who knows nothing about Greek, I've been curious about that word autarchy so thanks for that clarification.

#### Quote

Objection to SOE6: There is a component to this that was essential to Epicurus and is controversial, and that is the issue about whether the elemental particles are themselves indivisible. Epicurus appears to have held that indivisibility is essential for a number of reasons, most apparently leading to the need to point to something that is ultimately unchanging in order for the regularity we see in the universe to be grounded in nature and not in supernatural gods. I agree with him that the issue of indivisibility is critical and needs to be explicitly stated.

This is best split off into another thread: my sketchy understanding of atomic/subatomic particles ends at around 1978. What current sources of information are there on the subject that are comprehensible to a layman? I think some study of this would be useful in order to examine how current thinking aligns with Epicurus' conception of atoms. Much of the current understanding seems to be theoretical, as was Epicurus'. I don't want to become a nuclear physicist but I think it's a fertile topic for study and discussion. Particles, waves, energy, theoretical process... enough science to contribute to the philosophy. (I think we've touched on this elsewhere but I haven't tracked it down yet.)

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#### **Post by “Godfrey” of December 28, 2019 at 12:05 AM**

Here's a link to a previous post on the subject:

[Fields, Particles, and the Reality We Live In](#)

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#### **Post by “Elayne” of December 28, 2019 at 12:06 AM**

maybe Bruce Schumm's Deep Down Things about particle physics? My dad is a particle physicist, so I have heard him talk about it all my life. He still gives me lectures on magnetic fields when I visit him.

## **Post by “Elayne” of December 28, 2019 at 12:11 AM**

Also, Hiram, I am uncertain about Philodemus' accuracy in representing Epicurus. You lean heavily on him. I decided to become an Epicurean because he was the only philosopher I'd ever read whom I agreed with. I tested Epicurus' words against my knowledge of the world and found him valid, which is a different process from learning the ideas from scratch. I approve of him because he was right, rather than having learned what was correct from him.

I do not find that all of Philodemus' writings are as accurate about reality as Epicurus was. I'm not 100% convinced Philodemus understood things accurately, and I don't mind questioning the value of his advice.

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## **Post by “Elli” of December 28, 2019 at 5:08 AM**

To Hiram Crespo Thessaloniki 15th of October 2014

5757 N. XXXXXXX Rd., XXXXX

Chicago IL 60660 USA

My dear Hiram,

I hope this parcel of mine to find you strong and well.

I am really sorry to say to you, but I did not manage to read your book.

As I told you I have many greek books to read now. I hope next month, I will read it.

Then I'll give it to my greek epicurean friend for giving it to the publisher of “XXXXXXXXXX” if there is a possibility to be translated into the greek language.

I enclose to you the tea of the mountain of gods, Olympus, and a bottle of a good virgin olive oil, as I promised.

I hope you enjoy both of them.

We keep in touch at the FB profile as usual.

With my best and friendly epicurean regards,

This was the letter that I had sent to Hiram 5 years ago that is followed after he already sent me his book with an attached **cold letter by his publisher**. For speaking on Ethics that is to say, Hiram did not act like the wise Epicurus who was sending letters to his friends with many of his wise admonishments and **his feelings of care above all**.

However, when I did not manage for his book to be translated into the Greek language, due to the financial crisis that strikes and the editions in Greece, he did not like that of course. In the meantime, when I was speaking with frankness of speech to him e.g. as the above that is wrong to use the word "autarchy" for "self-sufficiency", as well as, for some other important issues OR when I spoke with frankness to some unknown and non-epicurean persons on the FB EP group, he suggested to delete me as an admin and as an epicurean friend from there, and please think of it, that his suggestion was in the day of my birthday when he never wished me anything at all. And that is because I did not follow educational instructions on how to write comments with prologues, epilogues, paragraphs, commas, full stop, question marks, and exclamation points! The same educational instructions were for Cassius too. Yes, indeed, this is the "epicurean friendship" that Hiram is proclaiming about and around. I wonder now who builds walls around him ? And who is the person that was never participated in anything with anyone on that FB EP group from the beginning till now? In the meantime when the newcomers were passing by from there, many of Hiram's comments were ads for his book.

But the most important is that he imagines himself that is like Philodemus who was the chief-guide in a villa-school in the Roman city of Herculaneum that was supported by a wealthy sponsor with the name Piso, and all the people must obey his epicurean -mixed with idealism - teachings. And when someone will speak to him with frankness that somewhere he is wrong, first he speaks behind his back and then he says in front of that someone that he /she does not accept the Philodemus's parrhesia, as he/she has an ill-will using a harsh language, for taking all these as personal attacks to him or to someone else like him.

So, here are **some simple thoughts by Epicurus on the wise man** :

**- A man cannot become wise in every kind of physical constitution, or in every nation.**

**- The wise man shows gratitude, and constantly speaks well of his friends whether they are present or absent.**

- **The Epicureans assert that the wise man will not make elegant speeches.**
  
- **The wise man will not become a tyrant.**
  
- **The wise man will leave books and memorials of himself behind him, but he will not be fond of frequenting assemblies.**
  
- **One wise man is not wiser than another.**
  
- **The wise man gathers together a school, but never so as to become a leader of crowds.**
  
- **The wise man will give lectures in public, but it will be against his inclination and never unless asked.**
  
- **The wise man will teach things that are definite, rather than doubtful musings.**

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**Post by “Cassius” of December 28, 2019 at 7:27 AM**

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

I don't want to become a nuclear physicist but I think it's a fertile topic for study and discussion.

As you say Godfrey this needs a thread of its own. As I understand the point, I too think that Epicurus would say that you don't want or need to become a nuclear physicist. The issue revolves more around what I understand to have been the logic games that the philosophers had been playing with infinite divisibility, relating too to the issue of questions like how it would be impossible to walk across a room because the distance could be looked as as always decreasing by half (poor summary but as you say - needs a different thread). I think this was an area that derives more from "it must be the case" deduction, just like the swerve of the atom. The very act of discussing it is what Epicurus advised too, because knowing that there are reasonable theories which explain things without the existence of supernatural gods goes a long way toward toward the peace of mind of all of us who are not, and never will be, nuclear physicists. And that's not to mention the peace of mind needed by the nuclear physicists themselves, who themselves do not know, and will never know "ultimate" answers.

Godfrey have you read any Victor Stenger? I know that Alex says that his physics books are very good and at least largely compatible with Epicurus, but I have not found the time to read them myself so I cannot verify that personally.

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## Post by “Cassius” of December 28, 2019 at 7:40 AM

### [Quote from Elayne](#)

I am uncertain about Philodemus' accuracy in representing Epicurus.

I am going to comment on several of the above posts but this comment I want to highlight. I agree that skepticism toward Philodemus is warranted for a number of reasons, but there is one reason that I want to highlight, and that is: Many of his works are in such a bad condition that much of what we are reading as the work of "Philodemus" is often little more than informed speculation based on reconstruction of words and passages so much out of contact that it is hardly possible sometimes to tell whether Philodemus is talking about Epicurean positions or "enemy" positions.

(And that's especially a problem because it's normal in a philosophical writing to quote the position you are attacking before you attack it. What if the part that survives is the quote from the position being attacked?)

And that fragmentary and out-of-context state means that scholars -- in many cases very contemporary scholars who have drunk deep from the Stoic-friendly interpretations of Philodemus - are making speculative reconstructions of what they \*expect\* Philodemus to have been saying, when what they "expect" is not what an ancient Epicurean would really have

written.

I think some very valuable information can be gleaned from what we have on Philodemus, but it has to be done very carefully, and I agree with Elayne that I do not trust anything that we have from Philodemus that would carry any implication that cannot also be supported from Lucretius, Diogenes of Oinoanda, or other more faithful and less fragmentary sources.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of December 28, 2019 at 8:03 AM**

OK as to the points raised in the other posts by Elayne and Elli in the last 24 hours: there is a lot of background context to this discussion which may not be appropriate to explain further for this thread. On the other hand it "may" be appropriate, too, depending on whether one of the participants or someone reading it wants to discuss and learn from the details for more than just an unproductive desire to air unpleasantness. I can address any details as appropriate.

For now I think the basic point I want to make is that my reading of the history is consistent with Elli's and Elayne's interpretation of it. Elli goes almost as far back with Hiram as do I, so she has watched the situation over the years and knows it clearly. Elayne brings a fresh and quickly insightful perspective to evaluating where we are. It is clear to me that she expresses a justifiable frustration with the situation because as we have advanced in clarity over the years of study, the contradictions that might not have been quite so apparent years ago are now much more visible and easy to see. Elayne sees the contradictions and is working vigorously to deal with them, as we all should, regardless of pre-existing relationships.

Those of us who are committed to promoting Epicurus as he was understood "classically," as a mortal enemy of Stoic emotionlessness and Platonic idealism, are in a distinct minority. It is necessary for us to stick together cooperatively wherever and whenever possible. And that means that watering down the philosophy for the sake of appealing to its enemies, which we do when we compromise with the many variants of humanism, is a very negative thing that needs to be called out as such.

What rumbles beneath the surface here is a continuing struggle against humanism / idealism / stoicism that isn't going to go away, and isn't going to be fixed by finding some kind of middle ground or papering over the canyon between the opposing perspectives.

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### **Post by “Elli” of December 28, 2019 at 11:31 AM**

## **Walls**

With no consideration, no pity, no shame,  
they have built walls around me, thick and high.  
And now I sit here feeling hopeless.  
I can't think of anything else: this fate gnaws my mind -  
because I had so much to do outside.  
When they were building the walls, how could I not have noticed!  
But I never heard the builders, not a sound.  
Imperceptibly they have closed me off from the outside world.

## **The Windows**

In these dark rooms where I live out empty days,  
I wander round and round  
trying to find the windows.  
It will be a great relief when a window opens.  
But the windows aren't there to be found -  
or at least I can't find them. And perhaps  
it's better if I don't find them.  
Perhaps the light will prove another tyranny.  
Who knows what new things it will expose?

The above are two of the top poems by C.P. Cavafy about the trapping that characterizes many people's lives and of course his own. A life of loneliness and sadness, with the feeling of being unsatisfied with the poet's wanderlust, who seeks diligently the reasons that led him to this point. The poem "The windows" symbolize the reasons sought by the poet for the state of his life. While his poem "Walls" are being built by others, we see that "windows" are combined with the concept of light and what the poet wants is to illuminate the dark spots of his life so that he can understand how he came living his life with many restrictions and oppressions. How he lost control of his life over the years and ended up spending his days in the dark - in ignorance - and in solitude.

This wondering of the poet expresses the concerns of many people who have gradually found themselves far from their original goals and the pursuit of happiness i.e. **the pure pleasure as we, the epicureans, are saying**. A web of habits and obligations, the attempt of man to live as others require for him without him, and a society that traps its members in a prescribed course, often alienate to the human removing from him whatever he wishes for his life.

As in the poem "The Walls" Cavafy raises the question of the restrictions that have been put on his life and states that he never understood when and who trapped him inside them, in the poem "The Windows" Cavafy appears to ignore the reasons why his life has come to be so limited and depressing. And despite his efforts to find the "windows", he fails to appear as if they were not even there or as if he were unable to locate them. The truth is, after all, that in order to be able to identify the reasons why he does not have the life he desires, he must seek responsibility not only in others and in society, as he says in the first poem entitled "Walls", but also to himself, which is not always easy.

That is why the poet thinks it may be better that he cannot find the windows - which are the causes that has to search and deepening in them - because, as he says, he may then be confronted with issues that he would rather not to know or has not to realize. Perhaps, the poet says : to find windows, to be finally a new state **of the feeling of pain, and the truth that he wants so much to find**, to be the cause of a crucial battle with himself, and this may, instead of rescuing him, **it will bring him a greater agitation**.

The poet's hard days are a result of not only the restrictions the society places on him, but also the restrictions he places on himself. The responsibility for the grief of the poet - and every human being like the psychosomatic of the poet - lies not only on others but also on himself. And this is our subjective truth that we are not always ready to handle, which is why the poet concludes that it may be better not to find the windows.... And that's why the majority of people **choose the STOIC anesthesia and apathy that is given with that known : <<pleasure is the absence of pain>> !**

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**Post by "Cassius" of December 28, 2019 at 11:42 AM**

[Quote from elli](#)

That is why the poet thinks it may be better that he cannot find the windows - which are the causes that has to search and deepening in them - because, as he says, he may then be confronted with issues that he would rather not to know or has not to realize. Perhaps, the poet says : to find windows, to be finally a new state of the feeling of pain, and the truth that he wants so much to find, to be the cause of a crucial battle

with himself, and this may, instead of rescuing him, it will bring him a greater agitation.

I think this gets very close to an ultimate issue that divides people who interpret Epicurus differently. I can certainly understand that there are times and circumstances where the pain of life is just so overwhelming that it seems like nothing is worth doing other than escaping agitation. But as bad as I feel for such people, I don't think that such a worldview is necessary for everyone in every circumstance, and I think Epicurus was part of the segment of humanity who sees life in Jefferson's phrase - "the greater part of life is sunshine." We can't measure the sunshine part in terms of length, or in any specific terms at all, other than that we FEEL that part to be why we are alive and how we want to spend our lives.

Those of us who see the world that way bear no ill will against anyone else who wants to focus on the dark side and the escape to what they want to call "tranquility." But that doesn't seem to be a two way street, because many people who are focused on escaping from pain see those who are not so focused as an affront to themselves, and so they work very hard to invent all sorts of ways to "prove" that pleasure is an impractical guide to life, and that there are things in their minds that are so much more "worthy" than the pleasure of themselves and their friends.

To me it is no coincidence that both Nietzsche and Liantinis saw something important in Epicurus. I don't think either of them developed the connection deeply enough, but both of them express the depth of feeling that is (to me) the end result that is compelled by the Epicurean worldview.

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## Post by "Hiram" of December 28, 2019 at 11:54 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I think I see this same tension in the work of Catherine Wilson ...

These are the issues that I see dividing u....

If you read my review of her book, you will see that these are NOT exactly the issues that are dividing us (only your perspective of them), and that I agree with much of your critique of her. I will discuss in more detail below, and later as time allows, if you let me.

Concerning the 6th Tenet, that's the reason why I chose the word particle instead of atom, because atom means indivisible and this will avoid the confusion.

### [Quote from Elayne](#)

I am being straightforward here. I know nothing about you personally, so I am not making a personal insult. But your direction in philosophy is not consistent with science. It has a strong thread of idealism for which there is no basis in reality. I do think Epicurus' ethics was consistent with his physics. It does upset me that you are using your public platform to put Epicurus' name on a version that doesn't fit the physics.

Not sure what you're even talking about ... idealism? Really? In the years I've been promoting EP this has always been clear. Can you elaborate?

If by this you mean the "idealist interpretation of the gods" and "the atheist interpretation of the gods"--the first is one of the academically accepted interpretations and the last one is the interpretation that is most prominent perhaps among today's Epicureans, including Ilkka and myself (sources and arguments cited from both our blogs). If Society of Epicurus is to be a big-tent organization of Epicurean intellectuals, people who hold the three views will have to be willing to work with each other (obviously this is my project, not yours, but if you ever have to create an organization you will have to consider this issue).

So [Elayne](#) I'm sorry if I ever disparaged you particularly. I have history with Cassius, six years, and I've come to expect that he already has made up his mind before I present any critique, which has produced distance between us. So I'm made to feel like he will not profit from my words, and like I'd rather talk to a wall or a mirror (a drag queen once told me that mirrors don't lie, and it's true!). I was very thankful to him for his influence in the initial years of my formation, but we have been for some time obviously in the process of parting ways and it would be nice to do so with friendly discussions and, as we clarify our points of disagreement, (and ONLY if there is room for parrhesia, and therefore for Friendship) to challenge each other from time to time. Can two factions of Epicureans work together, and to what extent? I don't know.

Also thank you for admitting that you do not rely on Philodemus, and this is a **highly important point of sincere divergence**. It's also very problematic. I had a very strong suspicion that you hadn't read his Peri Parrhesias.

I do not consider Epicurus infallible, and I suspect most modern Epicureans think the same, and I also think that Philodemus is extremely important because by the time he was writing, many generations had been connecting theory with practice for centuries. So it's an error on your part to dismiss his writings.

Also, there is the problem of **defining authority**. And how is authority used. For you, it's Epicurus--for me, it's the canon, and all the intellectuals that have studied nature following this tradition will continue to use the canon, and perhaps some will even continue to **perfect** its use. This point of divergence will become more crucial if you ever decide to try to create an

Epicurean organization, because it will define everything else.

I don't just respect Lucretius, Philodemus, and even people like Lucian the comedian--which acknowledging that none is infallible. I also consider Michel Onfray to be the most important Epicurean intellectual of our generation, but I don't think you guys have anything approaching a clear idea of his work, and this--again--makes it difficult to connect theory with practice, with the current societal needs and issues that Epicurean philosophy has real moral guidance to give on.

I see Epicurean philosophy as a growing and evolving, adaptable, school of thought, and I get the sense that you, Cassius (and probably a few others) do not, you are instead Epicurus-only fundamentalists.

I am willing to concede that your approach is a FORM of Epicureanism, even if not one that I would agree with or find useful. I think Cassius is willing to concede the same to me, but so far you're not, for reasons that are not fully clear to me.

I wish to address your gate-keeping behavior, and I think Philodemus is important for this. **If you adopt a fundamentalist approach, and claim that you're the ONLY TRUE Epicurean and no one else is, that you're right and only you are right but no one else is (even \_Philodemus!\_, as you have just admitted--who was a recipient of centuries of tradition directly from a Scholarch of direct lineage), then in practice that becomes a mechanism to avoid frank criticism, which is a critical component of the mode of operation of EP.** My challenge is for you to think about the repercussions of this.

If a person does not accept our frank criticism there is no true friendship. If I am made to feel like I must be an object to your ideology or your agenda in order to be in your circle, and I can never be a subject (Hiram, with my own ideas, history, cultural baggage, likes and dislikes, my gayness and my hostility against the Catholicism I was brought up in, the FULL human being), then there is NO possibility of proper inter-subjective relations between us. AND of friendship. I can't be a subject, only an object. I would be forced to become a flatterer, rather than a Friend in the proper sense. Which is where Philodemus comes in, because **Philodemus wrote about this, which means that he must have observed it in his Garden or other Epicurean spaces, and that this is a tendency in some Epicurean communities and he wanted to warn us about it.**

Philodemus said that flatterers were a category of false friends. The person who is always right and does not accept a critique (for instance, the fundamentalist) will attract flatterers instead of friends, and your gate-keeping behavior and Cassius' insistence that he will "only work with" others who agree on all his opinions creates the possibility for surrounding yourself with flatterers, who may feel like they must remain more-or-less silent when they have a sincere disagreement with you in order to avoid your excommunication.

That's PHILODEMUS' critique of flatterers: that they are not real friends. My own critique is that you will not receive the proper "medication" of frank criticism, the moral and intellectual challenges that come with friendship, if you continue to push away potential friends and surround yourself with flatterers in the service of the fundamentalist stance.

Surrounding oneself with flatterers is safe, it's comfortable, and I'm sure even enjoyable. Surrounding oneself with friends is enjoyable also, but CHALLENGING. Less comfortable.

I was hesitating to offer parrhesia, as I said, because I was not confident you + Cassius would profit from my words, which is why I've so carefully presented them, but even if I leave the forum, at least I hope you profit from THESE words. There is no TRUE Friendship without parrhesia, there is no intersubjectivity if people are made to feel like objects in your circle and pushed into the role of a flatterer (as you and Cassius often seem to each other), which is what the "I am always right, you're always wrong" and the impervious-to-frankness attitude produces. You will continue to push away friends and the only people you'll attract who will remain here will be flatterers.

I was thinking of leaving the EF forum, actually, for some of the reasons that I've shared before, and it's hard to figure out what to do with my six years of history with Cassius: you're always right, I'm always wrong, there is a closed bubble and I am now frequently not made to feel welcome in that closed bubble. But what if I stay?

So I guess what I'm saying is that I would like to be your friend, but I will not be your flatterer, [Cassius](#) and [Elayne](#). I will not be your object, only a subject. You do not have to \_accept\_ my offer of friendship, only the challenges that come with it (or you can reject it, to follow through your own agendas and projects to your liking and miss out on profiting from my words) ... but for me to stay, you would have to evaluate the problems related to the fundamentalist stance which nurtures the gate-keeping behavior. This means that you would have to accept that there ARE sincere Epicureans who will not be Epicurus-only fundamentalists.

And if [Elayne](#) rejects Philodemus' teachings, as she is free to do, then it's not clear what rules other than the ones he laid out would govern our interaction! I mean, Philodemus was on the receiving end of centuries of Epicurean community practices. We have ZERO of that.

oh and thank you [Elli](#) for defending "autarchy". It's a neglected subject, which is why I dedicated 2019 content in my blog to it and to epicurean economics.

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**Post by "Hiram" of December 28, 2019 at 12:03 PM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

OK as to the points raised in the other posts by Elayne and Elli in the last 24 hours: there is a lot of background context to this discussion which may not be appropriate to explain further for this thread. On the other hand it "may" be appropriate, too, depending on whether one of the participants or someone reading it wants to discuss and learn from the details for more than just an unproductive desire to air unpleasantness. I can address any details as appropriate.

Yes, considering Elli's characterization of me, I HONESTLY don't want to open that can of worms other than to say I've always disagreed with the suspicion and hostility that new students of Epicurus are often subjected to on the EP facebook group, and that Jason and I left the admin group in disagreement over this issue, ironically, while DEFENDING @Elayne's right to be in the group when she initially came in! So it's a huge irony that Elayne is engaging in similar gate-keeping behavior now, and subjecting me to it when I've been teaching EP for six years, and the only reason why she's here is because I angrily stood up to Elli defending Elayne's right to join the EP group.

Then there's lack of clear speech, which may be the result of language barrier, but impede frank criticism. As I said, I've been made to feel time and again like others have their mind made up before I offer my words, and I do not feel that the issues I raise are addressed. I want people to come to EP to be made to feel welcome. There are more issues here, which are prudent to avoid discussing, so I'll refrain from addressing Elli's remarks further.

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### **Post by "Elayne" of December 28, 2019 at 2:30 PM**

Hiram, I preferred not to go into a bickering level of detail, mostly bc it seems pointless. Elli and I have long ago developed a friendship. Our initial difficulties resulted from a misunderstanding-- she thought I was a humanist/idealistic, and I was offended at someone thinking that about me, because it is the opposite of who I am. After I saw how much trouble the FB site had from people pushing other philosophies on there, I totally understood what happened. Elli turns out to be one of the warmest and kindest people I have met.

The reason I express admiration and agreement with Cassius and Elli is that I am joyful at finally finding people who understand life the way I do. It is not for flattery-- it is deep appreciation, and relief that I am not alone. Epicurus talked about the importance of finding like-minded friends to study philosophy and share life with.

I actually had already been using the Canon to assess reality before I read it, although mine was less organized. It is how I evaluated Epicurus' words for truth-- it is how I evaluate Philodemus or anyone else. I think what you, Hiram, are not understanding is that I am testing what anyone says, living or dead, by the Canon. So I don't care who it is that says a thing or how long they've done it for-- if it doesn't line up with reality, it won't fly for me.

I was startled to find a philosopher I agreed with, on almost everything. I would have just called it my own philosophy, because it is, but that would be plagiarism since he said it first.

I consider myself a fundamentalist only in regards to reality. Epicurus shared my perspective on that. If someone else doesn't, then that is why I disagree, not because of some weird cult thing.

You don't know how you would interact with me if I don't follow Philodemus' rules? If you don't know how it is you've been rude to me-- primarily condescending-- I don't think a rule will help fix that. I prefer the spontaneous kindness of friends, who do not need rules to want each other to be happy. Even while following rules, people can be very unkind if they lack the underlying feeling. I see Epicurus' words on friendship more as descriptive-- this is what it's like to be friends-- not a fixed set of rules.

Like Epicurus, I am not overly quick to assess a relationship as a friendship.

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## **Post by "Elli" of December 28, 2019 at 2:40 PM**

Hiram Crespo said : You will continue to push away friends and the only people you'll attract who will remain here will be flatterers.

I have the impression that he confuses the enrichment of feelings of empathy, understanding, care, pleasure, and joy with the flattering.

Maybe he did not have a clue that we do use all the criteria of truth of the Canon for judging rightly who are those that produce to us pleasurable feelings and who do not.

Does he say that we are naive ? Who said that Cassius and Elayne did not accept frankness of speech from me or me from them or from other persons? Does he know what we do say in our private messages to each other or on the private group of friends ?

Does he say that Elayne who is a doctor needs medication or Cassius needs too? Concerning me he does not comment, he will open the can with worms! Does he mean that I am a worm ?

Sorry, I am not a brown-nose for kissing filthy pants of such people that proclaim idealistic-humanism just for the purpose to sell any book. And sorry that I am not a Buddhist that I have to eliminate my self and my desires for reaching Nirvana. From the beginning, I did not agree with him with all these and these are the fist causes of our differences.

And again I say that I did not speak to Elayne behind her back and I did send to her a private message to understand each other better. This case is closed for us, and we are very closed friends now. But really, does he think that he was the reason for that ? Did he feel that he had any ability to inspire me to any beneficial thing after his actions with the translation of his book and as I commented to my first comment here ?

But really who speaks for all these ? The one that does not accept frank criticism from the beginning and the only he does is to speak to other persons and for other persons behind their backs ? I admit he has a master degree in intrigue.

However, for the flattering issue, we have Epicurus and some fragments of his letters to his friends that are as follows :

Epicurus to Leontion : “O Paeon and Anax Apollo, my dear little Leontion, with what tumultuous applause we were inspired as we read your letter.”

Epicurus to Themista, the wife of Leonteus: “I am quite ready, if you do not come to see me, to roll around three times on my own axis and be propelled to any place that you, including Themista, agree upon”.

Epicurus to the handsome Pythocles : “I will sit quietly and await with desire for your God-like coming”.

...and, as Theodorus says in the fourth book of his work, Against Epicurus, in another letter to Themista he thinks he preaches to her.

Epicurus corresponded with many courtesans, and especially with Leontion, of whom Metrodorus also was enamored.

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You are a bad-bad man Epicurus it seems in your above words that you flattered all the persons in your Garden, and you did not speak to each other with Parrhesia as Philodemus said!

Epicurus asks: who is Philodemus ?

Elli responds to Epicurus : O, he is just like a small hair from your testicles, my dear teacher!



## Post by “Cassius” of December 28, 2019 at 4:24 PM

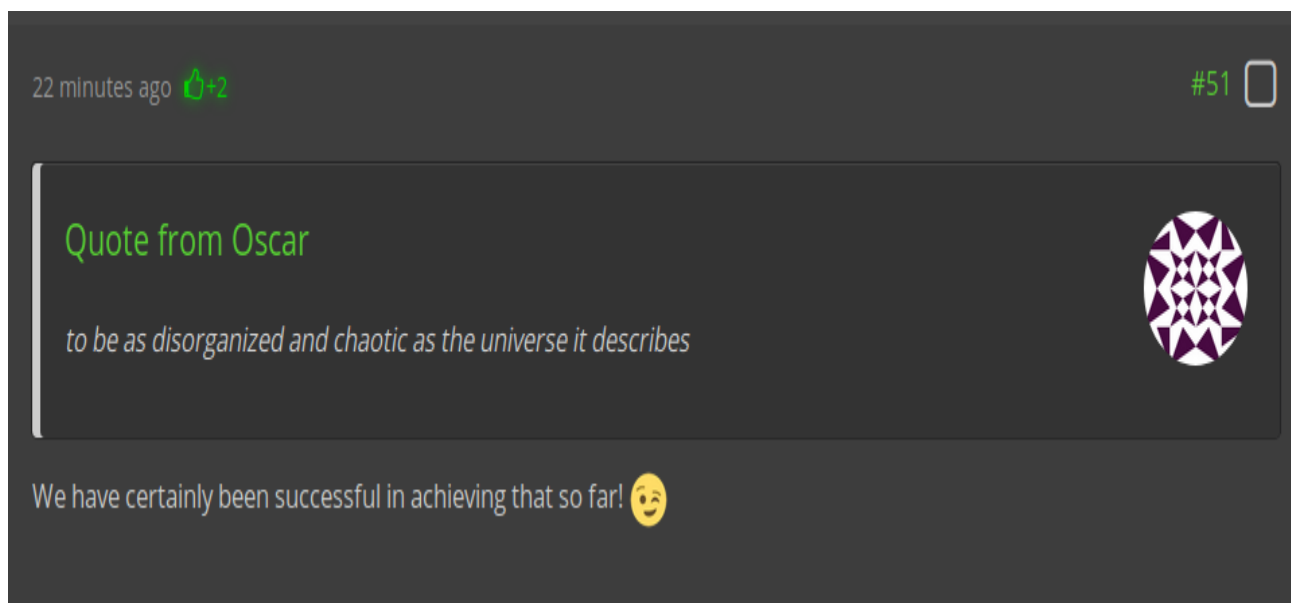
[Quote from Oscar](#)

to be as disorganized and chaotic as the universe it describes

We have certainly been successful in achieving that so far! 😊

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## Post by “Cassius” of December 28, 2019 at 5:02 PM



I should have said more about this, but I think I missed the point because my first reaction to Oscar's comment was that it was funny. More than being funny, observing that application may be "disorganized" is EXACTLY what I think. I think it's the nature of the universe that living things experience pleasure in ways that are both (1) broadly similar among species and (2) widely variable within those limits for individuals of the same species. And that means that there are going to be very many individual "takes" on how to apply Epicurean philosophy. I would like to think that we can bring a certain degree of organization to it, and that it definitely not be "chaotic" (at least under some definitions of that word) but there is no way everyone is going to see things the same way on everything.

And I see this as one of the major differences in perspective that is behind these discussions. I find myself regularly making the point that we should not expect everyone to come to the same

conclusions about how pursue pleasure. I think part of the reason I find myself doing that because I get the impression from posts at Society of Epicurus seem to imply that everyone should pursue things in at least broadly similar ways (such as the "golden rule" comments).

I doubt I need to elaborate much further again because I have make the same point earlier in this thread, but that's why I don't want people to get too disconcerted over the disagreements they are reading in this thread. By trying to enforce rules against "politics" we can try to keep focused on higher-level issues that allow the widest possible big tent. But at the same time, real people have real feelings and specific interests that they want to talk about. The rub is that the more specific they get about controversial issues (as does Catherine Wilson or other "humanist" writing) then the more we're going to have disputes need to form separate initiatives.

That's natural and to be expected, just as Oscar implies, and need not be a source of personal animosity.

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### **Post by “Hiram” of December 30, 2019 at 9:41 AM**

#### [Quote from Elayne](#)

You don't know how you would interact with me if I don't follow Philodemus' rules?

Like I said before, I am sorry if I was ever rude or condescending to you. You and I and everyone here are not perfect Epicureans or perfect people. We all have a right to have our flaws. It's also not clear that you accepted an offer of friendship from me, so we do not have to be friends if this is what you've decided. I would not want to participate here if there's going to be a Hiram-bashing and excommunication party every time I intervene. We all have to choose our battles.

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### **Post by “Elayne” of December 30, 2019 at 11:12 AM**

Hiram, I have no standard for "perfect people" or "perfect Epicureans" other than the degree to which people achieve pleasure. A perfect person would be exactly as Epicurus described his gods, beings experiencing continuous total pleasure without pain. So in that regard, I haven't met anyone who got that far, including myself, but I can say I have learned by experience how to enjoy my life more and more. And that for me it requires total rejection of idealism in favor of

reality testing.

I also don't know what it means to have a right to have flaws. The only flaw I know of would be some kind of habit or characteristic reducing one's own pleasure, and I don't know why anyone would want a right to less pleasure. However, observation of biological reality does tell me, as I've said above, that we do get in our own way sometimes.

Your choice of that framing tells me you have a very different perspective from mine-- some other kind of way to define perfect or flaws. You asked for examples of idealism, and what you just said is one!

As far as friendship goes, I can't make decisions ahead of seeing behavior. I accept your apology, and I would need to see repeated, prolonged evidence of friendliness before I could make that kind of decision. More evidence than from a stranger who had not been unkind.

However, as long as you think in an idealist way and are actively promoting this as a way to view reality, that is going to be unpleasant to me. It wouldn't be a basis for friendship, because it would cause me pain and not mutual benefit of pleasure. I will feel obligated, for the benefit of my friends, to say that you are wrong and that I hope people don't listen to you.

If you changed your way of thinking such that you adopted a realist philosophy, even if you decided Epicurus wasn't a realist and therefore rejected him, it would be easy to be your friend, because our disagreement would only be about what Epicurus meant, rather than about truth itself.

Certainly I do not expect any friend to be a source of pure pleasure and no pain in my life, if that is what you meant by a perfect person. If someone is my friend, I have a strong feeling of love and loyalty to them which overrides many pains they cause me unintentionally, and even sometimes intentionally if they are sincerely sorry and make amends. A betrayal would need to be repeated and/or severe before it would break my love. Friendship is a deep bond of feeling. I don't enter into it lightly, because of that. To say you are my friend means that you love me so much that if I am in need of your help, you would drop everything and come to my aid, and I for you. And that we trust each other not to make those requests excessively, so as to cause each other pain. It can start from a less complete bond, but a mature friendship means the friend's pleasure and pain is entangled deeply with your own.

By that definition, which is described by Epicurus but which I developed by my own experience with beloved friends, you and I are not friends. But I will agree to leave that possibility open,

depending on how you treat me and those whose pleasure is entangled in mine from here forward.

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## Post by “Hiram” of December 30, 2019 at 11:37 AM

### [Quote from Elayne](#)

However, as long as **you think in an idealist way** and are actively promoting this as a way to view reality, that is going to be unpleasant to me. ..

**If you changed your way of thinking such that you adopted a realist philosophy,..**

By that definition, which is described by Epicurus but which I developed by my own experience with beloved friends, you and I are not friends. But I will agree to leave that possibility open, depending on how you treat me and those whose pleasure is entangled in mine from here forward.

I still can't wrap my head around your categorization of "idealist" after six years of work in positing what Onfray calls "a counter-history of philosophy from the perspective of the friends of Epicurus and the enemies of Plato". Maybe you have considered my willingness at some point or another to consider other people's views as my agreeing with them? I just don't see what you're even talking about.

Also, for the record, I know that "Epicurus-only fundamentalist" is something that will sound derisive maybe to someone looking from the outside, but I honestly think that Cassius is happy to adopt this label for himself (and maybe others will too) because he is adamant that that is his view: for instance, when he says "Epicurus didn't use this or that word", this is what he means to say. So among us it is clear that your project and agenda is different from mine in this regard, and it's useful to name it so that we can clearly establish that our work differs from each other.

Either way, it's true that we are clearly not friends, and I would also like to leave the door open to friendship in the future, with the understanding that we will be working on separate projects and that our disagreements are sincere and not merely an artifact of ill-will. First: we will disrupt our own pleasure while studying EP, but the founders said that with philosophy unlike other activities the pleasure and the learning come at the same time, so we'd be doing it the wrong way. And second: People who hate EP will use the abuse that they see among the

Epicureans to turn around and say: "See how nasty they are? This is how the Epicureans treat each other"--which doesn't serve the teaching mission of the Gardens, and which makes us look as if we're incapable of living the principles of the philosophy.

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### **Post by "Elayne" of December 30, 2019 at 11:57 AM**

Hiram, I can understand your assertion that what you are saying is Epicurean, if it turns out Epicurus was not a realist after all, or if you are defining that as being what people who have called themselves Epicureans have said.

If neither one of us had ever read Epicurus, though, our baseline philosophies are different.

When you say "perfect person", what do you mean? What standard are you using? If it is not subjective pleasure, then it has to be something else, and what is that, for you? Based on your other writing, I assumed it was tied to some unfailing demonstration of a golden rule of some kind, which is idealist, assuming everyone agrees on how they want to be treated, rather than based on subjective experience.

But perhaps I have put words in your mouth. Can you tell me what you mean by perfect person without referring to any ideas you can't show me with perceptual examples? How do you define that?

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### **Post by "Elayne" of December 30, 2019 at 12:06 PM**

Because our personal philosophies are strikingly different, I do not feel myself to be under the same tent with you, so far, any more than I am in Plato's tent. So it doesn't bother me that people would see us not considering ourselves to be in the same philosophy at all-- that's just accurate. The confusing part is calling it all EP.

This debate is bringing me to the point where I no longer want to discuss what Epicurus did or didn't mean unless it is also made clear whether my discussion partner is testing all philosophy against their own perceptions of reality and whether we have reached the same conclusions about the nature of reality. Then we can explore whether Epicurus got something right or not.

We can test his words against the evidence of reality together. Anything else feels like a waste of time.

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### **Post by “Elayne” of December 30, 2019 at 12:09 PM**

I'm happy to be called a "reality fundamentalist", and I will only agree with anyone's philosophy to the extent they can demonstrate their position to me, based on perceptions--senses, feelings, and innate intuitions (pattern recognitions).

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### **Post by “Cassius” of December 30, 2019 at 1:30 PM**

Interim comment: There is a lot going on in these exchanges, which combine philosophical and personal points with many things in one post. I am going to have to come back to this series to break it down, but I want to make a procedural comment:

We are writing these posts publicly and I do not think people should read too much into the "Likes" or "Failure to Likes" that get added to posts in a series like this. At least in my own case I am having to think about a series of points being made in each post before I decide how best to respond, and I don't want people to think that I am taking flat sides one way or the other by liking or failure to like individual posts. I feel sure that this observation applies to other people as well but I thought this was worth saying. The "like" system has its uses, but in complicated discussions like this one I think its usefulness breaks down.

The issues being discussed here are important on lots of levels so I hope people will feel free to comment on "parts" of these posts without fear of being misunderstood as endorsing or not endorsing someone's entire position.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of December 30, 2019 at 1:40 PM**

Quote from Hiram

I still can't wrap my head around your categorization of "idealist" after six years of work in positing what Onfray calls "a counter-history of philosophy from the perspective of the friends of Epicurus and the enemies of Plato". Maybe you have considered my willingness at some point or another to consider other people's views as my agreeing with them? I just don't see what you're even talking about

I think one way of stating what I see as "idealism" is a pattern of leaping from what we as individuals find pleasurable to a wider position on social/political issues. This pattern is clear in the work of Catherine Wilson (and she admits it, I think) and certainly in the work of Robert Hanrott, but it is also inherent Hiram in many of the things I see you writing in the 20 tenets threads. For example you are taking the last ten doctrines on "justice" and extrapolating that a certain set of conclusions on social issues should be "the Epicurean position." Catherine Wilson does that repeatedly, and while I may agree with her (or you) on many of the positions you choose to take, it seems absolutely clear to me that you violate the spirit of what Epicurus was saying, in proclaiming "no absolute justice" and "no matter how depraved we think the person is...." if it ends in pleasure for that person then we have no reason to complain with that person's choices. This is very clear from your "mutual benefit" conclusion, in translating "not to harm or be harmed," which is a restraint of action rather than a command of action, and turning it into a categorical imperative that we seemingly have a duty to "benefit" each other -- and implicitly not only each other, but *everyone*.\*

I am no libertarian myself and I am not looking for libertarianism in Epicurus' work, nor am I looking for justification to argue that *any* particular set of policy conclusions should apply to everyone. But it is absolutely clear to me that if someone continuously asserts that one or a list of policy choices should be adopted by everyone, then they have failed to accept the basic underlying premise that the feeling of pleasure, which all of us experience *individually* is the guide, rather than an idealized version that they think applies to everyone.

That is the problem with "Humanism" and I do not see you even acknowledging the issue, much less taking the non-absolute position that Epicurus's doctrines would plainly call for.

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### **Post by "Elayne" of December 30, 2019 at 2:11 PM**

Yes, I am not expecting everyone to agree with everything I am saying. I do want to say, though, that I don't view personal and philosophy issues as separate, because this philosophy include feelings. It applies to all parts of life, and in fact saying it applies to specific interpersonal disputes is part of what makes it different from other philosophies. That is why I don't think people need to shy away from having feelings about these recent discussions. The

feelings involved are real.

If nothing else, readers can see how difficult it is to publicly endorse a philosophy of pleasure tied solely to material reality. You will be met with all kinds of opposition, and Epicurus was too. I have my pleasure reward in having finally met others who enjoy practicing pleasure as I do, and it was necessary to take risks to find them. I hope I have set at least some example of standing firm against idealism and that some of you will benefit, and that gives me pleasure.

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### **Post by “Elayne” of December 30, 2019 at 3:24 PM**

Oscar, because my adult son has schizophrenia, I have a little bit of a different take on this. The most current research shows that schizophrenia is truly a neurologic condition. It may eventually even be possible to treat it as an immune disorder using medications designed for MS-- there's research with preliminary encouraging results.

So of course, they did do whatever they did. But if one day treatment can reliably remove the illness that caused the actions, it is possible they could be safely released. My son now that he consistently takes his medications is at no higher risk of harming someone than an average person. When psychotic and delusional, off medications, I had to have him committed, which is very hard to do.

Some of the work I have been doing is to implement evidence based commitment strategies-- outpatient commitment to f/u inpatient-- for people who have not committed a violent crime but are at risk of doing so. This is very effective at reducing violent acts. A major problem with schizophrenia is that the disease itself impairs reality testing and thus the person's ability to know they are sick is lost. They can think they are normal, so why take medicine? Commitment, if adhered to by the court and treatment team, provides that the person be re-committed to inpatient care if they cannot manage to follow instructions outpatient.

For those who already have done violence, some need to be confined for life if we want to be safe, to protect our pleasure. However, I personally do not feel anger towards them, because now I really understand that the same person can be entirely different when sick and untreated.

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### **Post by “Elayne” of December 30, 2019 at 3:25 PM**

I don't mean to get off track on schizophrenia-- but it's relevant because the disease attacks perceptions. Without accurate perceptions, we can't make wise decisions for pleasure!

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### Post by “Hiram” of December 30, 2019 at 4:57 PM

#### [Quote from Elayne](#)

But perhaps I have put words in your mouth. Can you tell me what you mean by perfect person without referring to any ideas you can't show me with perceptual examples? How do you define that?

I was paraphrasing a quote from Philodemus of Gadara's *Peri Parrhesia* (I think his "On Arrogance" may have said something similar):

#### Quote

"For how will the sage hate the one who commits pardonable mistakes, remembering that he is not perfect himself and that all men are accustomed to err?" - Philodemus of Gadara

**The quote is an appeal to offer criticism to each other with the right spirit.** I have it fresh in my mind because I just translated into Spanish DeWitt's "Organization and procedures in Epicurean groups".

Your obsession with labeling everything I say as "idealism" makes it impossible to use words as conventionally understood: a perfect person would be a person with no flaws or failings whatsoever, of any kind.

Now if "perfect" is an idealism, well that is the point! We are not ideal persons. We are real persons.

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### Post by “Hiram” of December 30, 2019 at 5:09 PM

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

For example you are taking the last ten doctrines on "justice" and extrapolating that a certain set of conclusions on social issues should be "the Epicurean position." .

THIS SPECIFIC POINT, THIS is where you're either misconstruing or misreading: No, I do not.

It is clear in PD 37-38 that THAT which is just or moral will change depending on circumstances.

There's a whole section in my review of her book on mutual advantage. There, I do argue that there are METHODS for addressing issues of policy and that Wilson SHOULD HAVE used the method of evaluating what concrete advantages and disadvantages involve the concrete people affected by policies, so that these moral problems can be addressed through an Epicurean lens. She didn't do that. She stated policy offerings without applying any method, or appealing to PDs on how people set rules.

I care about this because I feel that we should be helping to form Epicurean intellectuals capable of arguing the ways in which EP is useful and practical and relevant for modern people. We should not just say: "oh that's idealism" and shut the conversation, as if we all didn't know that we are philosophical materialists. We should say: "what tools does our philosophy offer to help us deal with this problem? To what extent can those tools prove useful" and demonstrate how best to use those tools.

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## Post by "Hiram" of December 30, 2019 at 5:17 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

That is the problem with "Humanism" and I do not see you even acknowledging the issue, much less taking the non-absolute position that Epicurus's doctrines would plainly call for.

The problem with humanism is that it means many things to many people. It seems like different organizations agree on different sets of principles for their humanism, which is THEIR hedonic covenant, the rules that THEY have chosen for their organizations. EP says that people will do that, that that is natural morality: an agreement between people. Whatever manifestos people write for their organization is THEIR manifesto, their agreement. The evaluation of the content of these manifestos is a huge task, well beyond the scope of what I can offer, I'm sure I'll agree or disagree with many points, but I'm not gonna lose my mind because a bunch of atheists agree on a set of principles, particularly when they do not claim to be Epicurean and have no reason to state their set of principles in Epicurean terms 😊 I'd rather participate in an organization that chooses Tenets I am okay with living with.

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**Post by “Todd” of December 30, 2019 at 5:26 PM**

[Quote from Hiram](#)

Wilson SHOULD HAVE used the method of evaluating what concrete advantages and disadvantages involve the concrete people affected by policies

But the only people capable of making this evaluation are the ones affected! Not Wilson, or you, or I.

And even the people affected can only make the evaluation for themselves, not on behalf of others.

I do think there are things that can be said, from an Epicurean perspective, with respect to various policies, and I approve of your intention to work in that direction. But what I have seen so far of your method completely ignores that fact that pleasure is subjective. If you don't keep that firmly in mind, then IMO you are departing from Epicurean philosophy rather than extending and applying it.

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**Post by “Hiram” of December 30, 2019 at 6:01 PM**

[Quote from Todd](#)

I do think there are things that can be said, from an Epicurean perspective, with respect to various policies, and I approve of your intention to work in that direction. But what I have seen so far of your method completely ignores that fact that pleasure is subjective. If you don't keep that firmly in mind, then IMO you are departing from Epicurean philosophy rather than extending and applying it.

Hi Todd (I don't think i know you)

I shared the hermarchus example elsewhere and am curious to know what you think about it because the scholars, it seems, would have wanted us to apply these Doctrines in real life situations and under diverse conditions rather than be armchair philosophers.

Also Hermarchus may have been deciding for himself whether to eat animals, but it seems like he was speaking of policy makers at different points in history and describing HOW they came

up with policy based on concrete advantage and disadvantage at various times.

<http://societyofepicurus.com/hermarchus-on-...ent-of-animals/>

Here are the passages--notice that Hermarchus doesn't say "oh we CAN NEVER posit a certain policy because that's idealism", no he said "these are the philosophical tools and here's how to use them in the real world with a concrete example", and also notices that he speaks of concrete advantages and disadvantages:

#### Quote

Since, if we suffered them to increase excessively, they would become injurious to us. But through the number of them which is now preserved, **certain advantages are imparted to human life**. For sheep and oxen, and every such like animal, when the number of them is moderate, are beneficial to our necessary wants; but if they become redundant in the extreme, and **far exceed the number which is sufficient, they then become detrimental to our life**; the latter by employing their strength, in consequence of participating of this through an innate power of nature, and the former, by consuming the nutriment which springs up from the earth for our benefit alone. Hence, through this cause, the slaughter of animals of this kind is not prohibited, in order that as many of them as are sufficient for our use, and which we may be able easily to subdue, may be left.

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### Post by "Elayne" of December 30, 2019 at 6:59 PM

Hiram, the word "perfect" and "without flaws", applied to human behavior, conventionally uses the most common absolute moral standards, which are already idealist. It's baked into the words. If you ask a random person on the street what a person without flaws is like, they would use whatever absolute moral standards they'd been taught, such as "always honest", "altruistic", "always kind" "self-sufficient", etc. There would be some person to person variation, but those will be typical responses. I haven't done a formal study, but for decades I have asked parents of young children what kind of adults they hope to teach their children to be. It gives me insight that's useful when conflicts arise. It helps me remind them later and ask if they are demonstrating what they want to teach, in their own choices.

I would imagine that their "perfect person" would have these qualities completely. And those are the kinds of answers I get.

But that type of vision of a perfect person is a little different between people. It's also based on virtues. I have never heard a "perfect person" described as "someone who is always able to choose for their pleasure."

So that is why I asked what you mean by perfect. If you mean the usual, and if Philodemus does, it's abstract and idealistic. It's saying there's a definition we would all agree on which is based on some virtue.

So I ask again-- do you mean that typical definition? And if so, which virtues go into your own definition? Do you see how using virtues to define flawless is idealistic? If not, I am confused as to how to communicate. I am not obsessed with idealism. I just know how to recognize it, and I'm frankly baffled as to why it isn't obvious to you, so I keep re-explaining it.

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## Post by "Cassius" of December 30, 2019 at 7:02 PM

### [Quote from Hiram](#)

I shared the hermarchus example elsewhere and am curious to know what you think about it because the scholars, it seems, would have wanted us to apply these Doctrines in real life situations and under diverse conditions rather than be armchair philosophers.

I think we all agree that it is desirable to apply the Epicurean doctrines to real life situations and not be armchair philosophers. That is a huge point and I cannot imagine anyone disagreeing with that. The real issue comes down to our attitude toward the fact that different people will come to different conclusions about what will make them happy in a particular situation. When that occurs, we can offer the Epicurean framework of the nature of the universe and point out that no god or no Platonic ideals justify any particular decision, and that if they do something to get themselves killed that will be the end of their life, and we can point out all sorts of related observations about the limits of logic, the nature of living things as having some free will but also doing some things by necessity, etc etc....

But the minute we stray into saying that "if you are an Epicurean you will reach XXX conclusion ...." then we've gone further than the philosophy allows and we have undercut all of our premises from which we started. At the very least before discussing any policy decision we would need an exhaustive review of as many relevant circumstances as we could gather, and in the process of discussing those it would quickly be clear that there are no firm rules that apply

outside the particular context.

Which is not to say that the analysis can't be done. Not only can it be done, it MUST be done by the people involved. It's urgent that it be done! It's essential that it be done! If you back away from doing it you're not a man, you're a worm! (Let me not go too far in emphasizing my Nietzschean variation on the Epicurean tune that you have but one life to live and that nihilism for losers and so you must live as vigorously as you can! 😊 )

But in regard argain to the vegetarianism discussion, I don't see it as well documented enough to consider it outside the standard framework, and I wouldn't even get to the point of comparing it to the standard framework until I were firmly convinced that the text is reliable, which I am not.

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### **Post by “Todd” of December 30, 2019 at 9:58 PM**

Hi, Hiram. Nope, you don't know me. I apologize if my comments were a bit over-familiar. I've been lurking around here and on FB for a while, commenting occasionally when the mood strikes. I appreciate your efforts toward the practical application of Epicurean philosophy, even though I disagree with some of your methods and conclusions.

Anyway, regarding Hermarchus and the rabbits...first of all, that is a damn confusing example, because Hermarchus is talking about justice between humans and rabbits, when I thought we were talking about relations between humans.

To quote from your article:

#### [Quote from Hiram](#)

But it is not only advantage, as Epicurus would have it, that explains the origins of justice when it comes to creatures that we can't have agreements and contracts with, and in this Hermarchus departed slightly from the first Scholarch and we see the evolution of Epicurean doctrine as a result of exchanges with other schools.

So Hermarchus is departing from the teachings of Epicurus. I think that rather undermines the point you were trying to make with this example.

Nevertheless, it does seem likely that early Epicureans were trying to draw conclusions on practical matters, and possibly even make Epicurean policy pronouncements.

To the extent that they were merely giving advice with the aim of helping others to enjoy more pleasure, I have no objection, and in fact I think this is a valuable undertaking.

To the extent that they were insisting that their personal value judgments were or ought to be binding on other Epicureans, I think they were mistaken.

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## Post by “Hiram” of December 31, 2019 at 10:27 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Which is not to say that the analysis can't be done. Not only can it be done, it MUST be done by the people involved. It's urgent that it be done! It's essential that it be done! If you back away from doing it you're not a man, you're a worm! (Let me not go too far in emphasizing my Nietzschean variation on the Epicurean tune that you have but one life to live and that nihilism for losers and so you must live as vigorously as you can! 😊 )

Thank you!

But do you agree that EP offers the tools to help a lawmaker consider the advantages and disadvantages in a particular moment and circumstance to make his choices and avoidances (to pass a law)? And that it gives us the tools to determine whether an existing law is JUST for now, or for a given time?

Because if that's not the case, then we convict Epicurean philosophy of being escapist and impractical. The tools are there, in PD 37-38, and you keep imposing censorship on any attempt to use those tools, and accusing me of idealism when I am applying the CONCRETE, MATERIAL methodology--is this useful or necessary to mutual association, does this produce mutual advantage? Here they are, for the record:

### Quote

**37.** Among the things accounted just by conventional law, **whatever in the needs of mutual association is attested to be useful, is thereby stamped as just, \*\*\*whether or not it be the same for all\*\*\***; and in case any law is made and does not prove suitable to the usefulness of mutual association, then this is no longer just. And should the usefulness which is expressed by the law vary and only for a time correspond with the prior conception, **nevertheless for the time being it was just**, so long as we do not trouble ourselves about empty words, but look simply at the facts.

**38.** Where without any change in circumstances the conventional laws, when judged by their consequences, were seen not to correspond with the notion of justice, such laws were not really just; but wherever the laws have ceased to be useful in consequence of a change in circumstances, in that case the laws were for the time being just when they were useful for the mutual association of the citizens, and subsequently ceased to be just when they ceased to be useful.

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## Post by “Cassius” of December 31, 2019 at 11:22 AM

### [Quote from Hiram](#)

But do you agree that EP offers the tools to help a lawmaker consider the advantages and disadvantages in a particular moment and circumstance to make his choices and avoidances (to pass a law)? And that it gives us the tools to determine whether an existing law is JUST for now, or for a given time?

Yes, BUT! It doesn't just give those tools to a "lawmaker" it gives the same tools to everyone including the people living under the laws. And while you can definitely provide innumerable examples of agreements ("laws") that people might choose to live by, the issue is that not everyone will agree that those laws/agreements are advantageous to them, and their analysis can be every bit as based on Epicurean principles as can the lawgiver's.

The problem we are having is not the issue of saying that Epicurean philosophy does not have immediate practical application. The problem we are having is that we are talking (at least in hypothetical terms) about a "Society of Epicurus" rather than a "Society of Republican Epicureans" or a "Society of Democrat Epicureans" or a "Society of Tory Epicureans" or a "Society of Labor Epicureans."

If you were suggesting that you were forming a "Society of Vegetarian Epicureans" then I think it would be exactly proper to cite as a ground rule that the members of the society find the killing of animals so abhorrent / painful that as a premise of membership they agree never to kill any animal (except maybe in self defense). That would make perfect sense and I would think have no conflict with any Epicurean principle.

But there could just as easily be a "Society of Epicurean Carnivores" that makes a condition of membership being to advance the cause of eating meat / living keto style, due to the pleasures and health benefits they perceive to result.

Both of the opposite extremes could be perfectly organizable in Epicurean terms.

So our issue of disagreement is that as a philosophy, the philosophy does not justify or condemn any personal preference of pleasure as intrinsically superior or inferior than another, and to suggest that it does undermines the philosophy at its core.

Catherine Wilson does that to a relative extreme, and I certainly see that you have distanced yourself from that, but I don't see you embracing the full implication to the point of being willing to make your society distinct from the "absolutist" ideas that are inherent in humanism, stoicism, etc. By failing to make that distinction you're inviting the watering down of the philosophy, and I tend to think that watering down by later Epicureans was perhaps as much to blame for the fall in popularity as was the affirmative suppression by Abrahamic religion.

Until Norman DeWitt hardly anyone recognized Epicurus as such as strong anti-Platonist, and significant numbers of people today seem to have no problem combining Epicurus with supernatural religion, stoicism, and all sorts of other ideas that are fundamentally contradictory.

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### **Post by "Hiram" of December 31, 2019 at 3:31 PM**

I also want to say a point on Michel Onfray's counter-history of philosophy before I forget, because Onfray wants Epicureans to become more engaged in public discourse, but oftentimes your censorship of so many issues keeps you from being able to form people intellectually to show how to use philosophy.

<http://societyofepicurus.com/michel-onfrays...-of-philosophy/>

Onfray mentions instances where Plato used omission, or mis-representation of the pleasure view, in order to make it look ridiculous. He discusses and exposes the (often dishonest) techniques used by Plato.

Onfray's arguments throughout "counter-history" are that voice is important, speaking up is important and powerful, and that if the people who adhere to a perspective of "friends of Epicurus, enemies of Plato" do not become proficient at employing the arts of historiography in the same manner as Platonists have become proficient (history is written by the winners, and they HAVE BEEN the winners so far), then we don't have a right to complain that our views are invisible and attacked and mis-represented.

And so Onfray teaches philosophers to engage in historiography, and also encourages Epicureans to SPEAK UP, to become engaged in public discourse and talk about contemporary issues and about history / past issues from an Epicurean perspective. He wants to prepare intellectuals to strike blows for Epicurus more effectively!

This is a point I've tried to explain to you. It's also why I want to help form intellectuals capable of commenting on moral problems of our day using the tools of philosophy.

We do not say "THIS is the Epicurean stance on vegetarianism, or on politics", but we HAVE to be able to say "These are the tools that you can use as an Epicurean for this or that problem", and empower intellectuals to demonstrate the methods and the usefulness of EP.

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## Post by “Cassius” of December 31, 2019 at 4:22 PM

### [Quote from Hiram](#)

if the people who adhere to a perspective of "friends of Epicurus, enemies of Plato" do not become proficient at employing the arts of historiography in the same manner as Platonists have become proficient (history is written by the winners, and they HAVE BEEN the winners so far), then we don't have a right to complain that our views are invisible and attacked and mis-represented.

OK there are at least two things going on here:

(1) I am in favor of engagement wherever possible and wherever it makes sense to do so. The primary problem I have is as you alluded to in a recent post -- the call of ordinary life limits our resources tremendously and we have to decided what is the best use of time. And that leads to (2) --

(2) I do not think the statement above logically follows. Your premise seems to be that in order to be effective we must constantly engage with people who are at best ambivalent toward us or worst are absolutely committed to some opposing position. That's the point raised by Frances Wright in *A Few Days in Athens: Argument does NOT generally result in conversion of one side to the other. It often WIDENS the distance between the sides, because in fact many positions are not reconcilable.*

The reason that you Hiram and I (and others) are able to make some progress in these discussions is that we are already starting with positions that are relatively close in many cases (though it may not seem like it sometimes.) It's my view that you do not recoil at the humanism and the "absence of pain" position of the Cambridge Epicureanism (I am brushing broadly, I know) because you do not personally have it in you to accept the nihilism and the suppression of emotion that is at the root of their version of Epicurus. I am paying you a compliment by saying that you shrug off the implications because you cannot accept that most people would accept the implications of the position that they are arguing, but I think you are wrong about

that.

Our differences here are among people who are arguing about strategy toward pursuing pleasure / happiness. Outside this corner of the world, the suppression and historical sidelining of Epicurus has come at the hands of people who are absolutely outside that tent and know exactly what they are doing, and that's why I and others draw such a bright line and refuse to make common cause with them.

IT seems as if in the ancient world Cicero and even Julian the Apostate remarked that it was primarily the Epicureans themselves who read Epicurean literature, and I think that relates to our strategy disagreements. I don't think that trying to storm the walls of Cambridge or the Humanist Alliance (a name I made up for the occasion) is likely to be the best way to reach more people with epicurean philosophy (if we want to define our goal that way.) I think that "normal" people outside of academia and outside of the hothouses of issue advocacy, many of whom are (or should be) totally turned off by the alternatives are the ones we we will find the most honest and open reception.

On the example of Michael Onfrey, you have convinced me that there is doubtless some material in his work that would be helpful. But it is not easily accessible in English, Onfrey did not thoroughly embrace Epicurus as far as I can tell, which limits his usefulness, and unless someone has a special interest in pursuing Onfrey I personally can't rank that high on the list of things I would urge everyone to read.

So that's an example of my analysis -- more power to you if you are able to find good things in Onfrey and bring them to the table, but we all have to do our best to make our best use of our own time. And that's why I do not at all consider anything I am doing as "censorship." I see it the opposite -- there are reams of material devoted to commentators on obscure topics which enhance their resumes in the academic world, but which don't do a think to bring Epicurus into sharper focus for the "everyday person" who most needs the help.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of December 31, 2019 at 7:22 PM**

Oscar I have heard the terms analytic v continental but I freely admit as to myself you are way over my head. I would certainly be wary myself of anyone who is "anti-natalist." Do you believe Onfray is anti-natalist?

I see that a google of analytic vs continental brings up a huge amount of material. If at some point (probably not New Years' Eve!) you are aware of an article that summarizes the issues in a way that you find helpful that would be a good addition to the thread.

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## Post by “Elayne” of December 31, 2019 at 8:21 PM

Antinatalist? My word. Those people are truly a hot mess. That's the most erudite thing I can come up with. 😊

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## Post by “Cassius” of January 1, 2020 at 1:40 PM

### [Quote from Oscar](#)

This touches on Epistemology. My view is in line with the scientific understanding that objective reality exists independent of our sensations. That if life ceased to exist, reality remains. I do not subscribe to the salesperson's mantra that perception is reality, if you perceive yourself to be the Jesus Christ, I have bad news to tell you. I think objective reality can be understood through sensations and reason.

I completely agree with this very important point. A tree that falls in the forest with no one around to hear it does indeed make a sound. I think the issue is more that if one is coming up with a list of statements that are intended to be helpful philosophically, then it makes sense to address the point that is in philosophical contention, which in this case is that even though the vibrations created by the falling tree are of a particular "atomic" nature, different people are going to perceive those vibrations, or fail to perceive them, in different ways. So what we are trying to point out is that there are definitely things going on regardless of our perception of them, but at the same our own personal knowledge of those events arises through our perceptions.

Possibly the whole issue is being obscured, or not revealed clearly enough, by affixing the terms "objective" or "subjective" to "reality," without really stating what "objective" and "subjective" are intended to mean.

### [Quote from Oscar](#)

I agree with most of the above, though there's also quantum effects that new research, I don't really yet understand fully, suggests there may be more to say on this. I think this is no longer to be considered a philosophical matter since it's now, I think for sometime already, a scientific matter.

Definitely the issues develop over time as we gain new instruments and new observations to consider. However I suspect that there is always going to be a philosophic aspect to this, as the developments of science never stand still, and new discoveries are made. So we are probably always going to be confronted with issues of what attitude to take toward "ultimate questions" which seem to be a moving target against new scientific discoveries. I suspect that Epicurus would say that this ultimate issue is much the same as what he himself confronted in considering the claims of the mathematicians of his own day.

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### **Post by “Elayne” of January 1, 2020 at 5:05 PM**

Oscar, the objective/ subjective issue-- yes, there is a reality independent of us-- but-- we can only perceive it subjectively, through our senses, feelings, and intuitions. We have no way of perceiving reality without filtering it through our subjectivity-- it's literally impossible. Even if you are using an instrument, you must still use your eyes, ears, or I guess Braille, touch, to obtain the readout.

This is really, really important to get a handle on for anyone studying this philosophy, because most philosophies consider what they call "objective" reality to be somehow better or more "real" than subjective. But all we can perceive is through subjective experience. Epicurus judged that to be real and sufficient evidence of how things are, and I do as well.

In some cases, as when we are doing science, we will obtain measurements which are highly replicated by different labs/ researchers, and we can rely on this data as likely accurate. However, that replication does not remove the fact that subjective perception was used.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of January 1, 2020 at 5:35 PM**

#### [Quote from Oscar](#)

SOE17 To live pleasantly, we must have confident expectation that we will be able to secure the chief goods: those things that are natural and necessary for life, happiness, and health. Therefore, whatever we do to secure safety, friendship, autarchy, provision of food and drink and clothing, and other basic needs, is naturally good.

I wouldn't say whatever we do is good; I think Epicurus stated that in order to live pleasantly, you need to live justly, and without living justly you cannot live pleasantly.

This reminds me of a point I may have omitted to make before: I have a problem with the terminology "the chief goods." I do not recall this phrasing in the Epicurean texts, and it implies that there is a list of "goods" which is higher or more important than others. I think that's a repetition of the same issue commented on before.

"Pleasure" is the guide, and pleasure is the only thing desirable in and of itself. Even when we forgo a specific pleasure in order to avoid a specific pain or pursue a higher pleasure, the motivating force is still the feeling of pleasure, not some specific ranking of "goods" or even a specific ranking of pleasures coming somehow from outside our own feeling of pleasure. What is "chief" for me may not be "chief" for thee.

I am very reluctant ever to imply that there is an "objective" ranking of pleasures, and for the same reason I think it is perilous to suggest that there are "chief goods." I am not aware of Epicurean texts that would support that assertion, and I would dispute it if someone suggested that the "natural and necessary" method of analysis ultimately supports a ranking of "chief goods." Even "natural / necessary" as a method of analysis probably goes out the door when we decide that it is worth it for us to die for a friend, which is specifically contemplated as something an Epicurean might on occasion do.

The bottom line here is that I suspect that "chief good" is just a phrase that has been picked up for convenience in Society of Epicurus discussion rather than being based on a clear text. As always, please correct me if I am incorrect.

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### **Post by “Elayne” of January 1, 2020 at 7:17 PM**

Oscar, I am confused. How do you propose we can have "knowledge" that isn't subjective? We know what is real through our subjective senses, feelings, and prolepses. Sometimes by comparing notes. No other way to know anything.

Although sense organs and instruments can malfunction, as in hallucinations, we use multiple senses and reconcile the information from all of them together-- plus we can talk to each other.

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### **Post by “Elli” of January 2, 2020 at 3:02 AM**

The Greek word «Αυταρχία» in English as «Autarchy» does not mean self-sufficiency. It means tyranny, dictatorship, monarchy, monocracy, autocracy, despotism, totalitarianism.



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< Previous [1] Next >

Go to page: 1

## autarchy

[aw-tahr-kee] [SHOW IPA](#)

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*noun, plural au-tar-chies.*

- absolute sovereignty.
- an autocratic government.
- autarky.

**WORDS RELATED TO AUTARCHY**

tyranny, dictatorship, monocracy, autocracy, despotism, totalitarianism

Post by “Elli” of January 2, 2020 at 4:01 AM

A hypothesis : once upon time a primitive e.g. a homo Neanderthal or a homo sapiens that lived in a primitive village was devoured by a black panther and some primitives that were his companions, when they saw that, then they had spread around that black cats bring bad luck.

But these are "**ypolepses**" (false suppositions i.e. **painful memories** with mythical stories that are mixed with the fear of death) and not "**prolepses**" (preconceptions or anticipations or intuitions i.e. **pleasurable memories** with real fact stories without being mixed with the fear of death).

And here is the ending paragraph in the letter to Pythocles in which Epicurus describes the procedure of the manifold way of the Canon, and on how, we can be able to separate the imagination from the reality since the real purpose is living without agitation i.e. **the pure pleasure**.

**"All these things, Pythocles, you must bear in mind; for thus you will escape in most things from superstition (mythical stories) and will be enabled to understand what is akin to them. And most of all give yourself up to the study of the beginnings and of infinity and of the things akin to them, and also of the criteria of truth and of the feelings, and of the purpose for which we reason out these things. For these points when they are thoroughly studied will most easily enable you to understand the causes of the details. But those who have not thoroughly taken these things to heart could not rightly study them in themselves, nor have they secured the end for which they ought to be studied".**

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## **Post by "Cassius" of January 2, 2020 at 6:36 AM**

OK, Oscar suggested that the specific epistemology discussion on knowledge and objective/subjective reality continue HERE: [Exchange On Knowledge From January 2020](#)

I think that's a good idea and suggest people do that, but I also know that this issue is mixed together with this original thread on the 20 Tenets, so we'll do the best we can to keep things organized. However i have now copied (not "moved") several of the key posts into the Epicurean Canonics forum, so hopefully in the future this discussion can be found more easily.

So please note for people reading in this thread --- the conversation on the specific epistemology issue is likely to continue, and so look for further development, here: [Exchange](#)

**Post by “Hiram” of January 2, 2020 at 9:46 AM**

[Quote from Oscar](#)

[Cassius](#)

Hiram, I personally do not subscribe to nor view myself as belonging to the continental tradition. I presume you're aware of the split between analytical and continental philosophy.

... I'm concerned with anti-natalist thinkers (would you say Onfray is in that camp?) who think: "I wish I'd never been born" - since, I'm happy to be born and happy to live my life with pleasure.

I am unfamiliar with the differences between the analytical / continental traditions, but European intellectuals have WIDELY divergent views and it's not too easy to categorize them all. I only have some familiarity with a few of the existentialists (Nietzsche, Sartre), and I know OF the German idealists and the Marxist tradition but not too in depth.

Also, Onfray has a variety of interests, not only Epicurus--which makes classification even more difficult. He is also Nietzschean. No one claims he's ONLY Epicurean in his interests. But he's most likely the most vocal defender of Epicurus and the most vocal enemy of Plato in the world today.

If Onfray ever expressed "I wish I had never been born" at one point, he may have changed his mind during his intellectual evolution. I know that DURING HIS CATHOLIC UPBRINGING, the Church made him feel like life wasn't worth living, and he goes into his biography and how much damage he suffered by the Church (they sent him to a Catholic boarding school where he was emotionally, physically, and psychologically abused) in the first chapter of Hedonist Manifesto.

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**Post by “Hiram” of January 2, 2020 at 9:51 AM**

[Quote from Oscar](#)

SOE10 All that exists, exists within nature. There is no super-natural or un-natural "realm"; it would not have a way of existing outside of nature. Nature is reality.

- I'm a scientific and objective realist. I don't think within/without are appropriate and can instil more sense of confusion than clarity. To say something is "within" means you know the boundary or edge of reality? Epicurus taught us to wisely that reality is eternal and infinite. There is only reality, so I personally, don't use the word "within".

(Objective/subjective categories were removed some time ago from Tenets 1 and 2) This is an affirmation that there is no "otherworldly" reality, and a rejection of the empty words of theologians who might say "God exists outside of nature", or something along those lines.

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### **Post by "Hiram" of January 2, 2020 at 9:54 AM**

#### [Quote from Oscar](#)

SOE12 There are three acceptable interpretations of the [Epicurean gods](#): the realist interpretation, the idealist interpretation, and the atheist interpretation.

- I think the most plausible explanation is the realist; no personal god(s)

That's the atheist interpretation. The realist says that gods are blissful extraterrestrial immortals made of particles.

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### **Post by "Hiram" of January 2, 2020 at 10:00 AM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

This reminds me of a point I may have omitted to make before: I have a problem with the terminology "the chief gods." I do not recall this phrasing in the Epicurean texts, and it implies that there is a list of "goods" which is higher or more important than others. I think that's a repetition of the same issue commented on before.

...

The bottom line here is that I suspect that "chief good" is just a phrase that has been picked up for convenience in Society of Epicurus discussion rather than being based on a clear text. As always, please correct me if I am incorrect.

The doctrine of the "kyriotatai" (= chief goods) was articulated in Philodemus' scroll "On Choices and Avoidances". He was adamant that we should keep the distinction between these natural and necessary goods and vain ones in our minds.

I don't have this in front of me but we have to keep in mind that many of these scrolls were notes that Philodemus took while studying under Zeno of Sidon, who was the Scholarch at the time, so this would have been part of how the teaching was imparted to him.

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**Post by "Elli" of January 2, 2020 at 2:14 PM**

<https://epicureandatabase.wordpress.com/2015/12/28/rea...and-avoidances/>

After establishing the criteria for successfully making choices and avoidances based on the chief goods and needful things, and teaching us the importance of being confident in our abilities to procure these, Philodemus then gave a list of examples of what happens when people fail to distinguish between natural and necessary pleasures and those that are vain and unnecessary.

The scroll ends with this auspicious account of how the prudent man who is aware of the chief goods, lives a virtuous life.

\*

Attention to the ending paragraph as a conclusion on the chief goods [kyriotatai] by Philodemus :

The "**hedeos zen**" i.e. "living pleasantly or living a pleasant life" by Epicurus has been replaced by the "**enareta zen**" i.e. living virtuously or living a virtuous life. Sorry, this ending phrase is like to hear a priest preaching from a church's altar !



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**Post by "Elli" of January 3, 2020 at 7:54 AM**

The chief goods [kyriotatai] by Philodemus are the means to live a virtuous life, above all ?! The means are transferred to an end by themselves and for themselves to become a "virtuous life" as a goal ? But in reality of life whoever is preaching like this, everything else than a "virtuous" life wants to live or he lives or he had lived.

From the same source of "Φ" on "chief goods" [kyriotatai] we read a paragraph: **"In relation to these chief goods, men must have a clear understanding that externalities are only secondary and firm confidence that they can not affect our happiness in the way that the easy to procure chief needs can. This is clarified in Column XV, and mentions things like beauty, marriage, wealth, luxury, and the like".**

And now, I would like to say boldly to Philodemus that everything else he taught except what he really lived.

Do you want to see evidence of Philodemus's thoughts on beauty, marriage, wealth, luxury and the like? Read carefully his poems that are as follows :

**"On beauty"** : Philodemus the "philanderer" who was searching in his life the "perfect beauty" in women as we read in two of his poems e.g. :

1. Charito has completed sixty years,

but still black is her long wavy hair

and still upheld those white, marble cones of her bosom stand firm without encircling by a brassiere.

And her skin without a wrinkle, still ambrosia,

still fascination, still distills ten thousand graces.

But you lovers who shrink not from fierce desires,

come hither, forgetting of her decades.

2. Philaeniön is short and rather too dark, but her hair is more curled than parsley, and her skin is more tender than down: there is more magic in her voice than in the girdle of Aphrodite, and she never refuses me anything and often refrains from begging for a present. Such a Philaeniön grant me, golden Cypris, to love, until I find another more perfect.

**"On marriage"** : Does he mean, for cheating your husband or wife occasionally? Yes, this is what does he mean.

By midnight, eluding my husband,

and drenched by the heavy rain, I came.

And do we then sit idle, not talking and sleeping, as lovers ought to sleep ?

### "On wealth and luxury":

First of all, his school was a huge luxurious villa sponsored by Piso that was the father-in-law of Julius Ceasar. Moreover, as everyone can see, there is a copy-paste building of the Villa of Papyri with the "Getty Villa" in Malibu! As for the Symposia not only a piece of bread and a glass of water the participants were enjoying, since in another poem by Philodemus we read :

Artemidorus gave us a cabbage, Aristarchus caviar, Athenagoras little onions, Philodemus a small liver, and Apollophanes two minas of pork, and there were three minas still over from yesterday. Go and buy us an egg and garlands and sandals \* and scent, and I wish them to be here at four o'clock sharp.

...and "on the like":

1. The stone has place for three immortals ;

for the head clearly shows me to be goat-horned Pan,

the breast and belly tell I am Heracles,

the rest of the thighs and the legs are the portion of wing-footed Hermes.

Refuse me not a sacrifice, stranger, for your one sacrifice will earn the thanks of the three gods.

2. Seven years added to thirty are gone already like so many pages torn out of my life ;

already, Xanthippe, my head is sprinkled with grey hairs, messengers of the age of wisdom.

But still I care for the speaking music of the lyre and for revelling, and in my insatiate heart the fire is alive.

But O Muses, my mistresses, bring it to a close at once with the words " Xanthippe is the end of my madness."

Conclusion : I have no objection to Philodemus and on how he had lived, and where he had lived since, as we see clearly in his poems, he lived a pleasant life, and as he liked it.

However, I have objections to him or anyone like him giving me lists with "chief goods" or "lower goods" on how I should live for leading me so deviously to a purpose as a "virtuous life" ?!

No, Philodemus, Epicurus said the purpose is a **pleasant life "hedeos zen"** and not any "virtuous life".

Moreover, I subjectively and prudently, am able to judge and measuring what brings to me pleasure and what pain according to the circumstances and consequences of MY EXPERIENCES that are getting evolved in a space-time and in a society that I live or any other society I like to live with my like-minded friends, since we commonly have declared and accepted that our common goal is to live **a pleasant life!** So, simple !

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### **Post by “Cassius” of January 3, 2020 at 8:12 AM**

Elli is there not some controversy as to whether the Philodemus who wrote those love poems is the same person as the Philosopher? I presume they are the same person but it seems I have read that somewhere - maybe not. I do remember that one or more of the poems has some clear Epicurean references so presumably it's the same person.

But there seems to me to be a *\*lot\** of uncertainty about the Philodemus material. It may appear that he was a less orthodox Epicurean than Lucretius, but my position would be that we just have to be very careful reaching broad conclusions from fragmentary reconstructed texts. So I guess my view is that I don't think I am ready to criticize Philodemus, but I am *\*very\** skeptical of the fragmentary reconstructions, and I personally would never accept something that appears to deviate from a logical extension of a more reliable text. And what I mean is that I would not accept it as reliably established as being what Philodemus meant to convey.

And that's my real issue with so much of the Philodemus material that Hiram quotes -- it's just not based on as reliable a foundation as are the more established texts, so any apparent deviations are more likely to be the result of translator speculation or bias as it is from Philodemus himself. If Philodemus had a reputation in the ancient world for deviating from Epicurus in specific areas then that would give us more to go on, but if that exists I am not aware of it.

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### **Post by “Hiram” of January 3, 2020 at 1:28 PM**

I don't know Greek nor am I able to verify the source versus any translations to see whether the original mentioned virtuous or pleasant life, although the pleasant life proposed by the ancient Epicureans WAS virtuous by their own definition ... but I also know that many modern song-writers often sing songs and choose the words for their songs so that they rhyme, and not necessarily with didactic purposes.

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## Post by “Cassius” of January 4, 2020 at 11:38 AM

I agree with at least one premise of Oscar's question, that labelling interpretations requires definitions. It really doesn't help anything to come up with categories that don't have an accepted definition without explaining what you mean them to be. In the Epicurean texts I am aware of, there is only a series of statements about the nature of gods. Any categories of "interpretations" are our own, at best, and don't have established definitions.

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## Post by “Hiram” of January 5, 2020 at 10:53 AM

### [Quote from Oscar](#)

Hiram, can you please reference where you found those atheist, idealist and realist interpretations? Are these your own interpretations? Are you simply referring to Epicurus' description of the god(s) and working your way out from there?

I think your realism is actually the "idealistic" interpretation; to claim the gods are *blissful* extraterrestrial immortals made of particles is indeed an extraordinary claim that requires extraordinary evidence. How do you know that they're immortal? I suppose if they are made up of particles, perhaps they are also subject to particle disturbance and dissolution?

I don't think realists portray god(s) with adopting a **mystical idealism** per the saying "blissful extraterrestrial immortals made of particles".

Lastly, I don't think the atheist interpretation, in its most literal sense, is an acceptable position -- even Professor Richard Dawkins states, when pressed, to be agnostic. There's simply no convincing evidence supporting any personal god(s).

They're not my own. The first two are the widely accepted academic interpretations. For instance, if you look up the wikipedia article on Epicureanism it says:

*The manner in which the [Epicurean gods](#) exist is still disputed. Some scholars say that Epicureanism believes that the gods exist outside the mind as material objects (the realist position), while others assert that the gods only exist in our minds as ideals (the idealist position)*

This is followed by three sources, which are:

1. O'Keefe, Tim (2010). *Epicureanism*. University of California Press. pp. 155–156.
2. ^ [Jump up to:a b c d e](#) Sedley, David (2011). "Epicurus' theological innatism". In Fish, Jeffrey; Sanders, Kirk R. (eds.). *Epicurus and the Epicurean Tradition*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press. pp. 29–30.
3. ^ [Jump up to:a b c d](#) Konstan, David (2011). "Epicurus on the gods". In Fish, Jeffrey; Sanders, Kirk R. (eds.). *Epicurus and the Epicurean Tradition*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press. pp. 53–54.

So as you see this is a very complex subject, and I believe it's tied mainly to the problem of how much can we infer about life in other worlds based on what we see about life in this world (this is treated in "On methods of inference" by Philodemus); and it's also linked to the problem of the Canon and the requirement that it be based on EMPIRICAL data from nature. It seems like some ancient Epicureans argued that the gods could be "perceived" as anticipations, but this is very problematic. Therefore I adhere to [the third / atheistic interpretation](#).

I find it possible that in the ecology of the cosmos there may exist super-intelligent, super-blissful beings; and I find it possible that they may exist for thousands of years, but I find it impossible (it doesn't pass the test of conceivability, which is an important criterion cited in "On methods of inference") that beings of any species would last an eternal lifetime when all else goes to dust, as we see in nature, even suns and planets.

Here is a piece by Ilkka on the subject, where he also articulates the third view (the atheist view). He was the first one who initially posited this view in terms of the canon, so it would be unfair to attribute it to me although I adhere to it. He argues that the [Epicurean gods](#) do not pass the test of the canon, that they are unempirical.

<https://menoceus.blogspot.com/2014/08/epicurean-gods.html>

Also, we have discussed this in the past among us. Here are records of our previous discussions. Feel free to start discussions elsewhere or here based on passages from these previous discussions.

**Dialogues on the [Epicurean Gods](#)** -  
<http://societyofepicurus.com/dialogues-on-the-epicurean-gods/>

**“For there ARE Gods ...”** -  
<http://societyofepicurus.com/for-there-are-gods/>

## **Post by “Elayne” of January 5, 2020 at 11:27 AM**

Epicurus was not an empiricist in that he included prolepses in his Canon of how we know what is real. DeWitt talks about this. It's consistent with developmental research showing humans are born with innate pattern recognition but even beyond that to a sort of innate pattern expectation, the same way sea turtles hatch knowing not just to notice but to look for which way to go to the sea.

However, that is different from insisting on impossible things just because they show up in one's imagination, and a reality based philosophy would not accept an interpretation of an innate intuition that has been shown clearly inaccurate. I don't know which way Epicurus would go, if he had access to the physics we have now.

There's a difference in stating Epicurus meant to be idealist or atheist when he was clearly realist, vs giving one's own position about gods. I read Epicurus as a realist, and I am pragmatically speaking an atheist, although I wouldn't categorically say that extremely long lived and blissful ETs are impossible. I'm not sure there is firm agreement on what happens after expansion of the universe, whether it's one and done or recurring, and if it is possible there could be some configuration of matter we have not thought of that could be conscious and survive in either case. It seems unlikely. I don't really spend any time thinking about it unless it comes up here.

Just because O'Keefe says a thing doesn't make true. Idealism is a ridiculous position contradicted by reality. Allowing that into your definition of Epicurean stretches the meaning beyond comprehension. You can do that to any label you want to, of course, but it removes any claim to consistency or coherence.

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## **Post by “Elli” of January 5, 2020 at 12:29 PM**

I totally agree with Elayne adding that Epicurus was so realist and pragmatist that used even the gods as means/tools for living like a god in a society that mob was, and still is thinking and acting like gorillas and chimpanzees. 😊😊

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## **Post by “Cassius” of January 5, 2020 at 4:35 PM**

In the above discussion I don't think that Hiram is including all of the detail that even in the partial form that we have it that Epicurus / Lucretius cited. I think if you check Dewitt you will see that there is both (1) the argument from anticipations, which is most fully preserved in the Velleius narrative in Cicero's "On The Nature of the Gods," and (2) the direct receipt of "images" though space by the mind.

Those who reject Epicurus' theory tend to focus on the images argument and blend that into the anticipations argument, but someone attempting to weigh all the evidence of what the texts contain would need to consider both the anticipations argument and the "images" argument.

There's a lot going on in the consideration of [Epicurean gods](#), and my personal viewpoint is that Hiram is hanging too much weight on his own personal weighing of the current state of scientific evidence, which is by definition not complete and is ever changing. It's definitely a problem also to site the evidence that the universe is expanding (that refers to the OBSERVABLE universe) to contradict the Epicurean theoretical position that the universe is boundless in size. I have to admit that that one always bothers me. Just because the part of the universe that we have OBSERVED seems to be expanding from a central point does not countermand the logical deduction that the universe is boundless in size, and that presumably there are all sorts of other areas that are expanding or collapsing or whatever based on their own histories.

To talk about the "universe" as expanding from a center is going to be out of court from the beginning in Epicurean terms. Of course we can go back to the issue of definitions and say that "universe" doesn't mean EVERYTHING, and if so that's fine, but that's not the traditional use of the term "universe."

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### **Post by "Hiram" of January 6, 2020 at 11:52 AM**

Concerning the idea that gods emit particles that we can perceive, this was part of one of our discussions on the gods and was dismissed by Alex because, in an expanding universe paradigm, we are getting further away from the intercosmia and therefore the particles would eventually no longer reach us. This is just another problem with the realist position. Are we content to state something knowing that we will remain forever without evidence for it?

[Quote from Elayne](#)

Just because O'Keefe says a thing doesn't make true. Idealism is a ridiculous position contradicted by reality. Allowing that into your definition of Epicurean stretches the meaning beyond comprehension. You can do that to any label you want to, of course, but it removes any claim to consistency or coherence.

I think we have to be careful to attack the label "idealist interpretation" without considering the substance attached, because the key issue here is whether contemplation on the gods is USEFUL for pleasure.

In other words, the difference between the atheist and idealist interpretation is that the atheist does not see the point of contemplating on the gods in any way, while the so-called "idealist" does (and Epicurus, as a realist, did).

So we should not rush to attack the label's name without considering the point being made. If someone wishes to write an essay claiming the label, or re-naming the label for the sake of clarity, I would be happy to comment on it and help to re-brand the so-called "idealist position". But the key here, let's not forget, has to do with the utility of pious practice to experience certain kinds of pleasures even if we do not believe in physical gods (and the problem addressed here is also the "naturalness" of religiosity, or the idea that humans are by nature religious and that we should "not force nature").

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## Post by "Cassius" of January 6, 2020 at 1:03 PM

### [Quote from Hiram](#)

dismissed by Alex because, in an expanding universe paradigm, we are getting further away from the intercosmia and therefore the particles would eventually no longer reach us. This is just another problem with the realist position. Are we content to state something knowing that we will remain forever without evidence for it?

The "expanding universe" paradigm, to the extent it refers to "everything," is not Epicurean and I personally reject it on the same grounds Epicurus would -- it is inconceivable that the universe has a limit. This is not a problem with the realist position, but a problem with someone accepting "scientific" speculation based on incomplete evidence that contradicts something that is logically compelled. To the extent "expanding universe" is valid it refers (presumably) to what has been observed so far, and presumes that these observations are correct and can be taken to overrule something that is logically compelled by other compelling evidence (nothing comes from nothing or goes to nothing and the chain of reasoning that leads to infinite

universe). There is no way that both can be true, and the likelihood is therefore that we either have not observed far enough out, or we are misinterpreting or misapplying the results of the evidence so far.

Note: Referring to Alex here does bring back memories too, and this I think is an area where I disagreed with Alex. I think Alex (in following the expanding universe model to the detriment of the bigger picture being the universe as unlimited in size) is committing the "error" that I think we are discussing here. Alex is very very much into "science" which is very admirable, but I frequently detected that this issue we are discussing is something where he and I disagreed. When "science" appears to contradict something as fundamental as infinite / eternal universe, then I am not going to easily accept that "science" is right without a tremendously more powerful expression of proof than I am away that the theoreticians can bring to bear.

Just the same with the religionists -- truly raise someone from the dead in circumstances that are beyond dispute and then we'll talk about supernatural gods and an afterlife.

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### **Post by “Elayne” of January 6, 2020 at 9:26 PM**

Cassius, why can't the universe be both expanding and infinite? I don't think those two things are necessarily in conflict? Here's an article about that. I can't go to the primary research for this, because it's so far out of my area. I have to use sources for laypeople. But what this article describes makes sense. <https://www.npr.org/sections/13.7/...rse-really-mean>

If Epicurus was wrong and the universe is finite, however, it still doesn't change that there is no supernatural needed to explain any part of reality. None of the interesting possibilities change anything about the material nature of reality and how we humans perceive it. None of the cosmological theories set up a basis for absolute ethics.

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### **Post by “Joshua” of January 6, 2020 at 10:30 PM**

Just to clarify something; the current state of cosmology does not hold that the universe (observable or otherwise) is expanding from a central point. It holds that the universe is expanding equally in all points. This is a difficult point to get a hold of, and metaphors only go so far. But it's worth looking into

## **Post by “Cassius” of January 6, 2020 at 10:42 PM**

Excellent points Elayne and JJ. So long as the model does not create the inference of "everything" starting at a single moment from nothing / supernaturally," I suppose that would be an example of alternate acceptable theories of the type Epicurus said was AOK. Now of course it's beyond the scope of my ability to deal with, but I think if we were talking about a well-developed Epicurean community there would be effort directed toward making sure that there was an understandable theory available to "everyone" which didn't imply "spookiness" / implicit supernatural factors, which I gather is the aura that certain people like to create exactly for the purpose of spreading religious views, or simply for the fun of keeping simpler people disconcerted.

Such a theory would probably need to address the point about whether "everything that we observe so far seems to be expanding" applies to our expectation for everything not yet observed, and if so why or why not.