

Response to Daily Stoic Comparison of Epicurus vs the Stoics

Post by “Cassius” of January 15, 2020 at 7:20 AM

Someone at FB posted this link, which I don't recall seeing before:
<https://dailystoic.com/epicureanism-vs-stoicism/>

Here are my major objections/issues with it on first reading. I quote the statement about Epicurus that I think needs clarification or is incorrect and then give my comment:

*** They believed in thermodynamic entropy (it's easier to destroy arrangements of atoms than for the arrangements to be made, thus the universe is ageing towards a state of complete disorganization).* <<<< I don't believe this is correct from the texts. Yes decay takes place in parts of the universe, but in other parts the atoms are coming together, and this offsets the decay, so in total the different parts of the universe remain constantly cycling, not decaying overall.

*** Pain and suffering were bad, happiness and fulfillment were good.* <<< This may be true, but how in the world did he write that sentence without using the word PLEASURE? Using words like "fulfillment" is a typically Stoic way of avoiding the premise that Nature gives us the feeling of pleasure as the guide rather than abstraction like fulfillment, and that is why Epicurus talked about pleasure in general rather than using euphemisms or terms that are more narrow and indicative of a particular limited type of pleasure (e.g., "'fulfillment').

*** It's a certain medieval christian bias that led to the interpretation of Epicureanism as the pursuit of sensual pleasure.* <<<< No, this is not true, because Epicurus DID advocate the pursuit of sensual pleasure. The inaccuracy is that he advocated the pursuit of ALL KINDS of pleasure, including mental / emotional, and not ONLY sensual.

*** What is important is the Greek term Eudaimonia, which is often translated as happiness, but has little to do today with what we call happiness (the bubbly, pleasurable sensation that accompanies agreeable outcomes and events). Perhaps a better translation would be "Flourishing of life."* <<< This is misleading. Epicurus focused on PLEASURE as the guide of life. Eudaimonia and flourishing are terms associated with Aristotle and other Greeks, not the Epicurean perspective.

*** Accordingly, the Epicureans advocated moderation in things, and a balanced, "agreeable" life that pursued the "higher pleasures" of fraternity, self improvement, and freedom from the*

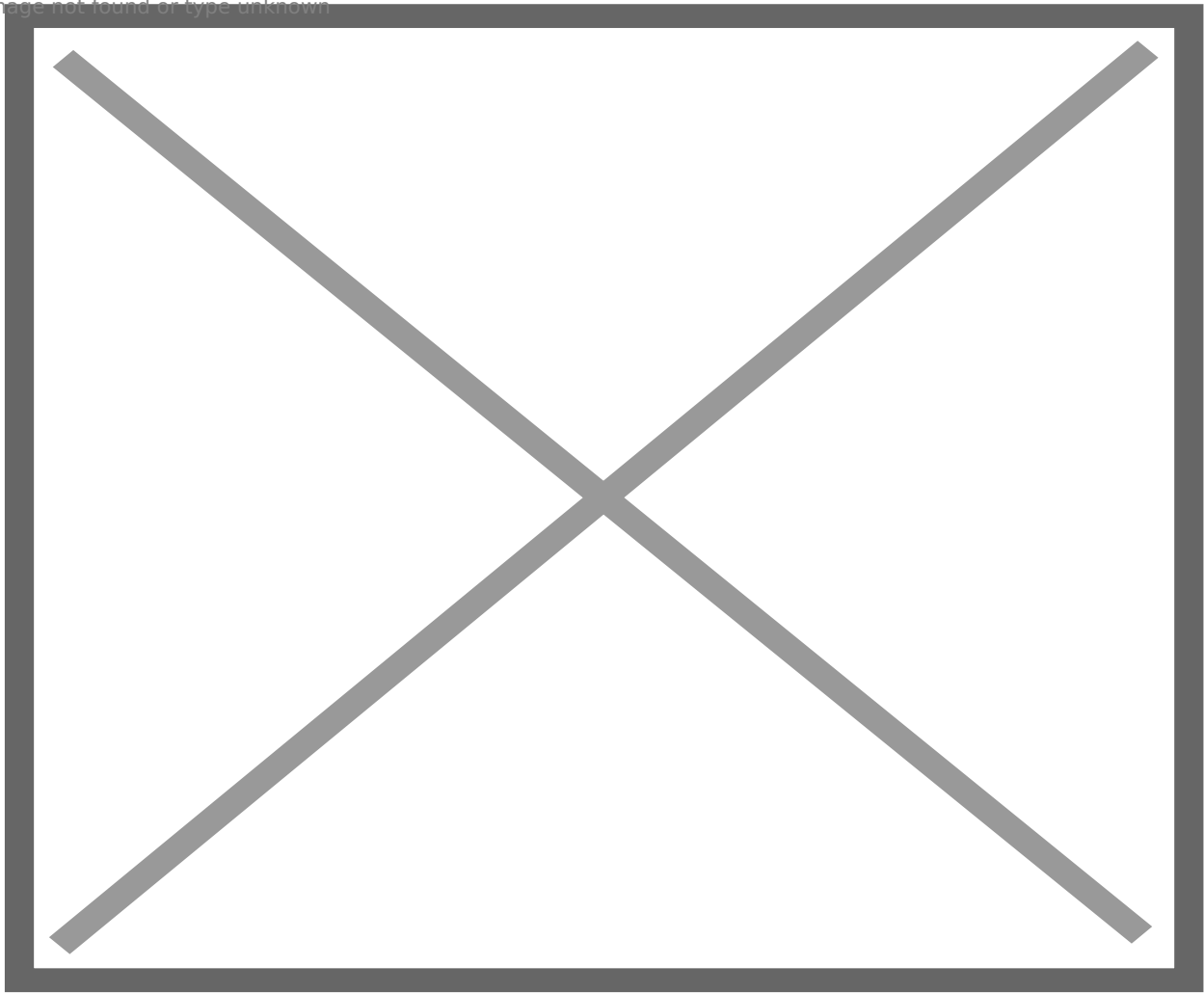
fear of death, which they thought would result in the freedom of all fear. <<<< False in several respects. Again, "moderation" is Aristotle - there is no advocacy of "moderation" in Epicurus. In fact it is the opposite, pleasure is the goal, and it should be pursued with all the vigor possible, but that means prudently so that in fact the pleasure is maximized, not run amok and creating needless pain. Also, there are no "higher" pleasures ranked by Epicurus. Friendship is one of the greatest tools for achieving pleasure, but it is given no "ranking" as superior kind of pleasure - nor is any other type of pleasure-- pleasure is pleasure.

***They saw anxiety as the great thorn in mankind's side, and their philosophical project was to rid themselves of it.* <<< Partially true but misleading. Anxiety is certainly to be diminished, as is all pain, but the focus is on achieving pleasure, and we will at times choose pain in order to achieve greater pleasure.

Post by "Kalosyni" of April 21, 2023 at 9:44 AM

I came upon this, which has all the same issues addressed by Cassius in the above post. But this is a much longer article, and there is added historical material regarding the rivalry of the two schools.

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[Stoicism Vs. Epicureanism](#)

By: Stephen Hanselman The English language has done a great disservice to two of ancient philosophy's greatest schools—Stoicism and Epicureanism. In the case...
dailystoic.com

Post by “Little Rocker” of April 21, 2023 at 6:35 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Epicurus focused on PLEASURE as the guide of life. Eudaimonia and flourishing are terms associated with Aristotle and other Greeks, not the Epicurean perspective.

I guess I think Epicurus intended to position himself within the long-standing dispute about the nature of happiness rather than outside it. So when he says early in the Letter to Menoeceus, 'Therefore, one must practice the things which produce happiness, since if that is present we have everything and if it is absent we do everything in order to have it,' he uses *eudaimonia*. But I totally agree he thinks eudaimonia consists in pleasure.

Post by “Don” of April 21, 2023 at 9:47 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Epicurus focused on PLEASURE as the guide of life. Eudaimonia and flourishing are terms associated with Aristotle and other Greeks, not the Epicurean perspective.

I agree with [Little Rocker](#) that Epicurus had every intention of engaging in the debates that were roiling through ancient Greek culture and philosophical debate for some time. Epicurus was more than happy to meet on the "field of (philosophical) battle" so to speak and to attempt to set the philosophical aright (as he saw it). I see parallels with his arguments for pleasure being the telos. Plato's [Philebus](#) tries to argue against pleasure; Epicurus tried to show how the argument in that work was fallacious. The Cyrenaics had one view of pleasure; Epicurus engaged with them to show how they were wrong.

Same with eudaimonia. Epicurus included eudaimonia as one of the results of living a pleasurable life. Eudaimonia was part of Epicurus's vocabulary and he had no issue including it in his philosophy. I found 6 instances of his use of the word eudaimonia itself plus one use in the commentary of Diogenes Laertius discussing Epicurus's philosophy in a cursory search of his texts:

[PD33](#). The body cries out to not be hungry, not be thirsty, not be cold. Anyone who has these things, and who is confident of continuing to have them, can rival the gods for ****happiness****

σαρκὸς φωνὴ τὸ μὴ πεινῆν, τὸ μὴ διψῆν, τὸ μὴ ῥιγοῦν· ταῦτα γὰρ ἔχων τις καὶ ἐλπίζων ἔξειν [hope or expect to have] κἂν <διὸ [dative of Zeus]> ὑπὲρ ****εὐδαιμονίας**** μαχέσαιτο. [contend/compete]

Fr. 548. ****Happiness**** and bliss are produced not by great riches nor vast possessions nor exalted occupations nor positions of power, but rather by peace of mind, freedom from pain, and a disposition of the soul that sets its limits in accordance with nature.

τὸ ****εὐδαιμον**** καὶ μακάριον [happiness and blessedness] οὐ χρημάτων πλῆθος οὐδὲ πραγμάτων ὄγκος οὐδ' ἀρχαί τινες ἔχουσιν οὐδὲ δυνάμεις, ἀλλ' ἀλυπία καὶ πραότης παθῶν καὶ

διάθεσις ψυχῆς τὸ κατὰ φύσιν ὀρίζουσα.

Letter to Menoikeus

[122] Μήτε νέος τις ὦν μελλέτω φιλοσοφεῖν, μήτε γέρον ὑπάρχων κοπιάτω φιλοσοφῶν. οὔτε γὰρ ἄωρος οὐδεὶς ἐστὶν οὔτε πάρωρος πρὸς τὸ κατὰ ψυχὴν ὑγιαίνειν. ὁ δὲ λέγων ἢ μήπω τοῦ φιλοσοφεῖν ὑπάρχειν ἢ παρεληλυθέναι τὴν ὥραν ὁμοίός ἐστι τῷ λέγοντι πρὸς ****εὐδαιμονίαν**** ἢ μήπω παρεῖναι τὴν ὥραν ἢ μηκέτ' εἶναι. ὥστε φιλοσοφητέον καὶ νέω καὶ γέροντι, τῷ μὲν ὅπως γηράσκων νεάζη τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς διὰ τὴν χάριν τῶν γεγονότων, τῷ δ' ὅπως νέος ἅμα καὶ παλαιὸς ἦ διὰ τὴν ἀφοβίαν τῶν μελλόντων. μελετᾶν οὖν χρὴ τὰ ποιοῦντα τὴν ****εὐδαιμονίαν****, εἴ περ παρούσης μὲν αὐτῆς πάντα ἔχομεν, ἀπούσης δὲ πάντα πράττομεν εἰς τὸ ταύτην ἔχειν.

[122] Neither must one who is young delay in loving and pursuing wisdom; nor should one who is old grow weary of loving and pursuing wisdom; because it is neither out of season nor untimely for the health of the psychē. And one who says either the season to love and practice wisdom is not yet arrived or the season has passed by is like someone who is saying either the proper time has not arrived or is no more for ****eudaimonia****. Therefore, both the young and old must love and pursue wisdom. On the one hand, the old can be young by means of gratitude for the pleasures which have happened; on the other hand, the young can be as if they are old in years by means of the fearlessness of facing what is intended to be done or what is to come. You must study and meditate upon that which produces ****eudaimonia****. For if indeed that is present, we have everything; if that is not present, we do anything to have it.

[127] ... Ἀναλογιστέον δὲ ὡς τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν αἱ μὲν εἰσι φυσικαί, αἱ δὲ κεναί, καὶ τῶν φυσικῶν αἱ μὲν ἀναγκαῖαι, αἱ δὲ φυσικαὶ μόνον· τῶν δ' ἀναγκαίων αἱ μὲν πρὸς ****εὐδαιμονίαν**** εἰσὶν ἀναγκαῖαι, αἱ δὲ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ σώματος ἀοχλησίαν, αἱ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ ζῆν.

And of the natural ones, on the one hand, are the necessary ones; on the other, the ones which are only natural; then, of the necessary ones: on the one hand, those necessary for ****eudaimonia****; then, those necessary for the freedom from disturbance for the body; then those necessary for life itself.

Letter to Pythocles

[116] οὐδὲ γὰρ εἰς τὸ τυχὸν ζῶον, κἂν <εἰ> μικρὸν χαριέστερον εἶη, ἢ τοιαύτη μωρία ἐμπέσοι, μὴ ὅτι εἰς παντελῆ ****εὐδαιμονίαν**** κεκτημένον [acquire, possess, own].

"Ταῦτα δὴ πάντα, Πυθόκλεις, μνημόνευσον:

[116] For such folly as this would not possess the most ordinary being if ever so little enlightened, much less one who enjoys perfect ****eudaimonia****.

"All this, Pythocles, you should keep in mind ;

Laërtius commentary not Epicurus: DL X [121]

Τὴν **εὐδαιμονίαν** διχῆ νοεῖσθαι, τὴν τε ἀκροτάτην, οἷα ἐστὶ περὶ τὸν θεόν, ἐπίτασιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν: καὶ τὴν <κατὰ τὴν> προσθήκην καὶ ἀφαίρεσιν ἡδονῶν.

Μετιτέον δ' ἐπὶ τὴν ἐπιστολήν.

"Επίκουρος Μενοικεῖ χάρειν.

[121] Two sorts of **happiness** can be conceived, the one the highest possible, such as the gods enjoy, which cannot be augmented, the other admitting addition and subtraction of pleasures.

We must now proceed to his letter.

"Epicurus to Menoecus, greeting.

Post by "Don" of April 21, 2023 at 10:12 PM

Just so I don't seem too critical of [Cassius](#) 's rebuttal to the Daily Stoic commentary:

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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I fully agree with your response to that. Just because there is decay in one part of the universe don't necessitate decay in all parts of the universe.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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Fully agree again. This was Epicurus's big innovation, separating his philosophy from the Cyrenaics.

[Quote from Daily Stoic](#)

*** What is important is the Greek term Eudaimonia, which is often translated as happiness, but has little to do today with what we call happiness (the bubbly, pleasurable sensation that accompanies agreeable outcomes and events). Perhaps a better translation would be "Flourishing of life." <<<*

See above. Plus, I continue to advocate for a translation of "well-being" for eudaimonia. "Flourishing" doesn't strike me as conveying the right tone... it's hard to explain, but I'm sticking with "well-being."

[Quote from Cassius](#)

*** Accordingly, the Epicureans advocated moderation in things, and a balanced, "agreeable" life that pursued the "higher pleasures" of fraternity, self improvement, and freedom from the fear of death, which they thought would result in the freedom of all fear. <<<< False in several respects. Again, "moderation" is Aristotle - there is no advocacy of "moderation" in Epicurus. In fact it is the opposite, pleasure is the goal, and it should be pursued with all the vigor possible, but that means prudently so that in fact the pleasure is maximized, not run amok and creating needless pain. Also, there are no "higher" pleasures ranked by Epicurus. Friendship is one of the greatest tools for achieving pleasure, but it is given no "ranking" as superior kind of pleasure - nor is any other type of pleasure-- pleasure is pleasure.*

I would concur that moderation is Aristotle. [His doctrine of the mean did not impress me.](#) On the other hand, I would contend that Epicurus advocates for a simple life, one in which one lives *within their means*, while at the same time taking pleasure in "extravagances" when they become available. And yes, there are not "higher" and "lower" pleasures; but I would contend that there *are* pleasures in which we can be more confident and less confident.

Post by "Little Rocker" of April 21, 2023 at 10:52 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

Plus, I continue to advocate for a translation of "well-being" for eudaimonia. "Flourishing" doesn't strike me as conveying the right tone... it's hard to explain, but I'm sticking with "well-being."

It *is* really hard to explain, but I agree--flourishing is just not the right word! It sounds too Aristotelian, too much like 'these plants flourish in afternoon sun,' but with humans rather than plants.

Post by “Don” of April 22, 2023 at 7:20 AM

I just took a look at the link [Kalosyni](#) provided. That definitely is a more in depth article. Right off the bat I saw:

Quote

Epicurus founded his school in 306BC in Athens, just five years before Zeno would branch out from his studies with the Cynics and Megarians to establish the Stoic school in 301BC.

And I'm more than happy to pick nits with the Stoics, so *technically" Epicurus bought the property for the Garden in Athens in 306. He had been teaching for several years prior to that in Mytilene and Lampsacus before that. The 306 and 301 dates make it appear that Epicurus and Zeno started teaching within 5 years of each other whereas Epicurus had a longer head start.

There are plenty of other nits (and larger bugs) to pick with that article but not a good start.