

Daily Interactions With The Non-Epicurean World

Post by “Cassius” of February 26, 2020 at 7:32 AM

I have a long-time friend who calls me almost daily to report his latest observation of the "insanity" of the religious world around us. His specialty is pointing out the obvious contradictions and maddening trivialities we see on church signs.

Today's call was about a public statement that a person who was killed in a senseless shooting is already now enjoying heaven so we have no need to mourn his death. Well if so why don't we all commit suicide today?

Another of his favorites: "If god is your co-pilot your in the wrong seat."

I suspect that people who enthusiastic enough about Epicurus to come to a forum like this probably have similar frustrations where there would like to just "blow off steam" about things like that. And I think there are plenty of things like that to discuss without veering off into the "politics" which would be destructive to our general purpose.

Sometimes I get the impression that the title "General Discussion" and the fairly intellectual tone of the board may discourage some people from posting that kind of thing, but I think it would be helpful for us to share experiences in order to build community.

Would it be useful to set up a separate forum (such as "Daily Interactions With the Non-Epicurean World" to emphasize that that kind of post is welcome?

Post by “Mike Anyayahan” of February 26, 2020 at 9:36 AM

I agree. In fact, this is what we should be preoccupied with if we want to grow and make a non-Epicurean world an Epicurean one. This is what priests and pastors do. Every Sunday, they talk about how Christians would live in a secular world. If we don't do it, we will remain a small and endangered species remote from the real world.

Post by “Mike Anyayahan” of February 26, 2020 at 9:52 AM

So instead of limiting ourselves from scholarly discussions, we can be more effective and productive if we also apply Epicureanism in the most practical context. I don't think it is wrong to talk about things like happiness at work, choosing the right products to buy, ideal home for a tranquil life, how love provides and destroys happiness, why criminals deserve punishment or second chance, how success makes one happy or miserable, when is the right time to quit a day job, how Epicureans should practice defensive driving, parenting, Epicurean life hacks, and the like.

Post by “SamJ” of July 12, 2020 at 8:29 AM

I'd be keen to learn of Epicurean life hacks people have or how people apply Epicureanism in a practical way.

Post by “Godfrey” of July 12, 2020 at 12:25 PM

We had a thread on this a while back:

[Practical Daily Pleasure-- Creating Pleasurable Habits](#)

Lately, I'm finding that I don't think much about seeking particular pleasures. Instead I think about the atomic universe and its implications, and that seems to motivate me to focus on a particular task, either for a day or for multiple days. Interestingly, the tasks that I choose in this manner keep turning out to be pleasurable even if I was originally envisioning them as onerous.

Post by “SamJ” of July 13, 2020 at 1:37 AM

Thanks Godfrey, just read that thread and some really useful thoughts. Thank you for pointing this out.

I also found your suggestion about the atomic universe and its implications to be pretty interesting. Be keen to here more about that.

I am trying to find innovative ways of teaching my 4 year old elements of Epicureanism as I figured if you teach it you can master it. (Which can only be a great thing for me). 😊.

This weekend I had a good opportunity to teach my 4 year old a little bit about 'what is terrible is easy to endure'. To which I think I'll have lots of lesson plans here!!

Post by “Godfrey” of July 13, 2020 at 2:23 PM

Sam], regarding the atomic universe.... Since everything is material and there is no supernatural or afterlife, this should put all of our focus on our lived life. This has given me an understanding that the only meaning to my life is that which I choose, and that this choosing is a process of being open and attentive to my desires as well as to my sensations, unconscious knowledge, and pleasures and pains. This choosing is an intuitive and hard to describe process, and of course it's different for everybody so it may not even be useful to try to describe it. But my opinion is that working with this process is far more important than any life hack, unless you want to think of *it* as a life hack. At any rate, this is giving me more confidence in my choices and, as a natural consequence, more focus in my daily activities.

Another implication of the atomic universe is that I find that I have a greater sense of wonder after I've been giving "the nature of things" an extended bit of thought.

Post by “Cassius” of July 13, 2020 at 3:00 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

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At risk of going way off topic, this passage on the issue of being able to understand yourself, reminded me of the "know thyself" phrase and issue, and that called to my mind a passage from a book I like very much and have talked about a little - "Dialogue on Innate Principles" by Jackson Barwis. I think the attitude he takes toward this issue is something with which Epicurus

would agree, given Epicurus' view of the "canon of truth" and what it is it can and can not reveal to us:

Here is the key line: "*... the knowledge we may attain of our own nature and principles is more clear and more certain, comes to us easier and with better evidence, then we can possibly acquire concerning the nature and principles of any other creatures.*"

More context:

Quote

It has long been an applauded fashion to make collections and to roam abroad in search of rarities and monsters for others to gaze at, indulging a sort of idle industry in vain curiosity concerning things but little relative, or perhaps quite foreign, to our nature: and such trifling is dignified with the honorable names of learning and knowledge. So much engaged without doors, however, it cannot be but our affairs at home must suffer, and our most interesting concerns lie neglected. For though I do by no means agree with those who think the most difficult of all knowledge is the knowledge of ourselves, yet I am very certain that men whose minds are continually employed in extraneous subjects of science, or in those amusing external arts which are irrelative to moral life, are but very rarely even tolerable proficient in the home-science. Indeed, it is not to be expected that a man should be skillful in an art which he has never allowed himself time to think of or leisure to attend to.

-- I am very sensible of the fashionable folly, said I, and know very well and have cheap a rate literary distinctions are purchased; and I must agree with you that a mind much addicted to extraneous researches is not likely to be very well-informed at home: but I should be glad to know why you think the attainment of a knowledge of ourselves is less difficult than commonly imagined?

I do not think, replied he, that any kind of knowledge can be acquired without attention and study: but the knowledge we may attain of our own nature and principles is more clear and more certain, comes to us easier and with better evidence, then we can possibly acquire concerning the nature and principles of any other creatures. What man can doubt that it is more easy for him to know himself than it is for him to know any other man, or than it is for any other man to know him? If a man be incapable of knowing himself, a subject with which he is so intimately, so sensibly united; whose principles, sentiments, perceptions, thoughts, and designs he can always inspect and know without disguise whenever he pleases to view them impartially, I say if he be incapable of knowing himself with the aid of so much previous, clear, intelligence, how much more incapable must he be of knowing any other man whose thoughts and designs he cannot be so sure of, or any other creature whose nature and true principles

can never with certainty be known to him? In short, the truth is this, that unless a man be a tolerable adept in the knowledge of himself, and can perceive all the various turnings and windings of the human affections and passions and their effects in his own heart, he can have no rule or measure by which he may form and regulate his judgment concerning the actions and intentions of others.

I think you are right, said I.

-- It is probably, therefore, a truer maxim, continued he, to say that it is easier for a man to know himself than to know any other man or any other creature; and that a man's knowledge of other men and of other creatures will very much increase as he advances in the knowledge of himself and of his own nature. For his most rational conjectures concerning the natures of other animals are principally founded on what he is conscious of in himself as an animal.

So as Godfrey says, I think this attitude that we are capable of understanding that which is really important to us "...is giving me more confidence in my choices and, as a natural consequence, more focus in my daily activities."

Post by "Godfrey" of July 13, 2020 at 4:47 PM

And the Epicurean Canon gives us the tools to know ourselves, which in a nutshell is what I was describing above. It's not just about square towers and bent oars!

Post by "Cassius" of July 13, 2020 at 5:11 PM

Yes that was the point of my going off on the tangent. It seems very Epicurean to me to take the position that surely off all the things we have information about, the thing we have the MOST information about is "us" -- so we need to start with understanding ourselves and not considering ourselves to be mystical black boxes that only a god or a magician could figure out.

Post by "DavidN" of July 20, 2022 at 2:28 AM

Godfrey's meditations on the atomic universe reminds me of Nietzsche's answer to the eternal recurrence, as found in *De Rerum Natura*. Rather than denying our connection to the eternal recurrence Nietzsche asks us to examine our life and make it worthy of living again. 'This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!' The question in each and every thing, 'Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?' would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life?"

Post by “Kalosyni” of July 20, 2022 at 7:39 AM

[Quote from DavidN](#)

'This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!'

This idea from Nietzsche perplexes me. There is something "dark" in this that I can't quite place, and something not particularly helpful, at least for me. The "eternal return" makes sense when reminiscing pleasant or enjoyable experiences, but not for unpleasant events. I think we must choose our actions wisely, due to our understanding of what will bring the best future outcome, but if there is some kind of mistake we have made or some terrible event that happens, then we need to work through that in a much different way than what the eternal return suggests.

Post by “Cassius” of July 20, 2022 at 10:05 AM

This eternal return from Nietzsche is very deep and we'd have to go into it pretty far to do it justice. I don't profess to understand it all myself. But two points to consider is that there is an aspect of the atoms coming back together into the same form listed in Lucretius, and rather than being dark Nietzsche was advocating the view as an antidote to nihilism, which is far darker. Maybe we already have a thread on this, or need one, but I don't know that we currently have any Nietzsche aficionados competent to deal with it.

Post by “Cassius” of July 20, 2022 at 10:06 AM

I see I did a (poor) graphic a long time ago to cite the Lucretian text, but I don't see that we have a thread. Now we do.

Thread

[Nietzsche's Eternal Recurrence \(Eternal Return\) In Relation To Lucretius](#)

I hesitate to open this thread at the moment because I don't have time to continue it, but we'll now have this here in case someone searches for "Eternal Recurrence" or "Eternal Return" and wants to talk about how it may relate to Lucretius Book 3:

[epicureanfriends.com/wcf/gallery/image/206/](https://www.epicureanfriends.com/wcf/gallery/image/206/)



Cassius

July 20, 2022 at 10:09 AM

Death is nothing to us; for that which has been dissolved into its elements experiences no sensations, and that which has no sensation is nothing to us. - *Epicurus Principal Doctrine 2*



Nor, if time should gather together our substance after our decease and bring it back again as it is now placed, if once more the light of life should be vouchsafed to us, yet, even were that done, it would not concern us at all, when once the remembrance of our former selves were snapped in twain. And even now we care not at all for the selves that we once were, not at all are we touched by any torturing pain for them. For when you look back over all the lapse of immeasurable time that now is gone, and think how manifold are the motions of matter, you could easily believe this too, that these same seeds, whereof we now are made, have often been placed in the same order as they are now, and yet we cannot recall that in our mind's memory; for in between lies a break in life, and all the motions have wandered everywhere far astray from sense. For, if by chance there is to be grief and pain for a man, he must needs himself too exist at that time, that ill may befall him. Since death forestalls this, and prevents the being of him, on whom these misfortunes might crowd, we may know that we have naught to fear in death, and that he who is no more cannot be wretched, and that it were no whit different if he had never at any time been born, when once immortal death hath stolen away mortal life. - *Lucretius Book 3*

Post by "DavidN" of July 20, 2022 at 8:16 PM

Nietzsche's point is to live a life worth reliving. Taking into account all the bad what would you have to do to make it worth living over and over again. It's a call to action to examine your life and change it for the better. What ever that might mean for your life and demeanor. There's quite abit more to it but that's the basics.