

Welcome Camotero!

Post by “Cassius” of June 6, 2020 at 4:15 PM

Hello and welcome to the forum [Mathitis Kipouros](#) !

This is the place for students of Epicurus to coordinate their studies and work together to promote the philosophy of Epicurus. Please remember that all posting here is subject to our [Community Standards / Rules of the Forum](#) our [Not Neo-Epicurean, But Epicurean](#) and our [Posting Policy statements](#) and [associated posts](#).

Please understand that the leaders of this forum are well aware that many fans of Epicurus may have sincerely-held views of what Epicurus taught that are incompatible with the purposes and standards of this forum. This forum is dedicated exclusively to the study and support of people who are committed to classical Epicurean views. As a result, this forum is not for people who seek to mix and match some Epicurean views with positions that are inherently inconsistent with the core teachings of Epicurus.

All of us who are here have arrived at our respect for Epicurus after long journeys through other philosophies, and we do not demand of others what we were not able to do ourselves. Epicurean philosophy is very different from other viewpoints, and it takes time to understand how deep those differences really are. That's why we have membership levels here at the forum which allow for new participants to discuss and develop their own learning, but it's also why we have standards that will lead in some cases to arguments being limited, and even participants being removed, when the purposes of the community require it. Epicurean philosophy is not inherently democratic, or committed to unlimited free speech, or devoted to any other form of organization other than the pursuit by our community of happy living through the principles of Epicurean philosophy.

One way you can be most assured of your time here being productive is to tell us a little about yourself and personal your background in reading Epicurean texts. It would also be helpful if you could tell us how you found this forum, and any particular areas of interest that you have which would help us make sure that your questions and thoughts are addressed.

In that regard we have found over the years that there are a number of key texts and references which most all serious students of Epicurus will want to read and evaluate for themselves. Those include the following.

1. The Biography of Epicurus By Diogenes Laertius (Chapter 10). This includes all Epicurus' letters and the Authorized Doctrines. Supplement with the Vatican list of Sayings.
2. **"Epicurus And His Philosophy" - Norman DeWitt**

3. "On The Nature of Things"- Lucretius
4. Cicero's "On Ends" - Torquatus Section
5. Cicero's "On The Nature of the Gods" - Velleius Section
6. The Inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda - Martin Ferguson Smith translation
7. A Few Days In Athens" - Frances Wright
8. Lucian Core Texts on Epicurus: (1) Alexander the Oracle-Monger, (2) Hermotimus
9. Plato's [Philebus](#)
10. Philodemus "On Methods of Inference" (De Lacy version, including his appendix on relationship of Epicurean canon to Aristotle and other Greeks)
11. "The Greeks on Pleasure" -Gosling & Taylor Sections on Epicurus, especially on katastematic and kinetic pleasure.

It is by no means essential or required that you have read these texts before participating in the forum, but your understanding of Epicurus will be much enhanced the more of these you have read.

And time has also indicated to us that if you can find the time to read one book which will best explain [classical Epicurean philosophy](#), as opposed to most modern "eclectic" interpretations of Epicurus, that book is Norman DeWitt's ***Epicurus And His Philosophy***.

Welcome to the forum!

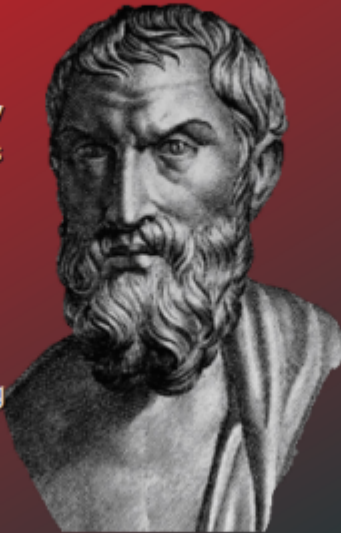
Not Neo-Epicurean, But Epicurean

1. Not "flourishing," "human potential," "self-actualization," or "meaningfulness," but happiness grounded in the feeling of pleasure.
2. Not "absence of pain" as a full statement of the goal of life, but "the Feelings are two, pleasure and pain" and "Pleasure is the beginning and the end of a happy life."
3. Not virtue for the sake of virtue, but virtue as instrumental for the attainment of pleasure.
4. Not "the greatest good for the greatest number," but "Every desire must be confronted with this question: What will happen to me if the object of my desire is accomplished and what if it is not?"
5. Not "humanism," "transhumanism," "individualism," "collectivism," "egoism," "altruism," "social progress," "Marxism," "democracy," "tyranny," or any "one size fits all" political ideal of any kind, but social structure based on friendship which "is formed and maintained by means of a community of life among those who have reached the fullness of pleasure."
6. Not "hard determinism," but "some things happen from necessity, some from chance, and others through our own choice."
7. Not "supernaturalism," but "materialism."
8. Not "supernatural gods," or "life after death," but confidence in a fully material universe and "for those men for whom wisdom is possible, and who do seek it, such men may truly live as gods."
9. Not only "short term hedonism," but "it is to continuous pleasures that I invite you."
10. Not "rationalism," but "all reason is dependent upon sensations."
11. Not fearful of death nor careless of losing life, but valuing life for the opportunity of pleasure it brings.

Our Posting Policy At EpicureanFriends.com:

"No Partisan Politics," "No Supernatural Religion," and "No Absolute Virtue"

This forum is dedicated to promoting the philosophy of Epicurus, and not to any partisan political positions whether "left," "right," or "center." The task of rediscovering Epicurean philosophy requires that such discussions be held elsewhere. Posts violating this rule are subject to removal.



Epicurean philosophy firmly rejects the viewpoint that there are any supernatural forces or absolute virtues or Platonic ideals of any kind. Argument which is based on supernatural claims, or "absolute" virtues or ideals of any kind, are in violation of this rule and subject to removal.

Post by "Charles" of June 7, 2020 at 12:46 AM

Welcome [Mathitis Kipouros!](#)

Post by "Mathitis Kipouros" of June 11, 2020 at 12:34 AM

Thanks for the welcome guys. Please forgive my typing since I'm on my phone and English is my second language.

I came to the site through the Lucretius Today podcast, which I've been enjoying and binge-listening to for the last days/weeks; thanks for that, Cassius and friends. The views put forth there have been eye opening. It makes me glad to say that being exposed to these has made me feel more comfortable with many views I already held myself, some of which I lived by, but that were hard to reconcile with what my "philosophy of life" was until now, which is changing.

Where do I stand about Epicurean philosophy? I'm new to it, but I wouldn't say I'm still "on the fence"; I think I'm past it now, but I do have some questions I'm looking to answer.

Sadly I haven't been able to read a lot yet about epicurean philosophy. I've read enough to know that the popular understanding of Epicurus is mistaken. I was disappointed to see that most readily available resources don't go deeply enough to make it past the common places we all know about.

I later learned that Lucretius could be a valuable resource to learn more, and thus discovered the podcast. This is apparently opening a new world for me. I'm about to order a copy of Dewitt's book to more seriously start studying about this philosophy. What I've learnt so far I'm liking. I feel, after searching a lot, that I'm on my way to find a worldview that will actually make sense.

I say this because I am "recovering" from stoicism and religion.

It's easy to see how these can give you tools to cope with hardship. They can help you to find peace when in turmoil. But, putting that aside, there were many things that, for me, "didn't hold" in the long term.

As good as they can be as coping tools, I find them also having the potential for subjugation, rather than liberation. I think they can put you in a disposition to accept, a bit submissively, or with resignation, the lot that's been "given" to you. This, to me, makes it obvious why western religion borrows so much from stoicism.

But I'm not here only as a rebound from stoicism, but rather because epicurean philosophy, after going past the common places mostly talked about, seems promising as to having the potential to be a philosophy for the good life, achievable in a more practical and intuitive way. Thus, I wish to learn more about it, and hopefully one day be able to contribute to the conversations in this "garden" of the internet

Post by "Martin" of June 11, 2020 at 4:49 AM

Welcome Camotero!

Post by "Cassius" of June 11, 2020 at 6:41 AM

Welcome, and thank you for the kind words about the podcast!

Post by “Cassius” of June 11, 2020 at 7:44 AM

Also Camotero, I would be very interested to hear what aspects of the podcast discussions have been of most interest to you. Probably that's another way of asking what aspects of Epicurean philosophy you think about or wrestle with the most. It's always good to know what people are thinking so if you have time to talk about what aspects you find most appealing (or unappealing) please let us know.

Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of June 12, 2020 at 12:19 AM

Well, let me try to share what's been appealing and what's been confusing. Please forgive, as many of these may be misattributed or not related to Epicurean philosophy, but this is where my understanding of it is today.

It's appealing to hear that it might be possible to have a framework that could be helpful to understand the world and how to navigate it in a very pragmatic way, within our reach, and with many tools we already possess.

It's appealing in that it could help to get rid of habits formed by years of accepting “abstractions” as real, and to learn to identify these abstractions.

It's so refreshing to find people who are honest enough with themselves and with others about the super natural being non existing (or completely irrelevant to our experience). It makes me think of the fear, hypocrisy or self-imposed-unconsciousness necessary to be able to live every day by these beliefs. Don't get me wrong, I've been guilty in the three accounts.

It's relaxing that, apparently, to understand it you can approach it in a “what you see is what you get” attitude, with plain language and without overly convoluted concepts. It feels straightforward.

It's liberating in that it faces you with the reality that whatever enjoyment or happiness you can expect to experience will have to happen before you cease to exist, and forgetting about doing stuff for “the points you'll get in the virtues exam nobody is grading”.

It's good to know that it's not a philosophy of libertine hedonism and debauchery.

Many of the following also may be because of my status as a new "student", so please bear with me:

It's confusing that some abstractions are bad and some good, so how to draw a line. Like higher math or complex music theory etc.

It's unappealing that it may be perceived as a selfish way to live life and act in the world. It worries me that the ethics won't comprise a care for the less fortunate and the downtrodden. Or that morality would be not relevant to it because of its ultra materialistic foundation.

Getting really out of my depth... it's confusing that the swerve (or whatever it is called in modern terms... what is it? What they call a "quantum jump" or "atomic transition" perhaps?) happens for no reason at all and from that we can derive a conclusion of this as evidence of the existence of free will. Perhaps this is a non-issue, since it's evident that free will exists, or at least our experience makes us feel it that way, which is what is relevant, but I dare to share something that in my huge ignorance I found a bit paradoxical (please do forgive me if this is very basic stuff): if we don't have any control over the swerve, then we are at it's behest, regardless of it happening for many reasons or any reason at all, no?

I hope I'm not taking too much of your time for stuff that I will come to answer with a bit more study later on, by taking advantage of your prompt, Cassius.

Post by "Martin" of June 12, 2020 at 3:06 AM

Here are Epicurean answers to 2 of the items which you perceive as unappealing and confusing:

We feel empathy with the less fortunate and the downtrodden. If we did not care at all for them, we would feel pain. Helping some of them where we can with reasonable effort increases our pleasure.

Moreover, caring for the less fortunate and the downtrodden may make it less likely that our security and thereby pleasure is threatened by violent revolutions or crimes committed under the pretext of justice for the less fortunate and the downtrodden.

The swerve is not evidence for the existence of free will but a precondition for the existence of free will in the sense of agency. In a materialistic universe, some kind of swerve is necessary to avoid determinism. Pursuing pleasure as the goal makes only sense if we have agency to deviate from a deterministic path.

Epicurus' swerve has modern analogies in quantum indeterminacy and in the measurement uncertainty in classical physics. Instead of the impossible mechanistic description of every particle involved, thermodynamic properties or emergent properties are used to describe reality as we perceive it and do not exclude agency.

Post by “Cassius” of June 12, 2020 at 4:43 AM

Great list of issues Camotero! Thank you! And I think Martin has hit the high points on the ones he addressed. Let me compose some responses on the others and we'll see what others have too.

But before I forget to say this to supplement the swerve comments from Martin, I think if you look up the article by David Sedley "Epicurus Refutation of Determinism" recently posted here you will profit a lot from it. I wish I had had that article years ago but I did not know about it until recently.

[Sedley: "Epicurus' Refutation of Determinism"](#)

Post by “Cassius” of June 12, 2020 at 5:04 AM

This one is possibly the deepest of all and I do think we need to articulate this one better:

"It's confusing that some abstractions are bad and some good, so how to draw a line. Like higher math or complex music theory etc."

I am on my phone so my typing here is truncated but here is a start.

First, I do not think it would be correct to say that Epicurus would have considered some abstractions "good" and some "bad." Good and bad are themselves abstractions and the issue is not that some abstractions are good and bad; the issue is always ultimately (1) abstractions do not exist outside our minds and (2) ultimately it is always pleasure and pain that are of significance to us.

I have been concerned for a while that we are not being precise enough on that point. I know it can sound like we are campaigning against abstractions as a whole, and so I am saying I do not think that is a correct point. Abstractions are tools - to take an emotional example they are like guns, and they can be used for great good / pleasure or great evil / pain.

Then there is the related issue of opinion and when opinion is true or false and when we should "wait." That is not quite the same issue but it is related, and that is where we need to make the point more clear that the more an opinion is "abstracted" away from the senses (including pain and pleasure) then the more likely it is that the opinion does not accurately reflect our reality and will lead to painful result.

So we come back to the analogy that abstractions are like "virtue" - they are tools of great power that are natural for us to use toward the natural end of pleasant living, but when considered to be ends in themselves they can lead to great error and more pain / less pleasure.

I am out of time to expand on that now but I will work on that because you are identifying a point that has lots of implications and we need to do better on it.

Post by "Cassius" of June 12, 2020 at 5:17 AM

"It's unappealing that it may be perceived as a selfish way to live life and act in the world. It worries me that the ethics won't comprise a care for the less fortunate and the downtrodden. Or that morality would be not relevant to it because of its ultra materialistic foundatwher"

Martin has addressed this well but I bet he and all of us think there is much more to say. The point he raised is I think one of the best. You identify concern for the downtrodden as a source of worry for you which means a source of pain to you. In Epicurean philosophy you must address that pain or you will not achieve the most pleasure / least pain that I'd possible to you. And Epicurus does not suggest suppressing or trying to "will" the pain to go away, as a Stoic might. So in that sense Epicurean philosophy is a stronger and more realistic way to understand why we are motivated to take social actions.

Unfortunately this is going to be one area where we just have to think for ourselves, read the text closely, and accept that we think that those who interpret Epicurus as a shirker / passivist / isolationist / etc are simply wrong in their interpretations of the philosophy. And that takes strength and courage to stand apart from the academic consensus.

As for the relevance of Epicurus being limited by its basis in materialism, that goes back to the discussion of abstractions above which I hope we are beginning to address. Being realistic about the atomic nature of the universe does not mean that we are at war with abstractions or feeling or emotions or mental aspects whatsoever.

I always think back to that line in ON ENDS where Torquatus explicitly says that Epicurus held that mental pain and pleasure are frequently more significant to us than "bodily" pains and pleasures. Since that is true, we must act to address sources of pain and pleasure in abstractions just as much (or more) as pleasures or pains that address our hands or feet or any

"bodily" part of us.

Post by “Don” of June 12, 2020 at 6:58 AM

Excellent questions and perspectives, [Mathitis Kipouros](#) ! Thank you very much for sharing and welcome to the forum. I read echoes of my own experiences in your post.

[Martin](#) and [Cassius](#) have done a good job in beginning to address some of your points. Let me add a few initial thoughts myself.

You mention:

Quote

It's unappealing that it may be perceived as a selfish way to live life and act in the world. It worries me that the ethics won't comprise a care for the less fortunate and the downtrodden. Or that morality would be not relevant to it because of its ultra materialistic foundation.

In thinking through this (and I've had similar thoughts), I sometimes refer to another tradition, to what I've read the current Dalai Lama calls "selfish altruism" which [has also begun to be studied by academic researchers](#) including [research studies in neuroscience](#). The Dalai Lama is quoted as saying:

Quote

Being wise selfish means taking a broader view and recognizing that our own long-term individual interest lies in the welfare of everyone. Being wise selfish means being compassionate.

Please don't misunderstand. I'm not trying to import Buddhism into Epicurean philosophy. I'm just trying to bring in a perspective on altruism or empathy that isn't recognized sometimes. As [Martin](#) said, we feel pain when we see the plight of others. However, I would say it's more fundamental and goes to how we make our choices and avoidances: if we treat others kindly and compassionately, we have a better chance of being treated kindly and compassionately in return. No guarantees, but more likely. Epicurus said that even friendship "is based on our needs... but it is maintained by a shared enjoyment of life's pleasures." Those who treat others kindly, who work for the downtrodden, do it because it brings them pleasure to help people. If people are unkind, cruel, or indifferent, they may experience momentary pleasure in feelings of superiority, etc., but, in the long run, may be hurting their own chances for future pleasures in

how people will interact with them.

Post by “Cassius” of June 12, 2020 at 8:36 AM

I agree with Don's post in every significant respect. Someone being a nit-picker, or just wanting to be very rigorous as to context, is going to ask about the "everyone" in the second quote, so I might as well address it to hopefully point out why I don't think it is as much of an issue as it may seem to some.

I think there are all sorts of issues involved in "everyone" which are beyond the scope of what we are talking about, with maybe the most obvious being that as we parse "everyone" we have to think about who that means and even whether they are living. The Jefferson quote "the earth belongs to the living" keeps coming to my mind lately, and I think that is one relevant factor, even though in proper contexts it is probably correct to consider those who are long dead, and those who are not yet even conceived. I am just making the point that we often get into in discussion utilitarianism, in that it is overbroad to conclude "greatest good for the greatest number" but it takes a lot of thought and reflection, not all of which is easy or comforting, to talk about the limits of the word.

An obvious example from the texts to include in such a discussion would be: "

39. The man who has best ordered the element of disquiet arising from external circumstances has made those things that he could akin to himself, and the rest at least not alien; but with all to which he could not do even this, he has refrained from mixing, and has expelled from his life all which it was of advantage to treat thus."

Those are complicated issues and probably beyond the scope of what we're really needing to discuss, or at least I think that it is pretty obvious that the real focus of what we're talking about is probably more the common questions about dealing with people in our own communities who don't, for whatever reason, conform to the norm of not physically harming the rest of us.

Post by “Cassius” of June 12, 2020 at 8:40 AM

This is such a good thread that at some point we may move part of it, or copy part of it, to a new thread with a title that will be more findable in the future, like "Dealing With Common Concerns For Someone New To Epicurus."

Post by "Cassius" of June 12, 2020 at 10:12 AM

Camotero I am currently editing episode 22 of the podcast, and I am hearing discussion that will raise this same question we are currently addressing as to how to assess abstractions. It's currently around the 10 minute mark after Martin starts reading, but that is going to change when I add the intro. It's a section in which Elayne makes a comment about abstractions being related to the discussion of some pursuits being "vain" and "futile," and that at least part of the issues with such things is that they are impossible to completely satisfy.

Listen especially for the statement "Nobility is an abstract concept and you're never going to have enough..."

Yes I think the issue of "insatiability" is definitely a part of why some choices in life are less preferable than others, and I would say that "nobility" is one of this, but I am not sure that we want to go so far as to imply that "all" abstractions have that problem, or that the issue arise purely because nobility is an abstraction. Elayne does not elaborate on that in the podcast, but I can understand how some people would think that is what is being said. Maybe in fact that is part of the truth, but I doubt it is the whole issue, and the issue needs a lot more clarity.

Even my summary here is not as accurate as it could be. I think there are issues involved not only with the issue of abstractions but with a lot of discussion of "vainness" and "futility," especially in what I see some other writers say about Epicurus. Personally I am not comfortable with a significant part of the analysis I see in other locations on the internet about how to analyze the issue of something being "vain" or "futile" and how that fits into the big Epicurean picture. All pleasure is pleasurable, but some choices are in sum going to bring more pain than pleasure. I doubt it makes sense to say that this question is answered completely by simply looking to see if the choice or activity involves an abstraction.

Feel free to talk more about this now, or wait til the podcast is released this weekend, or both, but it's an issue we do need to address more clearly.

Post by "Don" of June 13, 2020 at 2:44 PM

I got worried when I read [Cassius](#) 's first sentence here:

Quote

I agree with Don's post in every significant respect.

uh, oh! I was waiting for the "...but..." 😊 But it ends up, we agree. The only way "our own long-term individual interest lies in the welfare of **everyone**" is that we live in a society and "everyone" can *potentially* or *tangentially* have an impact on our own pursuit of happiness (eudaimonia). Primarily, we need to be concerned with those with whom we come in contact. Those with whom we interact. Those will have the most direct affect on us. I think [Cassius](#) is right in referring to Principal Doctrine 39. Here's another translation (excerpt):

Quote

Those of whom he cannot make friends, he should at least avoid rendering enemies; and if that is not in his power, he should, as much as possible, avoid all dealings with them, and keep them aloof, insofar as it is in his interest to do so.

Post by “Cassius” of June 13, 2020 at 4:32 PM

As another example, I regularly regret that the ancient Epicureans had to face the decline and fall of their civilization to Christianity, but I try to budget the time I spend on that to a minimum since unless I am able to build a time machine before I die, there is precious little I can do about it! 😊

Post by “Don” of June 13, 2020 at 5:12 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

As another example, I regularly regret that the ancient Epicureans had to face the decline and fall of their civilization to Christianity, but I try to budget the time I spend on that to a minimum since unless I am able to build a time machine before I die, there is precious little I can do about it! 😊

You can at least take pleasure in the thought experiment 😊 in going back and helping to save the Epicureans and bring back some original texts.

Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of June 14, 2020 at 2:14 AM

Please, as you read this post, bear in mind I'm playing a bit of devil's advocate as a way to help my understanding of the philosophy.

Quote from Martin

We feel empathy with the less fortunate and the downtrodden. If we did not care at all for them, we would feel pain. Helping some of them where we can with reasonable effort increases our pleasure.

Moreover, caring for the less fortunate and the downtrodden may make it less likely that our security and thereby pleasure is threatened by violent revolutions or crimes committed under the pretext of justice for the less fortunate and the downtrodden.

Yes. The hard part is being able to connect your lack of action with its **potential** consequences that far in the future. Is there anything said about immediate vs. long term pleasure?

Also, when you see a man begging for change in the street, old and tired, the pain you feel in your stomach and heart (which I think is a feeling inherent to us, and most animals; inherent as language is an *materially* inherent *faculty* of humans - as I understand from the little I've read/heard of Chomsky) will not go away if you give him change. Perhaps if you give him enough to stop begging for the day, or the week, you may feel a bit better; but perhaps you may even feel bad because you're taking the whole responsibility by yourself, to the detriment of your finances (assuming you decided to be his sponsor for the week). This opens two other ramifications:

1.- The problem is societal.

It becomes apparent that if you decide to address your pain, the solution is not to take it upon yourself to solve it by yourself. It is something that would be better solved as an organized society. This opens the possibility with more probability for a negative balance (a lot of work not necessarily aligned with what makes you flow, perhaps not that satisfactory in terms of the effectiveness of said work, time away from pleasurable things/experiences, political exposure, etc.) than a positive balance if you decide to solve it by yourself; so solving it as a group is the most pleasurable way for everybody; thus, involvement in state matters is something that could bring you more pleasure in the long run than not. What's the approach of Epicurean

philosophy to this problem?

2.- The most pleasureable solution is to ignore it.

The second time you ignore it you start to become numb to the situation. And then the problem persists, but you're less aware of it. And then, when somebody even brings it up, you're probably so jaded you not only ignore the person but perhaps even think of him as a fool.

I guess, one expectation of somebody new to Epicurean philosophy would be to find that it comprised an extrapolation of the immediate pain/pleasure morality to something that would make it easier to find a well stated argument in favor of investing yourself in the formation of a society conducive to increasing the pleasure of everybody in the long term.

[Quote from Martin](#)

The swerve is not evidence for the existence of free will but a precondition for the existence of free will in the sense of agency. In a materialistic universe, some kind of swerve is necessary to avoid determinism. Pursuing pleasure as the goal makes only sense if we have agency to deviate from a deterministic path.

Could you please elaborate on how the swerve is a precondition for the existence of free will? Sorry again if this is basic stuff, feel free to redirect me to a source if it is, or please just say so.

Thanks Martin.

Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of June 14, 2020 at 2:43 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

First, I do not think it would be correct to say that Epicurus would have considered some abstractions "good" and some "bad." Good and bad are themselves abstractions and the issue is not that some abstractions are good and bad; the issue is always ultimately (1) abstractions do not exist outside our minds and (2) ultimately it is always pleasure and pain that are of significance to us.

This is clarifying, thanks.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

So we come back to the analogy that abstractions are like "virtue" - they are tools of great power that are natural for us to use toward the natural end of pleasant living, but when considered to be ends in themselves they can lead to great error and more pain / less pleasure.

This is one of the main takeaways for me from listening to the podcast. Because the popular discourse doesn't address very well what the position of the Philosophy with respect to virtue is. I'm sure I'm not using the right words, but what I'm talking about is the need for virtue in order to be able to rely on pleasure/pain, and the uselessness of virtue without it. Echoes of the "disconnect" that Erich Fromm used to write about come to mind. And of course, ying/yang, right/left brain, and all the others we've heard about.

Taking this sidetrack a bit further... This *disconnect* is real, though. I'd bet that to the regular person, when you tell them to become aware of what they're feeling, to get out of their mind, the last thing that comes to their mind is to address what they can identify as pleasurable or painful. Even in guided meditation, where one of the main techniques is to become aware of the sensations in your body, making a value judgement about what feels painful or pleasurable is completely out of the question. This is radical stuff. And it's been squeezed out of us for years (our connection to pleasure/pain). Or at least it hasn't been addressed for development as the rational part of us has. So interesting...

Post by "Martin" of June 14, 2020 at 7:46 AM

Quote from Could you please elaborate on how the swerve is a precondition for the existence of free will?

In both Democritus' and Epicurus' universe, particles and void are all there is. The distribution and movements of particles determine our reality including our thoughts about it.

In the Democritean universe, the particles behave like hard bodies in classical mechanics. The present and future distribution and movements are determined by the distribution and movements in the distant past. Therefore, the history of the Democritean universe including our thoughts are predetermined. We may still enjoy our pleasures but do so as concerned voyeurs (like sophisticated jumping jacks who have feelings and are integrated in a moving clockwork), not as agents who invent and choose among options for their actions. Therefore, there is no free will in Democritus' universe.

In Epicurus' universe, a particle may deviate a bit from its mechanistically determined path. Therefore, the universe including our thoughts is no more completely predetermined by the past. Under this condition, free will may be possible.

In which species free will exists and how it arises is still a subject of ongoing research. The conclusions still appear to be speculative.

For the background, there are a number of difficulties with Epicurus' physics:

It is partially refuted, completely lacks the powerful mathematical modeling with which we are familiar and is rudimentary in comparison with what we learned with Galilei, Newton and many other physicists.

I see a strong enough analogy between Democritean physics and classical mechanics that I use classical mechanics for the Democritean universe. Others may see this as too farfetched.

As Epicurus' ethics are based on Epicurean physics, others may reject the whole philosophy because parts of the physics are refuted. I take the refuted parts as similar to refuted or abandoned scientific theories. These theories were stepping stones for the progress to recent science and do not refute the scientific method. Similarly, the refutation of parts of Epicurean physics does not refute the whole philosophy.

To formulate an Epicurean answer, I combine not refuted parts of Epicurean physics with modern science. Others may reject my approach as arbitrary, choose a different approach and come to different conclusions.

Sedley's article referenced by Cassius above is probably a good read for the topic.

I recommend

<https://aeon.co/essays/heres-w...8b6167-69491777>

although I do not fully agree with it. According to comments on a Facebook forum, it is quite tough for non-scientists though.

Post by “Cassius” of June 14, 2020 at 8:30 AM

Thanks for that AON article Martin as I don't think I have read that.

Post by “Don” of June 14, 2020 at 8:35 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1593-welcome-camotero/>

This is a very thought-provoking discussion. Thank you, [Mathitis Kipouros](#) , for raising these issues! And thank you, [Martin](#) , for the replies and link to that article. (My mind started to bend part way through so I plan to go back for another read. Saved it to my Pocket app.)

One thing that came to mind when reading [Mathitis Kipouros](#) 's posts was the Epicurean concept of the limits of Nature. I may not be interpreting this correctly, so feel free to critique this. As Epicureans, we have to respect the natural limits of our abilities. We can't solve the world's problems by ourselves. We can't necessarily rescue every homeless individual we meet on the street (to use [Mathitis Kipouros](#) 's example). If we feel pain all the time in contemplating the plight of that person, it doesn't do them or us any good, leads to our living miserable lives, and wastes this precious - and only - life that we have to live. This doesn't mean we ignore the pain we feel at others' plights. It means we look soberly at what we can reasonably do, what we feel we can accomplish, what we know our personal limits of effective action can be. For some, this may very well translate into devoting one's life to living among the poor and having direct action every day of our lives. For others, it may mean supporting a charity. For others, it may mean accepting that the problem is bigger than you can personally handle at this time and revisiting your options later. Dwelling on misery and human suffering will, in the end, make you miserable and make you suffer... Unless it doesn't and spurs you to action! In which case, you will feel pleasure in the energy and excitement you feel about working for a cause you believe in. If, on the other hand, it makes you feel overwhelmed and full of pain, figure out where that pain is coming from, make a choice of what you can handle to alleviate that pain - *at this moment in time* - take the action, and move along. We always reserve the ability to make further choices and rejections in the future. Our future is not determined by Fate. Our future is made by the choices we make in the present.

Post by “Cassius” of June 14, 2020 at 8:47 AM

I completely agree with Don's post with no buts. The "limits" issue is big - no matter how much of our time we devote to any particular goal there is a limit in what we "can" do, and if we blind ourselves to that reality then we'll never ultimately come to terms with reality, and I think that understanding the natural order is a precondition to taking successful steps to change any part of it that can be changed. There's a parallel here with death - no matter how much we struggle against it we and our friends will eventually die, and we have to come to an understanding of that and integrate our time limits into our choice of actions.

Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of June 15, 2020 at 11:29 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

39. The man who has best ordered the element of disquiet arising from external circumstances has made those things that he could akin to himself, and the rest at least not alien; but with all to which he could not do even this, he has refrained from mixing, and has expelled from his life all which it was of advantage to treat thus."

Thanks [Cassius](#)

First question: This is the 39th passage from what text? Are there any arguments related to it that could give a logical explanation of why this is the case?

I guess that what could bother me is if there would not be a logical path traced by the philosophy that could lead the most people to care about those who need help/guidance to get out of their dire situation, which I, somehow, and it could be my years of catholic indoctrination, believe is something that could be to the benefit/pleasure of most. I wish there were an argument in favor of this from within the philosophy. This is what [Don](#) addressed quoting something outside the philosophy.

But I do recognize that we need to be aware of the limits. I was reading the other day that "complete" communication can only happen when two people are physically together. The person talking about it, a scientist, specifically a philologist, quoted many studies that said this is empirically proven (that a message conveyed directly, looking at the other person, and their body language and gestures is more complete and better communication than just talking without being there or, I guess even worse, "texting").

So what I'm trying to say in this last paragraph is... I guess... that perhaps if all of us were aware of what's good for us, what's pleasureable and painful, we could see the pain being relieved, the pleasure being experienced, if we focused only on improving the dire situations of the people that our within our reach. So there's probably no point in starting a non profit to help the most people that you're probably never going to even meet (unless I'm going to get a lot of pleasure from the starting up of the organization, but this would be beside the point); if you don't get this pleasure, perhaps your efforts would be better spent trying to help those who are actually within your reach, if I come accross them (or seeking them if that brings you pleasure); and if you enjoyed communication, and had a pain brought to you from the awareness of the dire situation of many people, bringing this sort of arguments to the most people within our reach would be the most effective way of helping.

Is there anything said within the philosophy about spreading its message? Oh my... I didn't mean to get evangelical... it just happened. But having these arguments at hand as a reminder for yourself and in case you get in a conversation about it with a non epicurean would be very valuable.

Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of June 15, 2020 at 11:40 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

As another example, I regularly regret that the ancient Epicureans had to face the decline and fall of their civilization to Christianity, but I try to budget the time I spend on that to a minimum since unless I am able to build a time machine before I die, there is precious little I can do about it! 😊

I would love to get more into this, without having an opinion about it, and mostly out of curiosity, but I don't know if you guys would regard this thread as the place for that, or that the thread has already taken many ramifications and whether that is ideal for the organization of information in the forum. Anyhow, and a bit related to this... I discovered the discord today. I bumped into [Charles](#) there and we talked (or I guess I did, I don't know if he endorses what I'm saying) how that (discord) could be an environment prone for discussion of less organized ideas, and possibly to dispell the doubts of new students like myself.

Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of June 15, 2020 at 11:58 PM

[Quote from Martin](#)

Sedley's article referenced by Cassius above is probably a good read for the topic.

Yes I downloaded it for reading later. Thanks [Cassius](#)

Thanks for your perspective [Martin](#) - also, the aeon article was a great recommendation on the topic.

Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of June 16, 2020 at 12:02 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

As Epicureans, we have to respect the natural limits of our abilities. We can't solve the world's problems by ourselves.

Thanks for this post. The first time I skimmed by it but as I see it know it definitely was the basis for what I posted a few lines upstream, now that I had the time to come back and write a bit. I'd love your comments about it if possible [Don](#)

Post by “Don” of June 16, 2020 at 7:06 AM

Excellent posts! I've addressed some of your questions and statements below.

[Mathitis Kipouros](#) asked

First question: This is the 39th passage from what text? Are there any arguments related to it that could give a logical explanation of why this is the case?

This is the 39th Principle Doctrine as listed in Diogenes Laertius's 10th book of his Lives of Eminent Philosophers. That book is all about Epicurus and is one of the primary sources of Epicurus's works to survive from the ancient world. There are numerous translations online and the [Principal Doctrines](#) (Kuriai Doxai in Ancient Greek) are at the end of the book.

[Perseus Digital Library](#)

[Attalus' site](#)

[Epicurus Wiki](#)

[Mathitis Kipouros](#) said:

But I do recognize that we need to be aware of the limits. I was reading the other day that "complete" communication can only happen when two people are physically together.

This is actually a very interesting point and probably the reason there is the academic discipline of literary and textual criticism and interpretation. Without being able to see a person's body language, tone of voice, etc., there can be ambiguity even in the clearest writing even though sometimes it's all we have. Consider reading the Principle Doctrines as opposed to being in the Garden getting a lecture from Epicurus. Which would be the most "complete" way of receiving these teachings?

[Mathitis Kipouros](#) said:

So there's probably no point in starting a non profit to help the most people that

you're probably never going to even meet (unless I'm going to get a lot of pleasure from the starting up of the organization, but this would be beside the point)

On the contrary, I think that's exactly the point. If you're going to be fulfilled by the starting of such an organization and will find pleasure in the work, then (I believe) Epicureanism would have no argument against your starting it up. You should still have a realistic expectation of the limits on the organization. However, also consider Epicurus' warning about the inherent pains of getting involved in politics and such if the organisation will take on a lobbying function in the political arena.

[Mathitis Kipouros](#) said:

Is there anything said within the philosophy about spreading its message? Oh my... I didn't mean to get evangelical... it just happened.



Actually, Epicureans *were* an evangelical bunch and their "good news" spread throughout the ancient world. There's a great (albeit depressing) book about the downfall of the ancient pagan world, including the burning of Epicurean texts: [The Darkening Age: The Christian Destruction of the Classical World by Catherine Nixey](#).

Post by "Cassius" of June 16, 2020 at 8:55 AM

Camotero your last posts have given me a lot more information about "where you're coming from." You indicated above that you had found the forum through the Lucretius podcast and I presumed from that (for some reason) that you had read extensively in Epicurus.

Now that I see that you have not, I want to double back and reinforce the recommendation I always make about reading the Dewitt book as the best place to get a balanced view of the philosophy. When someone doesn't have a fairly broad background in the philosophy then my experience is 99 out of 100 times they have come across only a few points that hit them as good, but they haven't seen how it all fits together. Most other modern books and articles hit on these "feature points" but in my humble opinion don't give you the background you need to fill in the blanks, and worse than that, they produce the impression that the background is not important ever to know. The result is lots of people just move on to new and spicier writers without ever understanding why Epicurus said what he said or where he was going.

So if there is anything I would urge you to do while you are fresh and enthusiastic about Epicurus it is to read the Dewitt book. There will be parts with which you won't agree, and parts which you'll definitely find questionable, but DeWitt gives you pretty much the FULL picture of ALL the parts of the philosophy in one place, and I think that helps to put everything in a good perspective. You'll find lots of discussion about his book here from people who read it critically

too (like Don's posts) and I think in the end you will find that once you get past a couple of issues of interpretation, DeWitt's approach and conclusions are generally sound and well documented. Again the point is not that you should agree with him, but if you don't read something like Dewitt most people just won't have the time to pull things together on their own.

Given your background it is also possible that something in DeWitt that is a stumbling block to people like Don and me, you yourself might find attractive and interesting -- which is the comparison and relationship of Epicurus to early Christianity. If you're into that, you'll find DeWitt's "St Paul and Epicurus" very interesting as well.

Right now I am detecting that you are substantially committed to certain positions and you're looking to see to what extent Epicurus is consistent or helpful in that, and you're probably keeping an open mind but doubtful as to how much attention to devote if Epicurus' positions don't end up squaring with your views. That's perfectly fine and to be expected, and in the end I think Epicurus stands for following your feelings in the way you are going. But I do think the best approach is to get into the "whys" of Epicurus' views and THEN decide to what extent you agree with his conclusions. And there's no better introduction to that than DeWitt IMHO.

Post by "Cassius" of June 16, 2020 at 9:27 AM

Also Camotero as much as you are comfortable and think it would be helpful I would encourage you to give us more background about yourself and your reading so far and anything about the direction of your thought that would be helpful for us all to communicate more clearly. It particularly gives me food for thought to realize that you have been listening to the podcasts without knowing the background of the [principal doctrines](#). It's possible that I need to add to our introductions some more basic pointers about what is presumed to be understood, and what the listener should check out if they haven't already. I know we do stress the DeWitt book in the opening of the podcasts but it would be easy for us to include or at least reference where other preliminary material can be found.

Here on this page we have the [FAQ](#) and the [Core Texts](#) menu but I shouldn't presume those are easy to find.

Post by "Cassius" of June 16, 2020 at 9:29 AM

Also please don't interpret my comments on the DeWitt book as a "RTFM" response

😊 Feel free to go ahead and ask any and all questions you have even before and during your reading of that and other books. That's the purpose of the forum. The advice to read the book is more in the "you'll save yourself time" variety. If you just go ahead and ask questions first, that's fine, and it actually helps the forum 😊

Also please be sure to look through existing threads and subforums because as you ask particular questions it would be optimum if we "file" them in those locations so others can find them in the future, rather than having everything strung under this "Welcome" post.

Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of June 16, 2020 at 9:43 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Also please don't interpret my comments on the DeWitt book as a "RTFM" response

Haha, no, I didn't take it like that, but thanks for clarifying.

Thanks guys for that welcoming exchange. It was very fun. I'll see you around the forum.