

Tactical Question for the Group Re Terminology In Discussing Reason and Logic

Post by “Cassius” of January 19, 2021 at 10:30 AM

Here is something to which I would appreciate as wide and frank a response as possible. Don't be afraid to offend me or anyone else with your reply, just give me what comes to mind, regardless if others post first and there seems to be a trend. This is important for methods of presentation, and I'd like to get as wide reaction as possible. The question is:

What is your reaction to the statement:

"When making decisions, don't use logic and reason, use the Epicurean canon."

Is that a statement you are comfortable walking up to a friend, saying, and then stopping, with the idea that you have made your point? Whether yes or no, please give as much explanation of your answer as you would like.

ALL are welcome to reply, no matter when you read this, and in fact to some degree the less you have posted and the newest you are to the forum, the better.

Post by “Elayne” of January 19, 2021 at 10:59 AM

I would need to explain what the Canon is, but otherwise I have had this conversation multiple times, quite successfully, while teaching med students! I have said uh oh, the answer you just gave sounds reasonable/logical, but what does the evidence say? And they find out what they thought is not accurate. This is an every day thing with new students. I teach them that relying on reason instead of looking to see if there's evidence can have fatal consequences for their patients, and we have a whole discussion on the pitfalls of both formal and informal reasoning. I rarely have the same student mess up in that way twice, because I make such a big deal about it that they start checking themselves before talking to me ☹️.

So you could replace that with "logic and reasoning are prone to error, so instead, use observations/evidence to find out about reality." It's best if you can also give examples (evidence!☹️).

Post by “Godfrey” of January 19, 2021 at 3:38 PM

I would say to prioritize the Canon and to keep logic/reason subservient. Begin with observations, apply logic/reason as appropriate, check the conclusions with observations, rinse and repeat. I might need to clarify what the Canon is; I probably would say observations and feelings or be more specific depending on the situation.

Post by “Cassius” of January 19, 2021 at 3:42 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

I would say to prioritize the Canon and to keep logic/reason subservient.

In saying that, do you think that most of your friends with whom you might be discussing that would know what it means to "keep logic/reason subservient?" If they were to ask "what do you mean?" what would you say?

Post by “Charles” of January 19, 2021 at 3:48 PM

Crossposting from FB:

Generally my friends would agree with that, though theres often the sense of belonging to a higher power or trusting some baseline of reason for them. Most of them know of my preference and belonging with Epicurean Philosophy, and so I trust them to assume that its a matter of belief and epistemology.

Almost anyone can agree or thinks that using reason over emotion is preferable, and so when one says "don't use logic or reason" it could be squeamish or uncomfortable, and someone unfamiliar with the canon would be turned off. On the other hand, if someone did know about the canon, but was not Epicurean, there is a chance they could view the anticipations/preconceptions as a priori knowledge and thus is a form of logic and becomes a process of reasoning when feelings and sensory experience are brought in.

Post by “Godfrey” of January 19, 2021 at 5:35 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

In saying that, do you think that most of your friends with whom you might be discussing that would know what it means to "keep logic/reason subservient?" If they were to ask "what do you mean?" what would you say?

I would say to start and end with observations. Logic can help to evaluate observations, but for practical real world use logic must be verified through observations. Observations coming from the senses, feelings and pattern recognition.

Post by “Joshua” of January 19, 2021 at 8:46 PM

Quote

"When making decisions, don't use logic and reason, use the Epicurean canon."

Hmmm...☐☐

I'm experiencing some heavy resistance to this phrasing. Let me see if I can articulate a response.

I first take issue with what might be differing interpretations with the word *decision*. If the word *decision* means "*a conclusion or resolution reached after consideration*", and these decisions can either be—according to the prevailing view of psychology—*rational* or *irrational* (in the neutral connotation of that last word), then we're faced with a startling apposition! Am I suggesting to my friends that they only make irrational decisions? I hope not. I think we too easily forget how quickly reason encroaches even on the simplest and most absent-minded of choices.

Here's a decision I often make based on personal pleasure; "I think I'll get a coke."

And here's only *some* of the underlying architecture of that decision;

-Observation 1: "This place sells soft drinks in a range of choices."

-Observation 2: "My previous experience with soft drinks—and it is *extensive*—suggests to me that a soft drink will give me pleasure."

-Observation 3 (self evident): "pleasure is the end or goal of my life."

-Premise 1 (inductive reasoning): "If I get a coke it will probably give me pleasure this time, too."

-Decision/Conclusion: "I think I'll get a coke."

So that even if I were to restrict the question only to 'decisions about pleasure', or 'decisions about the proper end of life', I would still have problems with it. But how much more troubling when we move beyond these humble beginnings!

I have family members who hold to a position they call "Zetetic Astronomy". One of the conclusions of their astronomy is that the Earth is flat. We have very little to learn from *what* these people think, but there is a lot to be learned from *how* they think. The basis of Zeteticism is that the traditional Scientific Method is fundamentally flawed. Scientists begin by making hypotheses about their observations, which they then attempt to falsify. From the point of view of the Zeteticist, these scientists are merely introducing a prejudice or bias into their work when they hypothesize. "What they *ought* to be doing instead (this is me paraphrasing) is performing the observation with an unbiased mind, and trusting the results."

For example; "I don't observe a gravitational pull when I put two apples side by side. No evidence for gravity."

"When I pour water on a baseball, it runs off onto the ground. No evidence for spinning ball with water on it."

"When I ride a merry-go-round, I can feel movement and rotation. I don't normally feel that. No evidence for motion or rotation of Earth."

You get the gist. I've had wearying hours of such "arguments", and have no stomach for them any longer. This particular individual used to drive me to distraction by failing to meet one simple demand; articulate your argument in the form of a syllogism. He never agreed to do it. C'est la vie!

TL;DR—The point I'm laboring to make is that reason and logic impend rather quickly in any decision-making process. Epicurus was right to exclude them from the canon, but they become inescapable *fast*. No, that's not advice I would give to my friends.

Post by “Don” of January 19, 2021 at 9:19 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

"When making decisions, don't use logic and reason, use the Epicurean canon."

Thoughts off the top of my head:

- 1) Nobody outside a small circle knows what the "Epicurean canon" is. Avoid jargon.
- 2) Epicurus taught to use words that everyone agrees on the definition.
- 3) Use the word logic OR reason, not both.
- 4) I actually like [Elayne](#) 's use of "evidence." But...
- 5) [Joshua](#) brings up a VERY good example of misunderstood evidence. 🤔 How to correct that?
- 6) What is the intent of using the word "decision"? Do you actually mean that or are you asking people to live their life based on the canon? When you say "make decisions" it sounds like discrete individual instances. Is that what you mean? Or do you mean something more general?
- 7) How about these?:
 - When choosing a course of action, which choice gives you pleasure?
 - You can *think* a choice to death. Instead... What's there feeling you get from your choice? Is it positive? Good, *now* think about the ramifications. Is it negative? It's probably not the right choice.

Okay, so nothing seismic there, but that's my contribution off the cuff.

Post by “Don” of January 19, 2021 at 9:52 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

When choosing a course of action, which choice gives you pleasure?

I will admit I've actually done this in making life decisions, specifically career choices. And I think I've made the right decision. Reason has entered in and made need second guess, but I still think I made correct initial decisions then was able to reason out that it was correct for these additional reasons.

Post by “Elayne” of January 19, 2021 at 10:04 PM

On misunderstood evidence-- there is evidence [] that giving more accurate evidence to stubborn people does not change their mind. It makes them dig in their heels. If they are determined to believe nonsense, they'll do it, and logic doesn't work any better than evidence. I deal with this when it comes to immunizations. Appeal to feelings and values is actually more effective when folks are just hesitant.

Sometimes it's just a matter of finding the evidence which has emotional salience. For baby walkers, I noticed a long time ago that parents didn't react when I explained about injury risk. I might as well have said blah blah blah. They just figured they could prevent it. But when I mention other evidence, that walker use is associated with developmental delays, their eyes get big and they appear alarmed. They don't know how to prevent that, so it has emotional salience. Once I realized what worked (by observing), I was more successful in achieving behavior changes.

I completely agree on imagining the options and noting the feelings that arise. I do lay out the pains and pleasures, but not as an abstract thing-- I have feelings in the evaluation process. So it's primarily non-rational. I won't say irrational-- that has a bad rap. Irrational is against logic, but non-rational is just using other brain functions. It's evidence and feeling based, not like a math problem. And it's not completely non-rational, but reason is not the primary tool.

Post by “Joshua” of January 19, 2021 at 10:07 PM

Elayne I want to thank you in particular for correcting me on one point-'non-rational' is far preferable to 'irrational'!

Post by “Cassius” of January 20, 2021 at 8:35 AM

Before we leave this discussion, I am interested to know how someone could square a total rejection of the words reason and logic with the wording of [PD16](#). The Epicurus wiki says that Epicurus used the Greek word *logismos* for what is translated as *reason* here. How would someone who doesn't want to separate "practical logic/reason" from "formal logic/reason" respond to someone who asked that?

"Chance has little effect upon the wise man, for his greatest and highest interests are directed by *reason* throughout the course of life."

http://wiki.epicurism.info/Principal_Doctrine_16/



Post by "Don" of January 20, 2021 at 9:13 AM

Here's the LSJ entry for λογισμός (logismos) <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...entry=logismo/s>

As you'll see, it references PD 16 specifically (Epicur. Sent. 16) as "reasoning power." This does not refer to "formal" logic. Here's an article about Aristotle's formal logic:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-logic/>

The word most often used there is sullogismos συλλογισμός

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...ry=sullogismo/s>

This has more to do with calculation, computation.

Post by "Cassius" of January 20, 2021 at 9:17 AM

Looks like sullogismos and dialekticos (sp?) are going to be two of the primary culprits.

I am beginning to think that those two are best described to "laymen" as "formal logic" and "the Socratic question-answer method."

Such as "Epicurus opposed the use of formal logica and the Socratic question-answer method of teaching."

Post by "Don" of January 20, 2021 at 9:32 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1845-tactical-question-for-the-group-re-terminology-in-discussing-reason-and-logic/>

Hmmm...

Logismos appears to be just the mental faculty to "reason" things out in everyday life. I think of it as the decision-making ability of the mind. Logismos would be the colloquial name of the ability people use when someone has made a "reasonable" decision. I **think** it would equate to your "everyday" understanding of the word "logic" you've been using, [Cassius](#) .

I would concur with your last two paragraphs. I think Epicurus would include formal logic within the paideia (enculturation; instruction; indoctrination) he criticised, ex. "Set sail in your own little boat, free from all paideia."

Post by "Cassius" of January 20, 2021 at 9:40 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

colloquial

That's an important word in this discussion too.

[Quote from Don](#)

. I think Epicurus would include formal logic within the paideia (enculturation; instruction; indoctrination) he criticised, ex. "Set sail in your own little boat, free from all paideia."

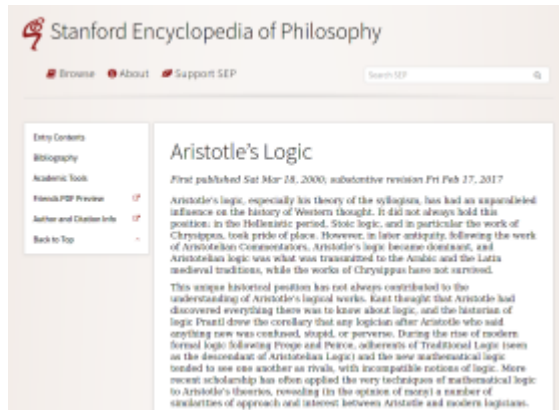
And yes that is also a saying that cries out for explanation. Epicurus was certainly not against ALL culture/instruction, it was only certain kinds to which he objected, because he had a "correct" version of his own.

To allow the suggestion to stand that Epicurus was against ALL such things is to guarantee that there's no way to resurrect the philosophy as an active force today.

Post by "Cassius" of January 20, 2021 at 9:43 AM

This is going to be a hugely useful article -- thanks again!

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-logic/>



Post by “Don” of January 20, 2021 at 9:45 AM

Agreed.

I see him against the enculturation or education of the assembly-line variety that obscures one's ability to learn from nature and observation. But I may be fantasizing.

Post by “Cassius” of January 20, 2021 at 10:22 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

But I may be fantasizing.

No I don't think so. 😊

Relevant to this discussion to is this below. I don't know that I agree with this division, but I do think that a division exists that needs to be articulated

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1845-tactical-question-for-the-group-re-terminology-in-discussing-reason-and-logic/>

THE CANON, REASON AND NATURE

It remains to examine the Epicurean standard of the value of reason even in dealing with things beyond the range of sensation, whether the nature of too remote for observation. To discuss the nature of ideas to show various phenomena he raised a familiar need to the rank of a methodical view, opinion, which by itself the words "secondary" or "tertiary" ideas. This is the case in the following proposition: "For all manner of things (opinion) are derived from the sensation by way of combination, analogy, similarity and combination, reason the something something." If while this grading concerns so reason should be used, it is identical also the procedure which singles comparison and analogy were in Epicurus an inferior kind of reason. By analogy, for example, it should even possible to have a heap of atoms, about we have heaps of dust, but a superior reason increases and remains as the atoms are combined with motion. Consequently, a heap of atoms is incommensurable. This superior reason employs the method of inference from the Twelve Elementary Principles. The procedure is deductive; **deduction is the only method.**

THE BASIS of reason are then recognized: first, a dependable kind that proceeds by deduction from first principles; second, an inferior kind that proceeds by analogy from the visible to the invisible and is subject to correction by the former; third, ordinary human intelligence (guessing, which is normally accurate and lower/visible and is subject to correction by the rational intelligence).

CRITICISM OF THE PROCEDURE OF REASON IN THIS CONNECTION IN THE HUMAN MIND, all are located in the mind. Outside of the human mind there is no reason in the universe, no world-mind which expresses itself in external ideas, regularities of motion, harmonic relationships, and spiritual perfection and is identifiable with truth itself.

It will remain to glance at the period in which Epicurus involves himself by employing reason in ordinary reason as the chief criterion. He places himself in a position similar to that of the skeptic who doubts the possibility of acquiring in knowledge, thus depriving his own skepticism of meaning.

This procedure, however, does not stand alone. It is the paradoxical that Epicurus should have assumed reason from his Canon and at the same time accept a great body of truth as established by the reasoning of philosophers and as their basis among his Twelve Elementary Principles of Physics. From this inconsistency he thought to escape by

Post by "Don" of January 20, 2021 at 10:47 AM

Okay, more it would be interesting if we could find a comparison between dianoia and logismos.

As a start, here's dianoia from LSJ:

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...3Ddia%2Fnoia%5E>

Post by "Cassius" of January 20, 2021 at 11:14 AM

One interesting aspect of this is that if I read DeWitt correctly, he is saying that Epicurus put the strongest indicia of reliability on "deduction from first principles." And he is saying that analogy from the visible (observation?) to the invisible, and ordinary human intelligence, are less reliable.

So is DeWitt not saying that the most reliable kind of reasoning is deduction based on "first principles" which would be from something like "nothing comes from nothing?"

It is very difficult for me not to see that (deduction from a first principle) as not being well described in modern colloquial terminology with words like logic and reason.

That's why I think it's necessary to have a presentation to new students of Epicurus that would help them distinguish between acceptable forms of logic and reason and unacceptable forms.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1845-tactical-question-for-the-group-re-terminology-in-discussing-reason-and-logic/>

Post by “Elayne” of January 20, 2021 at 4:45 PM

"Nothing comes from nothing" is not a first principle, or if it was thought to be, that's an error. It's an observation, which may or may not be correct.

A better example of a first principle would be "there is a reality which can be perceived."

Post by “Don” of January 20, 2021 at 5:03 PM

I think you're going to have to look at Dewitt and see what he's referring to with "first principles". Does he mean like "axioms"? <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Axiom>

Post by “Joshua” of January 20, 2021 at 5:12 PM

I continue to hold the view that Epicurus' approach to logic is inseparable from the intellectual climate in which he lived and worked. I've cited Stephen Spielberg's film "Lincoln" to this effect here before, and it's a perfect example of what I mean;

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=uZjllMeKlJY>

What Lincoln is proposing here (as memorably acted by Daniel Day-Lewis, and brilliantly scripted by Tony Kushner) is that moral laws of justice and equality can be derived from the logic of geometry. What's so striking about this scene is that it so perfectly mimics Platonism and Pythagoreanism and their geometric foundations. Lincoln is making a worthwhile and commendable moral stand, but his reasoning is faulty. There's nothing in geometry that *can* actually answer, with any kind of logical finality, these moral questions. In spite of the worthiness of the cause, it amounts to an abuse of reason.

This is not, in my view, to be understood as a carte-blanche dismissal of logic and reason.

Post by “Elayne” of January 20, 2021 at 5:17 PM

Yes, a first principle is an axiom. It's something you start with that you can't prove, nor is it logic based. An assumption that other parts of your model use but can't prove. It's not the same as a fact, because by its nature it actually can't be shown to be accurate. If it ever IS shown to be accurate by some kind of evidence, then it is no longer a first principle.

If your first principles are wrong, then anything derived from them is wrong.

However, a first principle that there exists an observable reality can't lead to other reliable conclusions without evidence... because choosing that as a first principle means observations are required for other conclusions.

Post by “Cassius” of January 20, 2021 at 5:50 PM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

"Nothing comes from nothing" is not a first principle, or if it was thought to be, that's an error. It's an observation, which may or may not be correct.

This is certainly a key question we need to clarify.

Was DeWitt holding "nothing from nothing" to be a first principle?

Was Epicurus holding something like "nothing from nothing" to be a first principle?

How does this relate to the Twelve Fundamentals of Nature?
<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/wcf/index.php?...tals-of-nature/>

Post by “Cassius” of January 20, 2021 at 5:59 PM

We don't want to turn this into a debate on DeWitt's reliability, because I think that what he's saying here is probably agreed with by the commentators - this isn't (to my understanding) an area of controversy.

So to repeat, we need to figure out if Epicurus did indeed consider these principles of physics to be the equivalent of axioms which are to be considered the ultimate building blocks of the philosophy. I will go ahead and say that that is indeed the way I view the Epicurus' take on this

subject. These principles of the nature of things are ultimately something that can be converted into the methods by which the universe is concluded to be natural and not supernatural, so I see room for latitude in updating them. But I think Epicurus considered them to be so well established as to be "certain" and that reasoning based on them would be among the most certain of truths that we can be confident of.

That's the way I treat them and to the extent that we part of what we have to do is to report what it is that Epicurus held, I would think this is a central part of the philosophy.

IN THE Epicurean scheme of knowledge the Physics takes precedence over the Ethics because it furnishes the major premises from which the nature of the soul is deduced and the proper conduct of life is formulated. The Sensations, Anticipations, and Feelings, that is, the Canon, are not represented as furnishing the content of knowledge but as being instruments of precision by which the certainty of knowledge is tested at all times.

The topic of physics was given encyclopedic treatment in the famous thirty-seven books entitled *On Nature*, which Lucretius rendered *De Rerum Natura*, "On the Nature of Things." By implication this title signified "the true nature of things," because Epicurus styled his system "genuine physiology," plainly indicating that all other systems were false.¹ Consistently with this assumption Lucretius incessantly employed the phrase *vera ratio*, "true reason." Similarly Lucian speaks of "the truth and the philosophy that is invariably right,"² referring to Epicureanism, and his friend Celsus published his slashing attack upon Christianity under the caption *alethes logos*, which is usually rendered "true account," but its equivalence to the Epicurean "true philosophy" ought to be manifest. It implies that Christianity is a body of false doctrine.

For the use of younger pupils the contents of these thirty-seven books on physics were subsequently reduced to a single roll. This bore a title which means "the twelve simplifications" or "the twelve principles reduced to elementary form."³ A single mention of this has survived, but the twelve principles themselves may be readily assembled from the first two books of Lucretius and the extant Little Epitome addressed to Herodotus. These two accounts are in essential agreement in respect of both content and arrangement. The chief difference is that the Little Epitome omits mention of the doctrine of the swerve of the atoms, manifestly for the reason that in the judgment of Epicurus this principle was a topic more suitable for the advanced student.

Twelve Elementary Principles. The greater interest attaches to this lost work because its importance has been overlooked down to the present time; the very title of it suggests a more orderly and coherent statement of the principles of physics than is elsewhere known to us from classical antiquity. It calls attention to the talents of Epicurus as a teacher and an organizer of knowledge and ought to be somewhat disconcerting to those who dismiss him as a muddled thinker. It also deserves attention from those who call him an empiricist, because these principles are treated as major premises from which the rest of knowledge is derived by deductive reasoning.

Before listing these Twelve Principles it will be well to recall that Epicurus was averse to the use of technical terminology and declared clearness the sole requisite of style. As a substitute for technical terms he resorted often to the use of synonyms and paraphrases as a means of attaining the desired clearness. To illustrate, in the foreword to the *Little Epitome*, as a preparation for the tabulation of the Twelve Principles he refers to them in seven different ways: the most comprehensive doctrines; the outline of the whole system; the panoramic view; the most commanding view over the universe of things; the most general outlines; truths condensed to elements and succinct statements; the condensed view of the integrated survey of the whole.

THE TWELVE ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES

The arrangement of the principles is orderly and easily discerned. The first six tell us what can be predicated of the universe, the next four deal with motion, and the rest with the qualities of matter, whether in the form of atoms or compounds of atoms. It is worthy of notice that space is called void as something self-existent and that time is not mentioned; discussion of the latter is found later as a rider to the third principle. In the ensuing list the items have been simplified in the direction of modern terminology:

1. Matter is uncreatable.
2. Matter is indestructible.
3. The universe consists of solid bodies and void.
4. Solid bodies are either compounds or simple.
5. The multitude of atoms is infinite.
6. The void is infinite in extent.

8. The speed of atomic motion is uniform.
9. Motion is linear in space, vibratory in compounds.
10. Atoms are capable of swerving slightly at any point in space or time.
11. Atoms are characterized by three qualities, weight, shape and size.
12. The number of the different shapes is not infinite, merely innumerable.

The first two principles deal with the indestructibility and uncreatability of matter. If the question be raised how the truth of these propositions is established, the answer is by deduction. It must be observed that Epicurus makes no show of his logical procedures and, like the layman, employs the enthymeme or elliptical syllogism. Nevertheless, if his omissions be discerned and then supplied, the procedure is as follows. The purpose is to demonstrate the uncreatability of matter. Let it then be assumed for the purpose of the argument that the reverse is true: Matter is creatable. This assumption becomes the major premise and the method becomes deductive. The deductions would be that there would be no need of seeds of plants, no limits of size, no geographical distribution, no part for the seasons to play, and no necessity for fish to be born in the sea nor animals on the land.⁴ These inferences are all contrary to observed phenomena. Therefore, the assumption is false and the contrary must be true: Matter is uncreatable.

Again, let us assume that matter is destructible and that material things can be reduced to nothingness. Why, then, should they not vanish before our eyes instead of weakening and declining and decaying as we actually see them do? Again, whence would come the substance of the fruits that the earth produces, the waters that feed the springs and the rivers, or the fuel that feeds the stars? To such questions the only true answer can be that the death of one thing is the birth of another. The turnover of material is perpetual in nature. Otherwise all things in the long lapse of time would have passed into nothingness.⁵ It then follows, as in the previous instance, that the assumption of the major premise is false. Therefore the contrary is true: Matter is indestructible. It is not to the point to inquire here whether this logical method is sound in this particular application. The point is that the method should be recognized as deductive, not inductive.

Post by “Cassius” of January 20, 2021 at 6:00 PM

This is turning into an interesting thread indeed!

Post by “Cassius” of January 20, 2021 at 6:17 PM

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

What Lincoln is proposing here (as memorably acted by Daniel Day-Lewis, and brilliantly scripted by Tony Kushner) is that moral laws of justice and equality can be derived from the logic of geometry. What's so striking about this scene is that it so perfectly mimics Platonism and Pythagoreanism and their geometric foundations. Lincoln is making a worthwhile and commendable moral stand, but his reasoning is faulty. There's nothing in geometry that can actually answer, with any kind of logical finality, these moral questions. In spite of the worthiness of the cause, it amounts to an abuse of reason.

Joshua the way I would say that slightly differently is that Lincoln's argument shows how important it is to trace back one's reasoning to determine what the "first principles" are. Lincoln's first principle here is erroneous - he is explicitly citing Euclidian / Platonic universals. Even though it leads him in this case to a conclusion with which we agree. However because the first principle is wrong, his reasoning on other issues could go into other "absolutist" directions with which we would disagree.

I think this is why Epicurus was so concerned to establish confidence in an explicit and firm set of "first principles" (such as nothing comes or goes to nothing) and that he did in fact consider his principles of physics to be just such starting points for all other reasoning (specifically including ethics), as DeWitt is suggesting.

I remember the different perspectives that some of us had on this surfacing in the discussion of some of the recent "Reverence and Awe" issues. My view is that anyone who suggested that communicating with gods could be a part of Epicurean philosophy would forever be barred from successfully arguing that due to PD1, which serves as such an axiom or first principle. My view is that PD1 should be considered as forever ruling out such an approach in an Epicurean Philosophy context. Not everyone agreed that that line of reasoning would suffice as an absolute bar.

My thinking on that hasn't changed -- Epicurus intended (in my view) that the basic principles such as the 12 Principles of Nature and to a lesser extent (because they are more loose, such as at the end) be considered bedrock principles that serve that purpose of anchoring the philosophy in something firm, and that absent that anchor the philosophy would be just another

person's set of assertions and entitled to no more deference. Identifying a set of bedrock principles anchors them in Nature rather than in Epicurus' personal preferences.

Post by “Cassius” of January 20, 2021 at 6:27 PM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

Yes, a first principle is an axiom. It's something you start with that you can't prove, nor is it logic based. An assumption that other parts of your model use but can't prove. It's not the same as a fact, because by its nature it actually can't be shown to be accurate. If it ever IS shown to be accurate by some kind of evidence, then it is no longer a first principle.

If your first principles are wrong, then anything derived from them is wrong.

However, a first principle that there exists an observable reality can't lead to other reliable conclusions without evidence... because choosing that as a first principle means observations are required for other conclusions.

When I made my posts above I had not really focused on this one from Elayne. I do not read DeWitt as following this "unprovable" perspective on "First Principles." I think both DeWitt and Epicurus were explicitly considering their principles to be proven by observation, from which point they THEN were treated as the confirmed foundation on which the rest were based.

This may be another situation where a word ("first principle" or even "axiom") is being used more loosely than it might be in formal logic, but it does seem to me that the "proven" version of a first principle is the way that DeWitt and Epicurus were looking at things, and that's the way that makes the most sense to me too. To say that your first principle is unprovable (let's assume an imaginary line with only length but no width) immediately rules it out of my mind as a candidate for being a first principle.

Post by “Elayne” of January 20, 2021 at 10:37 PM

Well, I was using the standard meaning of "first principles"... I don't see DeWitt even using that term. Anything but an axiom, an unprovable first principle in the way that term is used by everyone I've ever heard use it, would be subject to revision and falsification from

observations--- IF we agree that observations are how we know about reality.

Otherwise, the philosophy is left in the dust by new observations and cannot adjust. It is a disastrous mistake to cling to a conclusion as if it must remain inviolable. And there is no reason that the rest of the philosophy falls apart just because some of these statements are not necessarily accurate. It's just not true. The philosophy is far more sturdy than you've made it out to be, [Cassius](#) ! Reality is an excellent and sufficient testimony to EP.

Post by “Elayne” of January 20, 2021 at 10:50 PM

On the conservation of matter, I am bothered by the notion that this can be purely derived from deduction. It actually had to be observed before it was accepted-- it had to be tested. So the logic generated a hypothesis-- a known use of logic. And even then, it was not exactly correct! It needed to be modified as matter-energy. And if some other observations later require adjustments to that model, then that's what will be done.

It's important to note that even though Epicurus wasn't exactly right, there is still no supernatural realm! So the philosophy did not fall apart just because conclusions were updated.

I think it's inaccurate to stretch what Epicurus said to include energy. That is not the way he described matter. It is certainly amazing that he had so many ideas that fed into ongoing physics! And it's also the case that his conclusions have required adjustments over time, in response to observations.

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservation_of_mass

Post by “Cassius” of January 21, 2021 at 3:18 AM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

I think it's inaccurate to stretch what Epicurus said to include energy.

I would say that just as the essence of atoms is that they are uncuttable, the essence of "matter" is that it can be measured through the senses, in this case through the use of technology that extends the senses to areas that the unaided senses are not able to go on their own. I don't think that Epicurus would rule that the hearing of someone who requires a hearing

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1845-tactical-question-for-the-group-re-terminology-in-discussing-reason-and-logic/>

aid is not hearing, or that vision through an electron microscope or other detector device is not the equivalent of seeing.

Those extensions of the senses allow us to better describe the phenomena but would be fully compatible with Epicurus' first principles of nothing from nothing and nothing to nothing and the like.

If not for having confidence in some specific set of conclusions about the universe - and claiming that these are knowledge, then where is one's starting point other than "this is what I feel pleasure and pain about?" Would we suggest that pleasure and pain are the foundation for the position that there is no supernatural god or life after death?

Post by “Cassius” of January 21, 2021 at 3:59 AM

This is admittedly not a perfect analogy, but I continue to see parallels between Elayne's point of view and Frances Wright -- and I just realized another - A Few Days In Athens is, if I recall correctly, almost totally devoid of argumentation based on physics.

Compare also from Chapter 14:

"In the schools you have hitherto frequented," she continued, addressing the youth, "certain images of virtue, vice, truth, knowledge, are presented to the imagination, and these abstract qualities, or we may call them, figurative beings, are made at once the objects of speculation and adoration. A law is laid down, and the feelings and opinions of men are predicated upon it; a theory is built, and all animate and inanimate nature is made to speak in its support; an hypothesis is advanced, and all the mysteries of nature are treated as explained. You have heard of, and studied various systems of philosophy; but real philosophy is opposed to all systems. Her whole business is observation; and the results of that observation constitute all her knowledge. She receives no truths, until she has tested them by experience; she advances no opinions, unsupported by the testimony of facts; she acknowledges no virtue, but that involved in beneficial actions; no vice, but that involved in actions hurtful to ourselves or to others. Above all, she advances no dogmas, — is slow to assert what is, — and calls nothing impossible. The science of philosophy is simply a science of observation, both as regards the world without us, and the world within; and, to advance in it, are requisite only sound senses, well developed and exercised faculties, and a mind free of prejudice. The objects she has in view, as regards the external world, are, first, to see things as they are, and secondly, to examine their structure, to ascertain their properties, and to observe their relations one to the other. — As respects the world within, or the philosophy of mind, she has in view, first, to examine our sensations, or the impressions of external things on our senses; which operation involves, and is involved in, the examination of those external things themselves: secondly, to

trace back to our sensations, the first development of all our faculties; and again, from these sensations, and the exercise of our different faculties as developed by them, to trace the gradual formation of our moral feelings, and of all our other emotions: thirdly, to analyze all these our sensations, thoughts, and emotions, — that is, to examine the qualities of our own internal, sentient matter, with the same, and yet more, closeness of scrutiny, than we have applied to the examination of the matter that is without us finally, to investigate the justness of our moral feelings, and to weigh the merit and demerit of human actions; which is, in other words, to judge of their tendency to produce good or evil, — to excite pleasurable or painful feelings in ourselves or others. You will observe, therefore, that, both as regards the philosophy of physics, and the philosophy of mind, all is simply a process of investigation. It is a journey of discovery, in which, in the one case, we commission our senses to examine the qualities of that matter, which is around us, and, in the other, endeavor, by attention to the varieties of our consciousness, to gain a knowledge of those qualities of matter which constitute our susceptibilities of thought and feeling.”

Post by “Cassius” of January 21, 2021 at 4:20 AM

Quote

Above all, she advances no dogmas, — is slow to assert what is, — and calls nothing impossible.

It would be interesting to discuss whether this statement can be squared with Epicurus' views on "dogmatism" and such Lucretian terminology as Epicurus coming back from his survey of the universe to tell us "what can be, and what cannot," and "the borderline, the benchmark, set forever" in the opening of Book One, not to mention the reference in Book 4 to the man who says he knows nothing as being perverse or a trifler.

Post by “Elayne” of January 21, 2021 at 8:59 AM

[Cassius](#) extending the senses is entirely different from realizing that matter can be transformed into energy. There is also not really any known void in the way Epicurus described it, because of energy fields. When it comes to energy, if you want to make it the same as what Epicurus said, you've either got to classify it as matter OR as void -- it can't work as both in his model. If you want to include it in matter, then you need to admit he was wrong on void. If you include it

in void, then there is something from nothing. Moreover, the Big Bang models that say the "something" that everything started from did not take up any space and that time didn't exist-- this is dramatically different from Epicurus' idea of "something". It's really not possible to stretch his descriptions to fit something so different.

His model no longer works as described, even though it is a clear precursor, and a brilliant one. I feel pretty confident that if he were here today, he would tell you the current description of reality built on what he thought but is also substantially different.

All that is necessary for the pain and pleasure understanding, pleasure as a goal, is observations of one's self and others. Neurobiology is sufficient. That wouldn't change even if there were meddling gods-- in that case, we would still be trying to gain pleasure, lol.

But what is necessary for _accurate_ choices for pleasure is an accurate understanding of reality, and since that does not include meddling gods or an afterlife, we make our choices with that knowledge. None of the modern physics theories include meddling gods or supernatural realms. That is sufficient to be confident we don't need to include such issues in our life planning.

Post by "Cassius" of January 21, 2021 at 9:20 AM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

When it comes to energy, if you want to make it the same as what Epicurus said, you've either got to classify it as matter OR as void -- it can't work as both in his model.
I

In his model I presume that energy would be classified as material

[Quote from Elayne](#)

All that is necessary for the pain and pleasure understanding, pleasure as a goal, is observations of one's self and others.

I agree that that is all that is necessary for some people to be comfortable with the conclusion. Simply pointing to it and observing, as Epicurus said. But not everyone understands the point, and I would say that that is why we have philosophy to help them understand it. Simply pointing has not been sufficient, especially given the corruption of other philosophies and training, so more is required for many people.

[Quote from Elayne](#)

None of the modern physics theories include meddling gods or supernatural realms.

Isn't that the equivalent of saying: "There are no gods because the physics theorists tell me so?" That would be hearsay evidence in court, and admissible only under expert testimony rules, for which there would be conflicting testimony from creationist scientists. Even if you dismiss the creation scientists as inadmissible, you're still left with your conclusion that there is no gods resting on belief in the credibility of the physicists. I interpret Epicurus is saying that the question of this (and life after death) is so personal, and so important, that people seeking happiness through philosophy need a personal method of understanding the point which is not based on hearsay but on observations they can make for themselves. Yes this turns into what is effectively an inference about the unknown based on the known, but that is what Philodemus "On Methods of Inference" (which cites other and older Epicurean philosophers and seems in no way heretical from Epicurus) was doing. A lot of people who here that everything must be based on current observation, and that there is no reasonable way to reason from current observation to a principle that explains why it is reasonable not to expect to ever find proof of a god or life after death, are going to find something that is effectively "you can never be certain because new evidence of god or life after death may be uncovered tomorrow" to be insufficient."

For those who are satisfied with a view that observations can never be translated into principles, then that position is good enough. However I don't think that's what Epicurus thought, or what he taught. It seems to me that to simply take the ethics as a starting point would remove much of the force of the philosophy.

So the question I see is more likely something like:

If Epicurus were here today would he update his physics and still incorporate the updated conclusions into a philosophical system?"

Or would he say something like: "I see what you're saying Frances, and I see what you're saying modern physicists. My conclusions about matter and void and infinity and eternity have all been proven wrong. I am through with system-building and use of logic to deduce the unknown from the known is off the table! Let's just point to animals and babies and say "Pleasure is the good" and that's all we need to know."

Post by "Cassius" of January 21, 2021 at 9:34 AM

Matt posted a comment about something from nothing that deserves its own thread. [Something From Nothing](#)

However it also applies here too, so here's what he said:



This is an example of the type of rule that we're discussing in this thread, but to keep this one on track, please go over to the other thread to discuss the details of the logical argument in general and/or Parmenides in particular.

This thread is more on the issue of systems / logical deductions / methods of inference IN GENERAL, of which something from nothing is a particular example, but only one of many.

Post by “Elayne” of January 21, 2021 at 1:28 PM

Wow, you are making a lot of straw man arguments [Cassius](#) . Conclusions about absence of gods can't be accurately made from logic. I would have insufficient confidence in a logic based conclusion. That would make me nervous.

I put my confidence in my first-hand observations of nature, and in the complete absence of evidence for supernatural gods. And whenever more detailed evidence is obtained, at the level too small or too far away to investigate without instruments, never has any researcher found any observations a god was needed to explain. They haven't included gods in their models because none are necessary. So I am saying that new observations which invalidate old models have not challenged the conclusions about absence of supernatural gods. At every level, from the simple to the complex-- no supernatural shows up.

You seem to want explanations which appeal to those with less education or intelligence, whether those explanations are correct or not. But a sturdy philosophy should not repel scientists who note inaccuracies or cling to conclusions that could result in less educated people feeling threatened by published reports about new observations. The philosophy must have integrity, so that the simple explanations are not saying inaccurate things. It is possible to state this material in simple ways without stating it inaccurately. In order to maintain structural integrity and be an ongoing source of reassurance, a philosophy has to occasionally adjust some of its statements about reality in response to new observations.

Post by “Elayne” of January 21, 2021 at 1:41 PM

So, if you are going to include energy fields with matter, then there is no documented void in the way Epicurus described it. Objects are not really made of particles and void, because matter is not the hard body thing he described. Unless I've understood incorrectly, even astronomical voids are thought to contain dark energy. That means there is maybe no pure "nothing" and the statement nothing comes from nothing is just nonsense anyway, talking about an abstract idea which doesn't exist.

I don't see how you can escape the necessity of revising some of his conclusions unless you just dig your heels in and refuse to accept any modern observations.

Post by “Cassius” of January 21, 2021 at 3:36 PM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

Conclusions about absence of gods can't be accurately made from logic.

I agree with that, although I believe it should be stated as ".....cannot be accurately made from logic alone." I think that would be one reason why the Epicureans considered "anticipations" to be a kind of innate evidence which provides an evidentiary starting point for evaluation of the subject, so that the entire subject would not be grounded in abstract logic and speculation

[Quote from Elayne](#)

I put my confidence in my first-hand observations of nature, and in the complete absence of evidence for supernatural gods.

I think the part where we are not connecting is here. I agree that the root of the issue is first-hand observation, but I think Epicurus held that it is proper to infer conclusions from first-hand observation which we then treat as established principles and expect to be valid even in places where we have not seen any evidence (such as beyond reach of telescopes). Such a principle would be "the universe has no supernatural gods over it," or "nothing comes from or goes to nothing" treated not just as a sum of prior observations but as an established principle that can then be dealt with on an intellectual level as principles considered "proven" rather than in a category with those things which await further confirmation. That text reference to "awaiting further confirmation" I see as another indication that Epicurus held that observations must be converted to principles (to the category of "confirmed; no longer awaiting confirmation"), and

those conclusions would then be a large part of the outlines he referenced in the opening of the letter to Herodotus to be used in daily processing of information.

[Quote from Elayne](#)

And whenever more detailed evidence is obtained, at the level too small or too far away to investigate without instruments, never has any researcher found any observations a god was needed to explain

Agreed, but as per the above, the conclusion that Epicurus reached from this observation was to place it in the category of knowledge which is not waiting further confirmation. We can call that category "first principles" or something else, but the category would be considered as established to the point of a fundamental of nature, not just "the sum of past observations."

[Quote from Elayne](#)

You seem to want explanations which appeal to those with less education or intelligence, whether those explanations are correct or not.

Well in response to this I will simply say that we still are not joining the issue other than that you seem to be considering words like "logic" and "reason" as in tension with having an open mind to incorporate future observations. I see this as the point being made by Epicurus when stating then wise men should be "dogmatists" and "not mere skeptics" and also as the point made by Lucretius in considering the man who asserts that he knows nothing to be perverse or trifling or Lucian saying that an Epicurus would consider the deceit of Aristotle the Oracle Monger as a fraud, even though he did not know the precise way the fraud was being committed. We could also list here the statement by Lucretius that it would in fact be better to affirm an incorrect reason than to give up confidence in the senses; or really the entire "multivalent logic" approach where multiple possibilities are entertained where they are not contradicted by evidence. Each of these seem to me to affirm that Epicurus was suggesting that it is necessary to form our observations into principles which are then considered to be the building blocks by which we evaluate evidence and make our day to day decisions.

It seems to me that there is an issue here in how to consider whether anything is "established" in life to the point where it can be considered firm and unchallengeable within the philosophy. Thinking back to that statement of Epicurus, the point of the study of nature is not to become an encyclopedia of facts which ends with "and this is what has been discovered to this point and will be revised in our next edition" but to deduce a set of life operating principles by which we can confidently hope to live happily.

Post by "Cassius" of January 21, 2021 at 8:04 PM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

You seem to want explanations which appeal to those with less education or intelligence, whether those explanations are correct or not. But a sturdy philosophy should not repel scientists who note inaccuracies or cling to conclusions that could result in less educated people feeling threatened by published reports about new observations.

This, combined with the nearby and ongoing discussion of the mind-blowing Parmenides assertions, reminds me that I have always identified with this attitude from Thomas Jefferson's letter to Peter Carr. And I have to agree with Jefferson - I would much rather live my life in community of ploughmen than a community of Parmenides fans, and I do think the issue is the "artificial" nature of the professors' rules. Which is not to say that the ploughman doesn't have rules of his own, but that he finds them located in things that are sensible to him. All of this hark's back to Joshua's video early in the thread about Lincoln basing his reasoning on eternal forms. It still seems to me that it is usually not flaws in the reasoning once started, but flaws in the starting point, that seem to be the issue:

Quote

Moral Philosophy. I think it lost time to attend lectures on this branch. He who made us would have been a pitiful bungler, if he had made the rules of our moral conduct a matter of science. For one man of science, there are thousands who are not. What would have become of them? Man was destined for society. His morality, therefore, was to be formed to this object. He was endowed with a sense of right and wrong, merely relative to this. This sense is as much a part of his Nature, as the sense of hearing, seeing, feeling; it is the true foundation of morality, and not the [beautiful], truth, &c., as fanciful writers have imagined. The moral sense, or conscience, is as much a part of man as his leg or arm. It is given to all human beings in a stronger or weaker degree, as force of members is given them in a greater or less degree. It may be strengthened by exercise, as may any particular limb of the body. This sense is submitted, indeed, in some degree, to the guidance of reason; but it is a small stock which is required for this: even a less one than what we call common sense. State a moral case to a ploughman and a professor. The former will decide it as well, & often better than the latter, because he has not been led astray by artificial rules. In this branch, therefore, read good books, because they will encourage, as well as direct your feelings. The writings of Sterne, particularly, form the best course of morality that ever was written. Besides these, read the books mentioned in the enclosed paper; and, above all things, lose no occasion of exercising your dispositions to be grateful, to be generous, to be charitable, to be humane, to be true, just, firm, orderly, courageous, &c. Consider every act of this kind, as an exercise which will strengthen your moral faculties & increase

your worth.

Post by “Matt” of January 21, 2021 at 8:55 PM

Again, if it pleases the court, I'd like to state on the record that I am in no way a fan of Parmenides as a whole just an Epicurean with some eclectic knowledge that would infuriate Epicurus.

□□

Post by “Elayne” of January 21, 2021 at 9:50 PM

[Cassius](#) this is sad to me to hear, because Epicurus was cutting edge in his day and I do not think he would want to exclude intelligent scientists from his Garden. It is one thing if they exclude themselves but another to repel them by being unwilling to see that physics can be safely updated without injury to the philosophy.

Interestingly, in this case, your quoted passage advises limiting reason and rules, which is the position I have taken, while you are arguing to stick rigidly with rule-like models. I am more like the ploughwoman here who says pay more attention to reality.

If no one had ever made any further observations, then it would be understandable to take your position. However, observations have been made and are part of the popular press-- some of these observations have even been incorporated into technology which we use. And lay people, your ploughmen, read about these things! It is a disservice to tell them newer models endanger EP, when it isn't true. That leaves them in a confusing position where they could feel threatened unnecessarily by emerging observations. They would have to stick their heads in the sand like ostriches trying to block out the world which is moving on past them.

I think I have exhausted my efforts to change your mind and that this will be my last comment on the subject. If you ever decide to reconsider, I think there's enough here between me and Elli that you can come back to it.

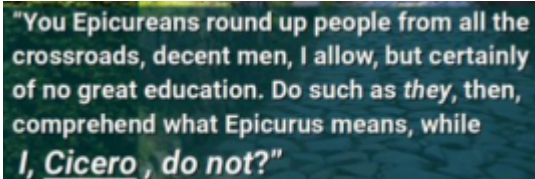
Post by “Cassius” of January 22, 2021 at 7:39 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1845-tactical-question-for-the-group-re-terminology-in-discussing-reason-and-logic/>

[Quote from Elayne](#)

I do not think he would want to exclude intelligent scientists from his Garden.

I completely agree. Your next sentence that they might exclude themselves though seems more likely to be a problem, if Cicero was correct, and on this point I bet he was:



"You Epicureans round up people from all the crossroads, decent men, I allow, but certainly of no great education. Do such as *they*, then, comprehend what Epicurus means, while *I, Cicero, do not?*"

[Quote from Elayne](#)

If no one had ever made any further observations, then it would be understandable to take your position

The main point I would leave this with for now is that I think you and I are mainly having a terminology debate, but beneath the surface of that debate lies the deeper issues that are more clear when reviewing what Frances Wright wrote. It's not you who I have the big difference with as much as it is Frances Wright and her "observation is everything" approach that is [very explicitly stated here](#). She's representing that as an Epicurean philosophy and we need to decide whether she's right about that or not.

My tentative conclusion about Frances Wright is that her position on this issue was wrong, and that this is the reason, more than anything else, why she seems to have essentially dropped the subject of Epicurus for the rest of her life and devoted herself to pure local politics. I won't argue that her decision was wrong for her, because if she got the most enjoyment out of politics then it isn't appropriate for me to second-guess that, but I can easily see how her views led her to conclude that she had gotten all she was ever going to get out of Epicurus and to move on to something else.

I think the issues underlying this question are very important to the future growth of a real "Epicurean community" in the future. The reason I titled this thread as "tactical" is that I don't think we have been clear enough about a definite set of principles about "what it means to be an Epicurean." Most of the time the public discussion on Facebook and similar places has been focused on discussion of happiness and "pleasure as the goal" that everyone can interpret the way they want to. As a result the people we attract on Facebook or in local meetup efforts are often thinking we're just going to be attending some kind of self-help psychology group for the purpose of helping them de-stress in addition to their Yoga and/or their Prozac.

That is where I think we have to get over this current issue, because it is essentially the issue of dogmatism that has caused several divisions in our efforts in the past. The issue is somewhat like - "Can we say for sure that anything important is definitely "known" about the universe, about life after death, or the existence of gods?"

If we follow the Frances Wright line and say "everything is observation," that leaves those big-picture questions open, and many people will feel tricked. If we were to invite people to a meeting and then spent our time talking about eternity, infinity, atoms, nothing from nothing, and the like, then those people will feel like they are in the wrong place, as that is not at all what they came to hear. I would say maybe as much as 80% of the Facebook group, or more, fits that category.

So I think we have to start being more clear, and more "dogmatic" that Epicurus held to a certain set of principles that remain fundamentally valid. Sure I agree that many of the physics details need to be updated, but I am personally convinced that the large conclusions (eternality, infinity, absence of infinite divisibility, role of the senses and reason, life throughout the universe, responses to Platonic arguments against pleasure, responses to Parmenides on motion, etc.) are still very valid and at the very least worth talking about as reasonable solutions to these questions.

If you follow Frances Wright's reasoning, all of the physics and "answers to essential questions about the universe" are essentially out the window, and you do in fact become basically a self-help psychology group with just a different slant on pleasure and pain.

That's why I think the Frances Wright perspective has to be cleared up before we can move to a next level of engagement. We'll constantly run into the disappointment I mentioned if we don't. We've actually been pretty consistent over the last six months in holding regular Skype discussions, but until we reach some conclusions about the Frances Wright perspective, we wouldn't even be able to agree on topics for a conference.

Would the topics for a live conference be:

(1) the pleasure of music (2) the pleasure of smooth motion, (3) the pleasure of food, and (4) why pleasure is more important than logic and reason?

Or would the topics be:

(1) the universe was not created by a supernatural god but is eternal, (2) the universe is infinite in space so there is no room for a supernatural god, (3) matter cannot be divided forever, and the elemental particles are the source of stability and repeatability, (4) he who says he knows nothing is a trifler and perverse, and (5) Epicurean logic and reasoning are based on evidence from the components of the canon, which is why it is the best kind.

Frances Wright seems to have been one of the most brilliant writers on Epicurus in the last 500 years, yet in the end she dropped away from it, so I think there important lessons to be learned

from this.

Post by “Elayne” of January 22, 2021 at 8:17 AM

Ack. Relying primarily on observations does not mean we can't make pragmatic conclusions. I thought last night I was "done" with trying to explain myself but lol ☹️ apparently I am not!

1) The universe was not created by a supernatural god and this has not one thing to do with how long it has existed. There is no observational OR logical connection between those two things. So don't worry about new theories regarding the beginning of the universe.

2) Not having "space" outside the universe for a supernatural god has not a single thing to do with there not being one. Such a being would still have to take action within the universe to be relevant to us, and it doesn't happen. There's space outside my living room but that doesn't mean I need to consider a magical unicorn being outside. Besides, this argument does not dissuade supernaturalists who believe in a supernatural realm apart from the material one, a realm invisible to all our instruments. The idea of material "room" would just make them roll their eyes. Recognize this as an endless "god of the gaps" situation and move on.

3) We don't quite know yet how stability and predictability work at the smallest level, but we can clearly observe it happening at the macro level, so we do know these are properties of matter and energy.

4) He who says he knows nothing may be technically correct, because the tiny degree of uncertainty is there, but it has no bearing on our lives unless we get obsessed with it. If getting obsessed with it causes a person maximum pleasure, then that's fine, but if it causes anxiety, there's therapy to get over obsessions. No amount of evidence can relieve someone's anxiety, according to evidence, but therapy can be extremely helpful. **** When someone clings to a conceptual conclusion as if adjusting it would make reality disintegrate before their eyes, given that reality doesn't in fact disintegrate, this is a dysfunctional anxiety situation as well and may not respond to more data.

5) The most unreliable logic is casual; formal logic eliminates some of those errors; and the most reliable procedure is to spend time making observations from senses and feelings for premises, and when you form deductive models from those observations, remember that no abstract model can ever fully replace reality, models are thus inherently incomplete (the word "pleasure" is not the same as the feeling of pleasure), and even a deductive model is abstract. Models can be pragmatically useful despite being incomplete. Always subject your deductive models to the available evidence. Be aware of your innate pattern recognitions and of your concepts, and remember that these patterns, such as the sensation of justice, are experiential,

and that there is no material item "justice" that is the same for every person.

Post by “Elayne” of January 22, 2021 at 8:47 AM

And to clarify a little what it's like to place observations first: there is no amount of logic that can tell me I don't feel pleasure when I feel it ☐. There is no amount of logic, of any type, that can convince me I don't interact with reality through my senses, because the person would have to give me information via my senses-- I don't even have another way to receive their logic except through my body. This is a description of my certainty and not a logic conclusion. If they want to convince me I'm a brain in a vat, how will they even show me math except through my senses? ☐

This is a bedrock sensation of certainty for me. I feel no obligation to believe in anything that has not been demonstrated to me. My prolepses, I have observed also.

Post by “Elli” of January 22, 2021 at 9:03 AM

Would the topics for a live conference be:

(1) the pleasure of music (2) the pleasure of smooth motion, (3) the pleasure of food, and (4) why pleasure is more important than logic and reason?

Or would the topics be:

(1) the universe was not created by a supernatural god but is eternal, (2) the universe is infinite in space so there is no room for a supernatural god, (3) matter cannot be divided forever, and the elemental particles are the source of stability and repeatability, (4) he who says he knows nothing is a trifler and perverse, and (5) Epicurean logic and reasoning are based on evidence from the components of the canon, which is why it is the best kind.

The laconic answer by Epicurus that excludes all the dilemmas of "either or" by Aristotle is : "I say, BOTH of the above"!

And from Epicurus letter to Pythocles and why I insist to be carefull with the usage of hellenic words.

"μάλιστα δὲ σεαυτὸν ἀπόδος εἰς τὴν τῶν ἀρχῶν"

And most of all give yourself up to the study (τὴν τῶν ἀρχῶν) i.e. of the first principles....

what Epicurus really means with of our **"first principles"** that **"nothing comes from nothing" and the things akin to them?**

He could mean, most of all give yourself up to the study of the axiom/principle of the law of conservation of energy and the theory of the special relativity showed that mass is related to energy and vice versa by $E = mc^2$ i.e. the mass-energy as a whole is conserved.

<< καὶ ἀπειρίας καὶ τῶν συγγενῶν τούτοις θεωρίαν >>

and of the "infinity" and of the things akin to them...

The greek word "ἀπειρία" (infinity) does not mean actually only something related with the eternity (time) and without boundaries (space). It means also of something that is without (a) +(experience) [α+περία] i.e. something that is not testified by the experience through the senses/feelings/facts/space time.

And if something that is not testified by the experience it's similar to the nothing. Outside the big bang and outside the facts of the space time was the nothing.

Please, do not make so much efforts to understand what Epicurus meant. The 93% of what Epicurus said along with Leucippus, Democritus and Lucretius are proved by the science day by day. The terminology may change but the principles are the same how the Cosmos/Cosmi are creating.

Please, my friends keep patient on waiting what would be the theory that will testified by the experiments, as I would like to give you a friendly admonition : Please first organize among you personal meetings to be known better to each other and be saved by each other, and leave as a second choice the conferences and the symposia in public. Because if you want to give a credence to my experience of the symposia in Athens, that friends of Thessaloniki and Athens met in person once a year... The results of all the conferences and the symposia in public became a whole mess.

Pleasure is the goal!

Thanks 😊

Post by “Cassius” of January 22, 2021 at 10:43 AM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

No amount of evidence can relieve someone's anxiety, according to evidence, but therapy can be extremely helpful

This is the sentence I would use to discuss what I see as the only practical difference between our positions. I don't think that Epicurus would have devoted so much of his life to exploring and writing about nature if he did not think that evidence can and does relieve anxiety in some people, when processed into a reasonable system of thought such as he presented in his philosophy. I think the point where we are missing each other is that you are correctly pointing out that for some people, no amount of evidence presented to them is going to change their mind. Such people are for any of many possible reasons not oriented toward making up their minds based on evidence, and for them some type of therapy is the appropriate option. But I would contend that many others DO make up their minds based on evidence, and its to those that Epicurus and Lucretius primarily directed their work. They wouldn't have ignored those who aren't interested in evidence, but the great bulk of their work seems to me clearly directed to those who were interested in a reasoned and logical analysis of the great questions of life. And yes, I'll repeat that I don't think a "reasoned and logical analysis of the great questions of life" means what Plato and the Stoics meant in their version of what I would call "formal logic."

As a result it is entirely appropriate for some people to devote their lives to the study of nature and to take that information and develop a system of reasonable and logical thought like Epicurus did, and like Lucretius followed. The fact that others exist for whom no amount of

gathering of evidence and system-building and reasoned presentation is going to make a difference is no reason at all not to engage in gathering of evidence and system-building and reasoned presentation for those who find such activities persuasive.

[Quote from elli](#)

The laconic answer by Epicurus that excludes all the dilemmas of "either or" by Aristotle is : "I say, BOTH of the above"!

I agree with Elli's laconic answer here -- BOTH approaches are legitimate and the Epicurean tent is big enough to contain them both. But I would strongly resist the idea that the ethics should or could reasonably be presented without the physics and the epistemology (the discussion of reason and logic and evidence that we are discussing now).

[Quote from elli](#)

Because if you want to give a credence to my experience of the symposia in Athens, that friends of Thessaloniki and Athens met in person once a year... The results of all the conferences and the symposia in public became a whole mess.

I continue to be fascinated by the situation among the Epicureans in Greece, and I am not satisfied that we should let that question go unexamined. In fact I think the answer there is very likely close to the subject that we are discussing. I think Elli is correct that closer personal contact would help alleviate any "mess" that might exist between disputing participants in Greece (or anywhere else), but I also don't think that the disputes are "only" a result of lack of personal contact. I think if people don't identify differences in approaches and bring out those differences for examination, then issues can never be resolved and progress made.

Even though this current debate may seem disconcerting I think it's among the most important we've ever had. We've been through debates before about whether "pleasure as the goal" should be kept front and center in presenting Epicurean philosophy, and we've seen people go separate ways because of disagreement about that. Rather than just have these debates go unresolved, it seems to me it's a lot better to explore in the open the reasons *why* the issues are important. That way even if people have to agree to disagree, then those of each position can continue to explore the implications of their positions, rather than leaving the different perspectives frozen perpetually. I think this discussion has been very useful for us all and I'm very glad we have had it.

Post by “Elayne” of January 22, 2021 at 11:54 AM

I meant to say "anxiety disorder", which is how I think of anxiety, a persistent false fear, vs fear which is reality based (tiger about to eat you). I disagree though that there is no other significant difference between our positions, because the fact remains that you are telling people modern physics models somehow threaten our philosophy, and it's not true. You are saying that the philosophy of reality can't survive new conclusions about reality, and it's not true. I am saying the philosophy can only survive by being open to (and not fearful of) new observations and conclusions on the specific ways reality functions. Imo that is not peripheral at all but central to preventing the philosophy from becoming something of only historical interest.

Post by "Elli" of January 22, 2021 at 12:26 PM

Im really sorry but the communication/contact through a machine i.e. a computer or a telephone or a skype and without any camera, can't produce strong bonds of friendship and **FEELINGS**. The machines have no feelings and they do not produce feelings. It is just a tool and does not lead to the real goal.

Where the friendship is based on ? Where do you looking for the friendship? On the ideas and theories ? Sorry, the conversations on philosophical ideas only do not lead to the real goal.

From Physics: atoms repulshing, swerving, colliding for the creation of many Cosmi =====> to Canon:: hedonic calculus through senses, feelings and prolepsis=====>to Ethics: common benefit/frankness of speech sharing knowledges and things with personal and non personal meetings, generosity, bravery.

The issue starts from Physics, is measured through the Canon and ends in Ethics, and it's: the creation of many Cosmi/friendships/communities/societies with real persons, as real as the atoms are !

Do you think that Epicurus established the Garden and maintained it as such, in the basis of theories only or mostly in trusted humans with blood and bones?

Why was the happenings of celebrations in every 20th and of birthdays?

What means exactly the attached photo with the letter to Themista ?

Epicurus was clear in ES 78: **The wisdom/knowledges is a mortal good, i.e. they will die within us and with us. Friendship is an immortal good.**

ES 18. Remove sight, association, and contact and the passion of love/friendship is at an end.

fg. 457 Passion for true philosophy destroys every disturbing and troublesome desire

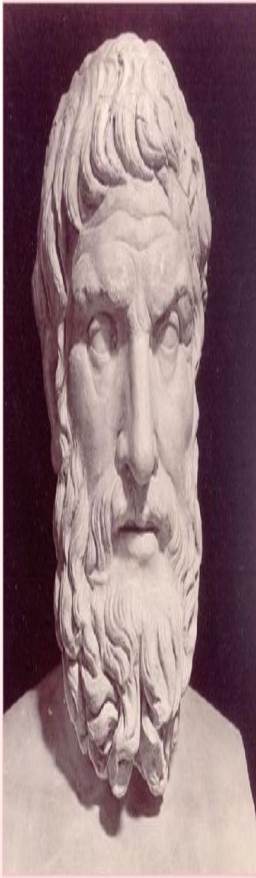
For hellenic language the words love/eros and friendship are synonyms.

For Epicurus the love for our philosophy is an erotic emotion!

E.S. 66 We support our friends not by mourning but by caring for them.

Sorry, but you will fall in the same trap of my fellow Greeks here, who they endlessly spoke through emails about the ideas, and in the end, the only they left as real friends was not even an idea.

Epicurean philosophy is measured and applied only with the experiences/actions in the real life. Please do not leave it in laboratory conditions or in the hands of academics. 🙄



εἰμί, ἐὰν μὴ ὑμεῖς πρὸς με
ἀφίκησθε, αὐτὸς
τρικύλιστος, ὅπου ἂν
ὑμεῖς καὶ Θεμίστα
παρακαλῆτε, ὠθειῖσθαι.

“If you don’t come to me,
I am capable of being
persuade to rush on my
own to wherever you and
Themista summon me”.

Wanna find out who your true friends
are?

Move away
and see who
comes to visit.

You'll quickly see
true colors.

someecards
user card



Post by “Cassius” of January 22, 2021 at 12:48 PM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

fact remains that you are telling people modern physics models somehow threaten our philosophy, and it's not true.

I am not seeing myself as disputing the part I quoted or any of the rest of what I quite there.

My view is that modern physics has a position on whether the universe is eternal and similar issues, and Epicurus had a position on those issues. Everyone can think about and decide for themselves what they want to believe and how much personal research they want to do, but they'll never even be able to consider Epicurus' position unless they know what it was and his reasons for holding them.

I certainly am not an expert in modern physics, and it's not appropriate for me to suggest to people that they should take a particular modern physics position either. I'm not qualified to say that a particular expert today is right, so I should not be in the business of endorsing one view over another, or saying that a particular expert has conclusively proved Epicurus wrong on the ultimate conclusions, even where there are many intermediate issues that clearly would appear to need revision.

Regardless of which side we take, there's no escaping the fact than in representing something to be Epicurean philosophy there 's a clearly documented position that Epicurus took on many of these issues. I don't think it was appropriate for Frances Wright to ascribe positions to Epicurus that conflicted with those he actually took, and I would not think it appropriate for someone to endorse a particular model unless they are themselves experts in the science. You're certainly a lot closer to that than I am, but even then, it's not a part of Epicurean philosophy to endorse the work of any particular scientists or to say that even a "consensus of scientists" deserves deference. For the very reasons you're saying, "science" changes over time and thus its conclusions change. We aren't in the business of being experts in science, we're in the business of finding a workable philosophy of life that allows us to live happily. Epicurus himself said that it would be better to follow the religionists than to give in to particular

"scientists" of his day -- those that denied the possibility of "free will."

I note that while I was composing this Elli wrote another very good post about remembering important issues like friendships and feelings. I totally agree with that. I note that she closed with **"Please do not leave it in laboratory conditions or in the hands of academics." I totally agree with that too, and that is why I do not think we should ever be in the business of placing our opinion on ultimate issues in the hands of "experts" who claim that they in their laboratories have access to ultimate truths that other people don't.** I am very willing to believe that they have access to all sorts of detailed observations that others don't have, but I think every person has to reserve for himself or herself the ultimate responsibility for their ultimate conclusions about their place in the universe. And whether I think they "have to" or not -- that's the nature of things. Nature hasn't set up a system where we are all compelled to believe the same thing, or to find pleasure in the same things.

By no means do I live in fear of modern science, nor do I think that modern science threatens the significant conclusions of Epicurean philosophy. But I reserve to myself the ultimate right to decide whose opinions I am going to follow when issues are disputed, and I think Epicurus taught that as well. Epicurus resisted the idea that the scientific experts of his day should be the ultimate authority on issues where no direct evidence was possible, and I think the same approach is valid today. Many people are troubled by issues where we can never observe directly (life after death; was there an origin of everything; will there ever be an end to everything). Where we can only infer the unknown from the known there are always going to be competing theories, and everyone has to decide how to apply those theories to their own lives.

Post by "Elli" of January 22, 2021 at 1:10 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Epicurus resisted the idea that the scientific experts of his day should be the ultimate authority on issues where no direct evidence was possible, and I think the same approach is valid today.

Cassius sorry, in the era of Epicurus there were not scientific experts, but astrologers, and charlatans. Only Aristotle had had a credit, but for Aristotle the purpose was the knowledges for the knowledges themselves and not to bring the knowledges in the real life with actions and on how we should live. Besides Aristotle used the methodology of dialectics. He did not leave behind his teacher Plato, and he spoke with frankness of speech to Plato, when Plato did not pass to Aristotle the leadership of his academia, but in one of his nephews, and then Aristotle

has to establish the Lyceum and the Peripatetic school.

Epicurus if he was alive in our days first he would find FRIENDS, they will read all together many of the scientific papers on materialism, they will be writing whole books and papers to help many of the scientists for finding the obvious. He would strongly argue only this: that from Physiology i.e. all sciences that ALL are using till now the CANON, they have to be connected and with Ethics and with the goal of pleasure. This is the issue with many of the scientists - not all - they do not know what is the true philosophy. Usually they discover it in old age, and when the issue on death is approaching.

Post by "Cassius" of January 22, 2021 at 4:13 PM

OK I have to apologize to everyone for being so distracted today that I have been delayed in responding more completely. As for myself, I continue to see this exchange as totally productive and a good-faith difference in perspective among friends. I do not doubt for a moment the good faith of everyone involved. I don't insist that my friends see everything the same way I do, nor do I let my friends insist that I see things their way.

I do, however, doubt the good faith of people like Lawrence Krauss, especially after watching his debate on [something from nothing](#) with Richard Dawkins. I believe that history has shown that scientists are every bit as open to errors of prejudice and bias and self-interest as anyone else, and I believe that nothing revolutionary has happened in human nature in the last 100 years to think that those errors of bias and prejudice and self-interest have been or ever can be eliminated.

Elli in referring to Epicurus I was mainly referring to those mathematicians whose mathematics was indeed in retrospect pretty good in calculating the size of the sun. It seems to me that Epicurus doubted them in large part because of what he perceived was their lack of good faith in arguing for conclusions beyond the scope of their facts. That remains a hazard today.

Here's my list of views that I personally hold but expect no one else to consider as evidence any more than they would consider the nonsense of any other dottering old fool. I've never suggested that anyone should take my point of view on anything, as a matter of fact. All I do is take the material I can find on Epicurus and interpret it in a way that seems the most persuasive to me. That's all I can do and of course everyone is entitled to their own opinion. These are mine. In each of these I should probably add "And I do not believe that any evidence to the contrary is conclusive" -- but that gets tiresome. These are my conclusions at this point in my life:

- I do not believe that the universe as a whole was ever created at a single point in time.

- I do not believe that the universe as a whole will ever come to an end.
- I do not believe that the universe has a size limit.
- I do not believe that the things we see around us are infinitely divisible.
- I do not believe that the viewpoint that the universe is composed of solid bodies and void has entirely lost its usefulness.
- I do not believe that any enumeration of elemental particles would ever come to an end.
- I do not believe that from any realistic viewpoint that the elementary particles, no matter how we define them, are motionless.
- I do not believe that the universe as a whole has a center (or floor, walls, or ceiling, for that matter)
- I firmly believe that elemental parties have a capacity that is reasonably describable as being capable of swerving at no fixed time and no fixed place

To me, that leaves me in broad agreement with the fundamental assertions of Epicurean physics quite well.

So to compare this to the [original list of twelve](#), the only one that my understanding that truly indisputable modern science would say needs revision would be eleven and perhaps nine.

[PN 01](#) Matter is uncreatable.

[PN 02](#) Matter is indestructible.

[PN 03](#) The universe consists of solid bodies and void.

[PN 04](#) Solid bodies are either compounds or simple.

[PN 05](#) The multitude of atoms is infinite.

[PN 06](#) The void is infinite in extent.

[PN 07](#) The atoms are always in motion.

[PN 08](#) The speed of atomic motion is uniform.

[PN 09](#) Motion is linear in space, vibratory in compounds.

[PN 10](#) Atoms are capable of swerving slightly at any point in space or time.

[PN 11](#) Atoms are characterized by three qualities: weight, shape and size.

[PN 12](#) The number of the different shapes is not infinite, merely innumerable.

Now of course I am not saying that modern science does not have lots of detail that can be applied to stating these more accurately or in ways that would significantly revise them. But I

think each of these can be interpreted in a way that remains consistent with what I understand to be modern science.

Now is Lawrence Krauss and / or other people going to tell me that my views are obsolete and that I need to spend more time in physics classes.? Sure. And he'll go to his grave doing his best to make sense of the evidence in front of him, as I will to mine.

I know it's somewhat uncomfortable to talk about these issues so frankly, but my analysis is that it helps everyone to think about these issues and see where people stand. I never represent that I am a physicist, and I freely admit that many physicists don't seem to agree with these conclusions.

I do what I do because it is enjoyable and satisfying on many different levels, and as Epicurus said "In a philosophical discussion he who is defeated gains more, since he learns more."

And I say all this with a smile and is as good a humor as ever! 😊

Post by “Cassius” of January 22, 2021 at 4:41 PM

I should say more about Lawrence Krauss. I'm not accusing him of being a bad person either. My main observation there is that there seem to be people who actually revel in uncertainty and doubt, and in particular, in creating uncertainty and doubt in other people where it did not previously exist. Now that can certainly be a good thing, but some people seem to carry it to an extreme of seeking uncertainty and doubt as an end in itself, and I don't think that's something that Epicurus would approve of. And I get that sense about Lawrence Krauss in his desire to define "nothing" in away that is counter-intuitive to a traditional and logical interpretation of the word "nothing." Of course there's that pesky word "logical" again 😊

Post by “Godfrey” of January 22, 2021 at 4:49 PM

Personally I'm not familiar with the idea of first principles and the idea as described by [Elayne](#) seems to me to be quite useful. I'd be grateful for any elaboration!

It seems to me that the twelve assertions listed above are all subservient to the principle "we live in a material universe that has provided no evidence of the supernatural or of an afterlife." As a layman I can't say whether or not any one of the twelve principles is correct, but I do think

that they are all subject to clarification due to modern physics. But if one or many of these principles is proven to be false, the only thing of importance to me is whether or not that disproves the principle that I've stated. If that principle is disproved then I need to rethink my approach to life!

I probably have a tendency toward oversimplification, but this first principle (if it is correctly called that) brings me more pleasure than trying to comprehend and verify the twelve principles.

Post by “Elayne” of January 22, 2021 at 5:38 PM

The reason I care about the outcome of this conversation is that I want to see EP survive and not be made obsolete, because I get pleasure from the pleasure of other people. I also feel some pain when it appears to me that Epicurus, a cutting edge, revolutionary scientist in his day, would ever be considered to support a less than cutting edge position today, when he's not here to defend himself. That, I realize, is silly, bc he's dead and can't be hurt! ☐☐

Here is my summary on which PDs can hold up:

Pd1 Matter is uncreatable: no, not in the way he described matter. If we change it to matter/energy is uncreatable, that holds up, but may not have been true in the Big Bang when matter/energy may not have functioned as it does now. Since that happened so long ago, I don't mind saying matter/energy is not created, because of the "is". An "is" doesn't rule out things having been otherwise in the past, so I'll take it.

PD2 Matter is indestructible : not true in the original description. Could reframe as matter/energy is indestructible. However, if there is a "big collapse" to conditions preceding another big bang, and everything we call matter/energy winds up taking no space and the physics we understand now changes-- then PD2 may not always be true. That doesn't change that it is true now and certainly during any survivable conditions for life. I'm fine again here with an "is" because it doesn't constrain the distant future. PD1 and 2 are accepted physics for the current universe, now that it exists.

PD3 no, the universe does not consist of solid bodies and void. The hard body model of physics is over. That one cannot even be metaphorically accepted. And since we are including all known types of energy fields as matter, there's not much void if any, especially if what looks like void has dark energy. It's just wrong. But it doesn't change that there's no god.

PD4 solid bodies are either compounds or simple. Just take out the word solid and it's ok

PD5 the multitude of atoms is infinite. We could translate better and say the multitude of elementary particles is infinite. But to be accurate, we actually don't know. It is unclear whether the universe is infinite or just very big, and the answer depends on that. Either way, it's so big in comparison to us that it might as well be infinite. If it is finite, that doesn't mean there's anything outside it. And there's still no god.

PD 6 the void is infinite in extent. Unclear. There are some observed areas of apparent void in space (not on earth) but they may not actually be empty-- they may have dark energy. We don't know enough to say this, and it's not relevant to being sure there's no supernatural god.

PD7 the atoms (elementary particles) are always in motion. That one seems to have held up ☐

PD8 the speed of atomic (elementary particles) is uniform -- that's not true. They can be accelerated, for instance. And since you are including particles like photons in matter, then those are (obviously) at the speed of light. You can look around without a physics lab and know that other stuff is not moving at the speed of light. PD8 can't be fixed-- it's just wrong.

PD9 motion is linear in space, vibratory in compounds. Well, no. Elementary particles have vibratory motion even when they have linear motion. There's also rotational motion, orbital, and suborbital motion.

PD 10 atoms (elementary particles) are capable of swerving slightly at any point in time. This physical description doesn't fit current ideas of probabilistic behavior of matter. Epicurus thought it was a literal swerve from linear movement and that's not what happens. It can be metaphorized to say future events are probabilistic, but imagining a little particle speeding along and suddenly, unpredictably changing course is not really what happens. I would leave out the "any point in time "-- I don't think we know that.

PD 11 atoms (elementary particles) are characterized by 3 things-- weight, shape, and size. That one would need updating to mass, charge, and spin

[PD12](#) the number of the different shapes (of elementary particles) is not infinite but innumerable. Shape is not a thing used to describe elementary particles, and so far there are a limited number of different types, nothing close to innumerable types. This one just needs to have a note for historical purposes -- it's not relevant any more. There's no way I can think of to re-state this in a way that is correct.

So you see, some of this information is not controversial in being outdated. Some is still unknown, but some things actually need to be revised now.

I agree it's important to question experts -- and also to question Epicurus. I don't put anyone on privileged footing when it comes to whether I would question them! So when you say why should we believe experts, I am with you, and it includes Epicurus.

I agree it's important to know where his ideas came from, and his thought processes. And it's also important for people today to know they can come to his same overarching conclusions about this being a material universe, about absence of gods, and about pleasure as the goal, while studying ongoing discoveries in physics. It's not that I want to say Epicurus didn't have PD8 and 12-- he did.

If we think of a conclusion like any of these PDs as a "diagnosis", and the observations as signs and symptoms-- parents sometimes get scared when they finally get a diagnosis for their kids' troubles. That's normal. And if the diagnosis changes, it's also scary. But what's true is that even though a diagnosis, a model of disease, provides useful information, the label doesn't change the child. The child is still who they are with or without the label. In the same way, reality is what it is with or without the concepts being applied.

I mainly want people to know that PD 8 and 12 being inaccurate and almost all the others needing updating doesn't do a thing to mess up the overall conclusions. And to put more weight on observations than reasons-- to emphasize the Canon. That's my whole point.

Post by "Elli" of January 22, 2021 at 6:40 PM

A few words about the quantum vacuum.

The quantum field theory proposed by modern physics forces us to abandon the classical distinction between vacuum and matter, especially since it has been shown that elementary particles can be born spontaneously from vacuum with the proper supply of energy. Emptiness is nothing, it is not non-being! Instead, it contains, potentially, an unlimited number of particles that are created and disappear non-stop. The void is actually a living void! The void has ceased to be considered the passive and non-participatory context of the play of natural phenomena and is recognized as a dynamic state of paramount importance.

I was surprised to find just yesterday that Epicurus in his Epistle to Herodotus refers to the void with the term "nature non palpate/untouched". It is indeed difficult to imagine how an ancient philosopher who knew nothing at all about quantum phenomena, thought of referring to the void as "nature", that is, something that exists and is obviously related to the other "nature of tangible things", even if it is not palpate/untouched!

The motion of particles in a world of probabilities.

Each particle can be described as a moving or stationary "wave packet", while the amplitude of a wave in a space over a period of time is related to the **probability** of finding the particle in

that space at that time. Thus, two quantum particles that are ejected by the same device, under the same initial conditions, can make different paths and end up in two different places. Or two identical nuclei will split at very different times, or even into different particles.

Lucretius in "On the nature of things" De rerum natura: "... When atoms carry their own weight in a straight line down into space, at indefinite moments and in indefinite places, they deviate somewhat from their trajectory, only to the extent that you can say that the movement has changed their. "Without this deviation, everything would be directed like raindrops parallel to the three depths of the vacuum, and no contact, no collision would be made between the original elements, and so nature would not create anything ...".

Feynman: "A philosopher once said, "It is necessary for the very existence of science that the same conditions always produce the same results." Well, they don't!"

CONCLUSIONS

Modern Physics has enriched our perceptions with many new concepts and has greatly deepened or differentiated the old ones. The world continues to be described by **atoms**, but also **elementary particles** and **quanta**, all of which have structure, quantum behavior and relativistic motion, dynamics and materiality.

The existence of discontinuity in matter is what allows the formation of structures in space. The diversity of the cosmos presupposes the existence of small material parts that in combination do the things we perceive. The ability to enumerate and combine building blocks is also the basis of mathematics, that is, the understanding and conception of the world on a more abstract level.

Structures are not only **in space**, but they are also **in time**. An example of a spatially structured entity is a simple stone, but also an entire cave with stalactites and stalagmites. An example of a time-structured entity is a simple note, but also an entire symphonic music play. The objects of the world have at the same time spatial and temporal substance and structure, that is, they are **living phenomena and they fill us with admiration!**

Reference 2

From the Book: The moment of quantum - Alfred Goldhaber (theoretical physics) Robert Crease (history and philosophy of science) - ROPI Publications, 2015

"What we need is a Lucretius who will be baptized in the source of Einstein, Schrödinger and Heisenberg, to compose a modern "De Rerum Natura" and to interpret the mystery and beauty that are inside and beyond the electron and space ... »

Source: New York Times, 1930

An excerpt of a work entitled: "For the understanding of Nature on the scale of the microcosm".

Tassos Liolios April 22, 2019

Professor of Department of Nuclear Physics and Elementary Particle Physics Department of Physics, and of Sciences in Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

<https://www.physics.auth.gr/people/41>

http://epicuros.net/new/241_-Gia-t...toy-mikrokosmoy

Post by "Elli" of January 22, 2021 at 7:11 PM

Silence in church 😬

The letters of Paul, dated to the [middle of the first century AD](#), were written to specific communities in response to particular questions or problems. Paul was in Ephesus around the year 56 when he received disquieting news regarding the church at Corinth. Factionalism had developed. At the fellowship meal some got drunk while others were left hungry. There seemed to be a preference for ecstatic prayer at the expense of works of charity, with a number of members all "speaking in tongues" at the same time. It was apparently reported to him that **women were appearing at the assembly without the head covering customary in contemporary Greek society, and may have been arguing over their right to address the assembly. The fledgling community appeared to be in disorder.** 😂

Corinthians 14:33-35(NIV) states:

Quote

"As in all the congregations of the Lord's people. **Women should remain silent in the churches.** They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church."



Post by "Cassius" of January 23, 2021 at 5:21 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1845-tactical-question-for-the-group-re-terminology-in-discussing-reason-and-logic/>

Reading from post 58 to 58 and looking for the connection, I think Elli has just given us an example of a swerve happening at macro level, or perhaps the discontinuity of matter? 😊 .

Post by “Elayne” of January 23, 2021 at 8:04 AM

[Cassius](#) lol it's connected ☐. I finally watched that Krauss/Dawkins video last night, and it was excellent! It was clear that Dawkins was very excited about Krauss' "something from nothing" and was saying that it is a huge blow to religions, by demonstrating that something from nothing doesn't require a god. I agree with him. Although the "nothing" had gravitational fields, it had no matter but was unstable and then "something " appeared. It really is amazing that stuff, matter, could come into existence.

It's definitely an example of how language, an abstraction, can't substitute for the reality it describes. But for most people, the phrasing is right. Most people don't consider a gravitational field with no particles to be a "thing". If you stretch the definition to include fields, then obviously the sentence falls apart and there is maybe no such thing as "nothing" anywhere, so it's a moot point.

For most people, and I think for Epicurus based on his reasoning, getting all the "stuff" we see in the universe from a condition with no particles is at least like getting "more something" than you started with, and that's a violation of nothing comes from nothing. Because of that, something from nothing is closer to "more something from less something", and it's probably as good a description as can be made without coining new words.

Epicurus' model really did not have elementary particles that could come from something else or change into each other. That is a big difference. They could come together to make different things but not one alphabet letter turn into another or a letter come from the page.

I am with Dawkins on the god as barnacle!☐

Anyway, Dawkins wasn't disagreeing with Krauss. If you mean the part where Krauss uses the analogy of biology from chemistry as something from nothing... it's again a difficulty of language, but Krauss is right in that consciousness remains confusing to the point that some researchers still wonder if it has to be some inherent property of matter that becomes more complex with structural complexity. Is consciousness emergent, a something of a new type, or something else? Nobody knows yet.

You have said you don't like how Krauss acts as if we know this happened for sure, but he never said that! What he said is that it could have happened, and that alone is marvelous. He was

very careful not to exceed what was supported by observations. It was beautifully stated.

It was also fun to hear them talk about the possibility that alternative physics could have arisen-- different universal constants, etc. Still minus god. There could have been, or maybe is, a universe where the observations we make about matter/energy are very different! But it still wouldn't need a god.

I thought it was a lovely, friendly, enthusiastic discussion between friends. I'm glad I watched it. These men have the attitude towards science I wish everyone had-- they take delight in it. It's fun, pleasurable. And it consistently renders god a redundant barnacle of a notion. ☐

Post by “Don” of January 23, 2021 at 11:44 AM

At the risk of wading in late to this discussion, I just would like to offer the following reminder. And I apologize if this had already been covered. I admit I haven't closely read all 60+ posts.

As a start, arguing over Epicurus's saying "nothing comes from nothing" is specious. Epicurus never said, "Nothing comes from nothing." That's what English translators have made him say. As I've mentioned *ad nauseum*, Epicurus didn't speak English or Latin.

His Letter to Herodotus states:

Quote

πρῶτον μὲν ὅτι οὐδὲν γίνεται ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος.

"First,... nothing comes into being from that which doesn't exist."

[οὐδὲν](#)

[ὄντος](#)

To me, this is broad enough to cover everything y'all have been discussing on that point. He doesn't say "Nothing comes from *nothing*" although one can paraphrase it that way in English. However, that's not literally what it says. He says "οὐδὲν - no-thing" comes from "that which is not existing (τοῦ μὴ ("not") ὄντος (ontos 'being, existing'))." (Note: ὄντος is related to English ontology, ontological.) Atoms, energy, fields, space-time all *exist.* When one throws in "ex nihilo", Epicurus didn't say that either. That's an interpretation, a translation. There has to be something for something else to come into being from it. Dawkins even emphasizes this about new species in that video. You need a starter for new species. Things come from other existing things. Period.

It might be good to go back to each of those twelve statements to see what Epicurus *actually* said before planting a flag on either side of any debate.

Plus, taking Epicurus in context is important. What was he arguing against? What is the *import* of his statements (i.e., no supernatural realm)? Was he closer to our understanding than his peers? Was he "on the right track"? etc.

Plus plus, I don't think that list exists as a list anywhere but in DeWitt. Does it? Diogenes Laertius mentioned Epicurus's "Twelve Rudiments" but that work is lost. I don't think we know for certain what twelve points were in that work. Please correct me if I missed something from another source!! My understanding is that the Herodotus letter is as close as we get, and DeWitt's Twelve don't seem to match up neatly one-to-one in order with that letter. I've tried.

Post by "Cassius" of January 23, 2021 at 3:11 PM

Great post Don.

I think you can add to the list that if I recall correctly, when Lucretius introduces the subject in book one, he adds the proviso that nothing comes from nothing "...at the will of the gods" or something to that effect.

As to the twelve fundamental propositions, yes I have seen commentators with other versions of the list, but they are all assembling them from Lucretius and the letter to Herodotus. The main one that comes to mind was done by Diskin Clay, and one aspect of that one that always stuck with me is that he included the equivalent of PD1, that the gods are complete in themselves, as one of the twelve fundamental propositions.

I believe he includes it in his article, "Epicurus' Last Will and Testament." I don't remember the date but shortly after I first started studying Epicurus, probably in 2013. I contacted Mr. Clay when he was living in North Carolina (he's now deceased) and he sent me a printed copy. I will upload it and come back here and link it. I haven't read it in years but I am sure you will find it interesting.

Here's the article: ["Epicurus' Last Will and Testament" - by Diskin Clay](#)

In case anyone is interested in a Diskin Clay reading marathon, here is:

- his 1967 thesis from the University of Washington: [Lucretius' Translation of Greek Philosophy - By Diskin Clay](#)

- his article [A Lost Epicurean Community - By Diskin Clay](#)

One more: [Diskin Clay - A Brief Memoir for Angelo Casanova \(regarding Oinoanda\)](#)

Below is a photo of Mr. Clay in his younger years.



Post by “Elli” of January 23, 2021 at 4:09 PM

Thank you very much Don. 👍 I very much appreciate that you did save my language, for which the english speaking claiming that is mysterious sounding and exotic!! But I do not misunderstand them, something similar was said by Lucretius, when he wondered how he would understand and how he could write in latin, about the dark meanings that are corresponded to the words of the Hellenes? 😞

Post by “Elli” of January 23, 2021 at 4:20 PM

For Lucretius is the blame as he confused Parmenides with Epicurus. 😊

Nothing comes from nothing ([Greek](#): οὐδὲν ἐξ οὐδενός; [Latin](#): *ex nihilo nihil fit*) is a philosophical [dictum](#) first argued by [Parmenides](#).

The Roman poet and philosopher [Lucretius](#) expressed this principle in his first book of [De Rerum Natura](#) (*On the Nature of Things*)

But by observing Nature and her laws. And this will lay
The warp out for us—her first principle: **that nothing's brought**

Forth by any supernatural power out of naught.

For certainly all men are in the clutches of a dread—
Beholding many things take place in heaven overhead
Or here on earth whose causes they can't fathom, they assign
The explanation for these happenings to powers divine.

Nothing can be made from nothing—once we see that's so,
Already we are on the way to what we want to know.

He then continues on discussing how matter is required to make matter and that objects cannot spring forth without reasonable cause.

For if things were created out of nothing, any breed
Could be born from any other; nothing would require a seed.
People could pop out of the sea, the scaly tribes arise
Out of the earth, and winged birds could hatch right from the skies.
Born willy-nilly, every animal, both wild and tame,
Would inhabit cultivated land and wilderness the same.
The same tree would not always grow the same fruit—what might bear
An apple one time, might, the next, produce a quince or pear.
Since there would be no generating particles, then neither
Would certain things arise from only a certain kind of mother.
But since in fact each species rises from specific seeds,
Each thing springs from the source that has the matter that it needs,
The primary particles, and comes into the boundaries
Of light, and that's the reason every thing cannot give rise
To every other thing, because there is a separate power
In distinct things.

Post by “Elli” of January 23, 2021 at 4:35 PM

And a few words for Mr. Dawkins. I remember that a few years ago, I had made a post on FB.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8hy8NxZvFY>

If you would like watch in the above link a video at the Youtube and answer this question :
<<WHY WE ARE HERE>> ?

This was one of the main questions that is dominated in this video at the youtube of a debate

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1845-tactical-question-for-the-group-re-terminology-in-discussing-reason-and-logic/>

among the scientist Mr. Richard Dawkins and a Catholic priest. The Catholic priest gave the same banal answer, which is to live virtuously in accordance to ten commandments by an almighty God that has been invented by the minds of some persons. Persons that were lived and still are living in different places and as they keep their own interests they also claiming that their God is the only absolute true God, who is under their interpretation of how to live in accordance of his absolute justice.

In this rhetorical question WHY WE ARE HERE ?? It is here also that we can understand that the whole point is missing. That outstanding scientist Mr. Dawkins has to read more and more philosophy and especially the Epicurean one. I urge him, with respect, to read Epicurus and Lucretius every night in his bed.

Because he has demonstrated here that he can't answer this question properly. He has demonstrated that the science exist only for the science itself. He has point out where is the huge gap. And the huge gap as a trap is when the science goes by itself without Philosophy.

Thus, he separated the science from ethics, and this happens in that point in which he agrees to say that the Darwinian theory of evolution is not suggested by him for placing us values or virtues on HOW to live.

Wrong Mr. Dawkins, if you connect the Darwinian theory of evolution with ethics you will realize clearly, how the human beings had evolved and especially how they had survived. And you would see also that the most adaptive has survived in Nature. This means that the clever specie which can preserve its genes can survive in Nature. How the human beings had preserved their genes ? Where is their cleverness ? On making such kind of societies with such kind of contracts within the majority of the persons understand and agreed that the solidarity and the friendship among them is something that can preserve them in life, against wild animals, earthquakes, plagues, famines, floods, diseases etc. Our specie, the human being, has proved with historical evidences that when we made social agreements to not harm each other, it was something that is PLEASING us and making us living a happy life. Human's life, which is in front of the eternity, has a duration of a nanosecond. And this duration of a time does not deserve to be wasted of endless rhetorical and meaningless questions which are leading to the infinity.

Why we are here, mr. Dawkins ? IMO the only proper response is this : To fulfill our purpose, our end, our aim in life as set by the Nature and the evidences of evolution as occurred by every individual person that is able to cooperate with others. And the human virtues, which are three or four in number, are THE MEANS for the achievement of this goal that is pleasure. Because if all the virtues would be connected with this goal of PLEASURE, EVERYBODY of US can live a pleasant, blissful and happy life. So simple is the response Mr. Dawkins.

By the way, Mr. Dawkins, here is something of Diogenes of Oinoanda inscription that may would help you to give in future the proper response in front of an audience :

<<Here is the point at issue between the other philosophers and the Epicureans. If we were both inquiring into, “what is the means of happiness?” and the other philosophers wanted to say, “the virtues,” (which would actually be true), it would not be necessary for us to take any other step than to agree with them.

But the issue is not, “what is the means of happiness?” The issue is, “what is happiness?” Or, in other words, “What is the ultimate goal of our nature?”

I say both now, and always, shouting out loudly, to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that pleasure is the highest end of life!

The virtues, which are turned upside down by other philosophers, who transfer the virtues from “the means” to “the end”, are in no way the end in themselves! The virtues are not ends in themselves, but only the means to the end that Nature has set for us!

This we affirm to be true in the strongest possible terms, and we take it as our starting point for how men should live.>>

Post by “Cassius” of January 25, 2021 at 5:49 PM

For those following along in this thread, be sure to check the following podcast, episode 55, for more discussion on this topic: [RE: Episode Fifty-Five - Reason Is Dependent On The Senses \(Part 2\)](#)