

"A Happy Greek" play by Christos Yapijakis (YouTube)

Post by "Kalosyni" of December 27, 2021 at 10:53 PM

This feels like a good overview, but it is also a modern interpretation of Epicureanism and may not fully align with the forum (DeWitt understanding). It is good to get clear about the "tranquility problem" and I we need to be able to do so in contrast to various interpretations. So feel free to make comments. We could add some links to previous discussions regarding the tranquility problem.

Beyond that issue, there are other things that make this worthy of attention and good for contemplation.

Here is a transcript of the English subtitles (the link to the video follows).

"A Happy Greek" (scene from the play)

by Christos Yapijakis

English subtitles

Music: Song of Seikilos

"While you live shine,

Have no grief at all,

Life exists only for a short while,

and Time demands his due."

Early 3rd century BCE in the Garden (Kepos) of Epicurus in Athens.

EPICURUS: My friends, this has always been my dream! A small community of friends which lives by its own rules in calmness and happiness but also in harmony with the city. I thank you, my friends, my loyal Hermarchus, my beloved Metrodorus, my sweet Leontion.

METRODORUS: Why are you thanking us, our wise friend? It should be the other way around. We are the ones who ought to thank you for changing our lives. None of us had ever dreamed such happiness before we met you.

HERMARCHUS: Right on Metrodorus! Why are you thanking us, my dear teacher and friend? Without you I would have never managed to find such tranquility and beauty in my life, I assure

you. I would have become a lawyer like my father orating at trials. My sole aim would have been to increase my property and my social influence and that would have led me to interweave with the council chamber of Mytilini and the principal there. I am sure I would have ended up marrying one of the principal's daughters. My whole life would have been full of rhetorical sophisms, hypothetical relationships, and enormous stress. I would have lived an unhappy life like most people.

LEONTION: Our sweet and beloved teacher, every student of yours has a story to tell like our friend from Mytilini, Hermarchus. But we as women, where would have we been without you? Each and every one of us can breathe freely only in the Garden. Regardless of being married or single, most women in the city rarely get out of their homes! Even we the courtesans, that freely circulate in the city alleys, feel like animals most of the time simply because we are treated with vulgarity by most people we meet in the streets. Only you, with your divine mind, teach that women value like men.

EPICURUS: Thank you my friends, for your kind words. I feel very rich being surrounded by all of you. Remember that making friends is more beneficial than having the largest property. The cultivation of friendly relationships constitutes the safest treasure capable of shielding us from luck's ups and downs. It is much more important than the cultivation of fields.

HERMARCHUS: You have said that many times, our respectful friend, Epicurus. From all the elements that prudence uses to provide us with a happy life, the most important one is friendship.

METRODORUS: I also like your poetic phrase which says that "friendship dances around the world telling us we must wake to blessedness."

LEONTION: We all know your teaching about friendship, our good master. And we not only know it, but experience it here. You told us that happiness means lack of physical pain and no disturbance of the soul. This is exactly what we experience here in the Garden. You taught us that happiness is the sedate state of pleasure according to which we obtain physical and mental health. Outside the Garden people struggle and exhaust themselves trying to make their dreams come true. That's why they are always unhappy.

HERMARCHUS: They believe in the faulty definition given by Aristotle stating that happiness can only be achieved when a task is accomplished.

LEONTION: And the poor people outside the Garden struggle and fight against one another for wealth and power. And they are continuously unhappy because they don't understand how easy it really is to acquire true happiness!

METRODORUS: The voice of our flesh tells us that it only wants to avoid hunger, thirst and cold. If one had all this and hopes to have them in the future, he could even compete with Zeus in happiness.

HERMARCHUS: Bread, water, some clothes and friends. These are the only things that human nature requires! And that simple fact of life is exactly what you taught us, our great master, and friend of humans! We are grateful to you for that.

EPICURUS: Don't be grateful to me, my friends. We should all be grateful to the blessed Nature which made all the necessary things easy to obtain and all the unnecessary things hard to get.

METRODORUS: But no one before you talked to us about Nature in such simple words. You taught us to seek and find the truth in the dark using prudence.

EPICURUS: That's for sure. I do insist on that matter! My dear friends, the beginning and the greatest good of all, is prudence. Any man confronted with false dilemmas and impasses that cause turmoil, suffers because he does not use his prudence based on the reality of nature. For this reason, prudence is more valuable than philosophy since all other virtues are derived from it. If somebody acquires prudence, in other words practical wisdom, he never returns to his previous false beliefs. Once a man becomes wise, he will always be happy for the longest part of his life. Luck does bring some small obstacles to the wise but the bigger and more important issues that appear to wise men are easily tackled...and they will always be tackled by his wisdom throughout his life.

METRODORUS: Indeed master, your words sooth our souls. Most of the things that upset and scare people are neither worse nor truer than the things that scare little kids in the dark of the night.

EPICURUS: You are right, my friend. A man's fears are of three kinds: The first fear has to do with the possibility of not managing to fulfill his wishes. But if a man realizes that his natural and necessary needs and wishes can be easily fulfilled, he can surely escape from this fear.

LEONTION: For us women that have many daily desires, this is very difficult!

METRODORUS: Difficult but not unfeasible as it seems. Dear Leontion, I find you much more relaxed and calm now from what you used to be when I first met you.

EPICURUS: In the proper environment, all people can be calm, my friends. Let me go back to what I was telling you concerning the kinds of fear. The second fear comes from the supposedly unexpected acts of the Gods. However, my friends, having fear for the Gods is not only great nonsense but also an act of disrespect. The immortal and blissful being that we call God, never gets involved with humans, human affairs and the governance of the universe. God never gets angry and doesn't do anyone favors. All these are characteristics of weak creatures and for that reason, it is an act of impiety to believe that the divine creatures possess them. We should worship the Gods and use them as an example, as a role model for our own happiness.

HERMARCHUS: So, we should not be afraid of the divine. Act of nonsense and impiety, the fear towards the Gods.*

EPICURUS: Precisely, my friend! The third fear is the biggest. The previous two are derived from it.

METRODORUS: It is the fear of death!

LEONTION: Do you mean the fear we all feel for the death of our beloved ones?

EPICURUS: My dear, the fear of losing our beloved ones hides the fear we feel for our own death. Usually, people refuse to look at death face to face and choose to hide it behind other fears...fears like sickness, poverty, insecurity, loneliness, and the fear of the unknown.

HERMARCHUS: The fear of death is what pushes people to an endless race of acquiring more wealth and power...because deep down inside, people believe that if they are powerful, death won't touch them!

METRODORUS: This is the example of Mithres! This is exactly what happened to our friend Mithres, the officer of king Lycimachus. You had warned him many times to withdraw from politics but he ignored you, master.

EPICURUS: I had warned our friend continuously because such behavior pushes people to misfortune. The fear of death pushes the foolish people closer to death. This is what happened to Mithres. When Lycimachus was killed, Mithres was arrested by his Macedonian opponents who would have executed him if we hadn't intervened.

METRODORUS: I remember you sending me to the Macedonian guard of Piraeus that kept him imprisoned with money and a letter. You, Epicurus, rescued him! What your teachings didn't achieve because Mithres couldn't understand them - was accomplished by your friendship!

HERMARCHUS: Contradictory but true! The fear of death usually pushes people closer to death.

LEONTION: Master, isn't the fear of death somewhat justified? After all, the common end of all humans is death. Death is the end of everyone.

EPICURUS: My sweet Leontion, our goal in life is happiness. Death doesn't concern us.

LEONTION: Doesn't concern us?

EPICURUS: Look at it this way. It is so simple. As long as we exist, death doesn't exist. When death does exist, we don't. Everything good or bad is experienced through our senses. Death terminates and abolishes our senses so it doesn't concern us.

METRODORUS: My dear Leontion, the Criteria of the Truth (Canon) as well as Physics teach us all about the atomic composition of matter in nature. Planets, mountains, pine trees and humans are all composed of atoms. Everything in nature is composed of interconnected atoms. Everything that is born, lives and then dies. However, its atoms continue to exist and to compose other material bodies that are transient.

LEONTION: And the fear of fate?

EPICURUS: Fate is just a byproduct of the obnoxious imagination of poets and priests...A myth which unfortunately also deceived great philosophers like Democritus. However, other philosophers, like Anaxagoras, were not fooled. Others, still insist today, like the former merchant and former Cynic, Zeno the Cypriot. Zeno teaches Eastern fatalism in the Stoa Poikile of the Agora. But the observation of reality rejects all these beliefs. There is no fate, my friends.

HERMARCHUS: If we believe in fate, every advice and every reproach is rendered useless since we are no longer responsible for our actions.

EPICURUS: Exactly. Nevertheless, there is randomness in nature. I came to realize that after a lot of thought. The answer was maturing inside me and then, all of a sudden, it dawned on me unexpectedly! It is the random deviation of atoms from their straight vertical orbits. That swerve is the movement that started the collisions and the complex movements of the atoms that led to the creation of our world. Now I am certain. Randomness exists in Nature and that fact allows people to have free will.

METRODORUS: This is surely observed every time we are called to make a decision. There is no fate and that means it is an act of complete foolishness to fear something that doesn't exist.

EPICURUS: Well said. My dear friends, it is impossible for someone to get rid of his fears concerning important matters, if he doesn't know the very nature of the universe and chooses to believe in myths.

METRODORUS: If we don't study nature, my dear Leontion, we won't be able to know the infinite number of atoms that compose infinite worlds. Some of those worlds resemble our spherical planet, our Earth, others bear no resemblance to it.

LEONTION: Infinite worlds? How do we know that?

METRODORUS: Since it is unlikely for only one cob to grow in a huge plain, it is unlikely that only one world will be created in the infinite universe. The fact that the universe is infinite is obvious from the infinite causes that exist. Where the causes are endless, there are endless effects as well. More specifically, since the atoms are the causes, the produced derivative bodies in which the atoms are involved are also endless.

HERMARCHUS: All those things, dear Leontion, can be understood with the observation of nature, the methodology of the Criterion of the Truth (Canon) and the law of analogy. If we observe nature objectively, we will allow it to reveal itself to us.

METRODORUS: On the contrary, some who pretend to be philosophers like the overestimated Plato, prefer to narrate myths instead of observing the natural phenomena. Even the intelligent Aristotle, who accepted the credibility of observation through the senses, always tried to interpret nature with the myth of teleology in which he firmly believed. The man from Stageira

(Aristotle) insisted that everything happened and continues to happen for a specific purpose. That led him to some big mistakes. For example, he said that the planets are degenerate animals and that the crystals of minerals could be living organisms since they multiply.

HERMARCHUS: As our master Epicurus often says, we shouldn't interpret nature with arbitrary myths and void axioms but according to the natural phenomena. After all, our life doesn't need irrationality and foolish theories but calmness.

EPICURUS: You are right, my friends! Myths and whims cannot alter reality. If somebody observes nature, he will easily understand why myths are wrong.

METRODORUS: Myths don't help us understand the universal laws and explain the natural phenomena.

[Interlude]

"While you live, shine!

Have no grief at all.

Life exists only for a short while

and Time demands his due."

EPICURUS: My dear friends, we should always keep in mind the nature of things so that we may be living really* happy. I do feel that what we established together here in the Garden is very important...It is very important because it creates free people. But beware, my friends, freedom is something very personal for each and every one of us. Freedom should first take place in our mind before we spread it to society. As Pericles had righteously said, "Happy is the man who is free".

HERMARCHUS: Exactly, my friend. All people can live a happy life. No matter how many difficulties we are confronted with, we can tackle them bravely as long as we have free thought, prudence and friendship.

EPICURUS: That's true. The knowledge of nature along with prudence constitutes the free mind teach us*. They teach us that it is foolish to wait for the world to be perfect so that we may become calm and happy. On the contrary, if we truly live happily, we can then share our happiness with others and help the needy ones. And then our world will be better. My beloved friends, what we have established together here in the Garden is very important.

cc creative commons -- Christos Yapijakis

(* indicates [Sic])

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=Zw9QoJXliXg>

Post by “Martin” of December 28, 2021 at 8:35 AM

At first pass reading, this is fine with 2 clarifications:

Prudence is the greatest good - in our toolset to assure pleasure as the goal.

We have the confidence that with prudence, we can always fulfill our necessary desires. Based on the peace of mind this gives, we can make prudent choices of fulfilling unnecessary desires if we expect that their fulfillment gives us pleasures which are worth the involved pain.

Post by “Cassius” of December 28, 2021 at 12:49 PM

I have not had a chance to review this recent post - it is possible there is discussion of it in the older threads.

What I recall is that Christos has done a very nice job of combining surviving text references into a coherent play for presentation.

As such, I would expect most and maybe all of it to conform to the texts - but just like the texts the message can be misunderstood when some parts are viewed in isolation. I think Christos' intent was to produce an overview of the major concepts, and no doubt he succeeds with that.

(It is interesting to compare this to "A Few Days In Athens", which targets a different audience and is much deeper.)

I gather that what is quoted above is only a part of the text. And not the whole(?). What I recall being concerned about was the effect of sections such as from the letter to Menoecus, which as I contend regularly can be misleading to us today when read outside of the full context of the philosophy.

Those are the sections I would want to look at more closely.

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 28, 2021 at 1:15 PM

From Christos' depiction it seems that Epicurus and his friends lived a very quiet life.

But that doesn't easily translate for us... in the 21st Century.

Forum links to earlier discussions:

[The Relationship of Pleasure To Absence of Pain And Disturbance](#)

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 21, 2024 at 3:11 PM

Thank you [Patrikios](#) for mentioning this in last night's meeting, and there are a lot Epicurean concepts packed into it. After having spent more time with studying, now I can recognize so much more...and will say more soon.

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 22, 2024 at 9:56 AM

What is good about the play and the dialog is that it presents many of the basic ethics of Epicurus, which are taken from the Letter to Menoeceus and the [Principal Doctrines](#).

Yet, there are several ways to "enter" the study of the philosophy, and each way will have differing results:

1) **study the ethics only** - this is a quick way to try to study, and yet it may end up requiring a kind of "faith" (similar to religion) because the underpinnings of the philosophy may not be fully studied and then the reasons for "why" are not fully understood. This may also lead to "short-cut" ideas like "moderation", "minimalism" and "bread-and-water Epicureanism".

2) **study the "way things are" and the ethics at the same time** - Epicurus presented a worldview based on "philosophical materialism" and emphasized the utmost importance of understanding the "seeds" and causes of things. We can see this in Lucretius' De Rerum Natura. When we apply the method of studying the causes of things to our everyday lives, then our ethics is more fully informed.

Life does not unfold with a "black/white" or "either/or" set of choices -- we need to test things out, and see what feels good (pleasant/pleasurable) and what feels bad (painful/stressful). From the outside to others it may appear that we practice "moderation", but on the inside we are continually sensitive to what works best based on the unique unfolding of circumstances -- such that what many may think is pleasurable actually is no longer pleasant to us, and we discover that it has no place (and no necessity) for us -- and we aren't giving anything up at all, but

instead we are gaining pleasure by abstaining.

Like-wise for pursuing pleasure and "going for it" - we must each evaluate the situation based on our own resources and on our unique physiological needs, again with a kind of "trial-and-error" (and when we are certain that the risks aren't going to bring a terrible outcome).

Implementing the philosophy of Epicurus takes time and effort -- there is a learning curve to making good choices in life and moving toward a pleasant/pleasurable/joyous life.

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 22, 2024 at 12:46 PM

I need to add that if one picks out certain quotes or excerpts from texts of Epicurus then that will result in a particular emphasis on implementing moderation/minimalism in a kind of "black/white--either/or" manner, when in actuality there is a longer process involved which involves learning how to use prudence as a tool which leads to a pleasant and pleasurable life.

And it is important to take in a big picture view, rather than only quick snippets. The quick snippets may work as a starting point, but the next step is understanding the big picture view, which leads to developing practical applications in the modern world that we live in.

Post by “Patrikios” of November 23, 2024 at 5:17 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

when in actuality there is a longer process involved which involves learning how to use prudence as a tool which leads to a pleasant and pleasurable life.

And it is important to take in a big picture view, rather than only quick snippets.

Thanks, [Kalosyni](#) . Here is how I am beginning to see the '**big picture**' of Epicurus' teachings (while I still have more to learn).

I understand that Epicurus taught us how to use a set of tools (e.g. prudent evaluation of desires, awareness of our senses, frank speech among friends) so that we could study **Divine Nature**. Our study enables us to live in balance (*eustatheia*) with Nature, so that we are healthy in body (*aponia*), mind (*ataraxia*) & spirit/soul (*psyché*), and living well to our highest good (

eudaimonia).

That's the goal as I see it; to adopt a daily practice so we can live a life of **imperturbability** (calm and unruffled self-assurance) like the "Happy Greek". 😊❤️