

Welcome SmoothieKiwi!

Post by “Cassius” of January 6, 2022 at 10:44 AM

Welcome @smoothiekiwi !

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

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

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

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

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

1. ["Epicurus and His Philosophy"](#) by Norman DeWitt
2. [The Biography of Epicurus by Diogenes Laertius](#). This includes the surviving letters of Epicurus, including those to [Herodotus](#), [Pythocles](#), and [Menoceus](#).

3. ["On The Nature of Things"](#) - by Lucretius (a poetic abridgement of Epicurus' "On Nature")
4. ["Epicurus on Pleasure"](#) - By Boris [Nikolsky](#)
5. The chapters on Epicurus in [Gosling and Taylor's "The Greeks On Pleasure."](#)
6. [Cicero's "On Ends" - Torquatus Section](#)
7. [Cicero's "On The Nature of the Gods" - Velleius Section](#)
8. The Inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda - [Martin Ferguson Smith translation](#)
9. [A Few Days In Athens" - Frances Wright](#)
10. Lucian Core Texts on Epicurus: (1) [Alexander the Oracle-Monger](#), (2) [Hermetimus](#)
11. [Philodemus "On Methods of Inference"](#) (De Lacy version, including his appendix on relationship of Epicurean canon to Aristotle and other Greeks)
12. "The Greeks on Pleasure" -Gosling & Taylor Sections on Epicurus, especially the [section on katastematic and kinetic pleasure](#) which explains why ultimately this distinction was not of great significance to Epicurus.

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

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

Welcome to the forum!

Not Neo-Epicurean, But Epicurean

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

Our Posting Policy At EpicureanFriends.com:

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

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



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

Post by "smoothiekiwi" of January 6, 2022 at 11:34 AM

It's somehow funny to see one's own nickname referenced 😊

Anyway, I've found this forum by the Lucretius podcast and was intrigued by it. As most of the members here, I've went around and delved into Stoicism, Aristotelianism, Pyrrhonism and Epicureanism. The most influential book in that regard was "A few days in Athens", which moved me to discard my opinions and beliefs about Stoicism. Its really fascinating to think that in my age, a person could write such a great book... and it makes me a bit envious, although I shouldn't be.

Even so, I've the feeling that Epicureanism unites all of the latter three philosophies: Aristotelianism by being a wise, virtuos and happy man, Pyrrhonism by discarding unnecessary beliefs, except the evident one- that pleasure feels good and pain feels bad. And this is something extremely liberating. So I'm trying to understand this old, wise philosophy, because I've the nagging feeling that I'm missing something in Epicureanism. Not in the sense that pleasure isn't the thing we should employ to determine what is good or bad, but because there's something resulting out of this belief that transforms a regular man into Gandalf, so to speak. And I'm trying to understand this "what", and what I'm missing in the philosophy- or, to be more exact, in the application of it. Maybe my perception of Epicureanism has been shaped by Wright, but I still believe that there's something I misunderstand from this philosophy- and I'm trying to figure out, what.

Anyways, that's basically it. "Tending the Epicurean garden" by Hiram has also been a good book I've read, and I'm currently listening to the podcast and trying to figuring out whether or not I should read the poem on my own 😊

Post by “Cassius” of January 6, 2022 at 12:57 PM

Thank you for that intro!

I hope you will have DeWitt on your list, and that you will consider the [Nikolsky](#) article and the Gosling & Taylor book thereafter.

As many eyes as we can get on these issues the better off we are!

It's interesting that you were so impacted by the Frances Wright book. It's incredibly impressive as you say, but in itself it leads to some interesting issues (that we have some threads on here at the forum). Since you are focusing on its attack on Stoicism, I think you would also be interested in the sections of Cicero's "On Ends" that are attacks on Stoicism. So many people consider him to have been a stoic but those sections of On Ends make some excellent anti-Stoic

points from an unexpected direction.

Based on what you wrote if I were you I would probably NOT read the full Lucretius poem next - I would read DeWitt and the ones I mentioned above to further assist in the overall framework.

[Quote from smoothiekiwi](#)

Not in the sense that pleasure isn't the thing we should employ to determine what is good or bad, but because there's something resulting out of this belief that transforms a regular man into Gandalf, so to speak.

It might be that further explanation of the Gandalf analogy would be helpful. I am familiar with Lord of the Rings but not enough to be sure exactly what you mean or draw from the analogy.

Post by "Cassius" of January 6, 2022 at 12:59 PM

[Quote from smoothiekiwi](#)

Maybe my perception of Epicureanism has been shaped by Wright, but I still believe that there's something I misunderstand from this philosophy- and I'm trying to figure out, what.

Also --- I do think if Wright were someone's main frame of reference, there is a possibility of going off track due to her emphasis on "observation" and her unwillingness to go further in the direction of Epicurus' epistemology.

I myself haven't gotten as far as I would like in analyzing Philodemus' On Signs / Methods of Inference, but I think that Epicurus would conclude that she went somewhat too far in Skepticism and that she did not absorb, or at least embrace, his ideas on when it is proper to reach conclusions and on what subjects.

Post by "smoothiekiwi" of January 6, 2022 at 1:48 PM

Well, thanks for the answer! That was quick.

Regarding DeWitt, I've already noticed that it seems to be in high estates here on the forums- the problem is that I'm currently a student and living in Germany- which means that purchasing expensive books from across the ocean is basically impossible. Even so, I'm going to keep my eyes open.

edit: Just as I was writing this answer, I saw [this open tab](#) which referenced the book, and then clicked on the link to the pdf (by the way, it worked, so you can change the date to today if you want to). So even if I will leave this forum today, this book will be something which I'll keep with me 😊

Regarding Cicero: I've actually began reading his work, and one of the points which brought me to Epicureanism was his argumentation against it. I remember that I found many parts of it unconvincing and weak- and that brought me to Wrights book, in which I hoped to find an answer in the eternal debate of "Stoicism vs Epicureanism". And, at least for me, I can say that I found it!

Regarding the Gandalf analogy: I got inspired by the Principal Doctrine 39- "He who best knew how to meet fear of external foes made into one family all the creatures he could; and those he could not, he at any rate did not treat as aliens; and where he found even this impossible, he avoided all association, and, so far as was useful, kept them at a distance. " In some way, this image of a person who's able to always find the right way is really appealing to me- at the same time, I've to recognize that Gandalf or Kenobi is (and stays) only a movie figure. We'll never be able to meet every single obstacle with the perfect answer, or the perfect amount of virtue (sorry Aristotle), simply because we're humans. Yet I'm interested in how much Epicureanism can help with that.

And, regarding Wright: she isn't my only point of reference, in no way- but I really, really like how she portrayed Epicurus in her work, and am simply interested if that was only a figure from books and literature, or if philosophy can really help on the path of becoming such a person.

(and now, please excuse me, just a few minutes ago a huge 400- page pdf appeared on the top of my book list 😊)

Post by “Godfrey” of January 6, 2022 at 10:15 PM

Welcome smoothiekiwi!

I too became aware of Epicurus, and convinced of his importance, through reading Cicero. And Tending the Epicurean Garden was one of the first books I read after that. I, too, felt like I wasn't really getting the philosophy at that point so I'd like to share a couple of thoughts from

my journey.

Hiram as I recall was trying to find commonalities between Epicurus and other traditions, and was trying to lay out ideas for a hedonic regimen. As I've studied further I've largely rejected both projects.

I've rejected the commonalities project because, for me, it added a layer of confusion to understanding Epicurus: he needs to be understood on his own terms and in his own context. As I've studied a lot more and become more comfortable in understanding the philosophy I've become peripherally interested in his predecessors and how Epicurus was influenced by and responding to their ideas. That, however, is about following development of thought where I think Hiram was trying to incorporate practices from other traditions. Giving up on the latter allowed me to focus on Epicurus, and that's when Epicurus started to make sense!

As to the hedonic regimen, I interpret that as too structured for leading a pleasurable life due to my feeling that I need variety to prevent pleasures from becoming stale. Maybe a hedonic menu is more appropriate. But more important, I think, is understanding the Canon and the original context if you're trying to get a grasp of the philosophy. To me, that's the focus: my understanding, accepting and practicing the philosophy has grown from there.

Post by “smoothiekiwi” of January 7, 2022 at 2:48 AM

Thanks for sharing ! (And great profile picture, love it! 😄)

I think that one of the beautiful things of Epicureanism is the ability to use it „as needed“, or as a very flexible tool. Stoicism shows a clear path, without other branches: virtue is the only good, so your goal is to focus on virtue. That's it. You like photography and think that you are extraordinarily talented? It doesn't really matter, because your goal is virtue. It's better if you go into politics, because that's where you can be the most virtuous. Obviously, I'm exaggerating a bit, but the problem is real: by proclaiming virtue as the only good, all other possibilities to make the world better- by taking good photos, composing songs, being a gardener etc.-, are reduced to meaningless.

In contrast, Epicureanism allows one to freely follow his passions, as long as one a) remembers that they aren't necessary for survival and b) bring pleasure. You love taking photos? Great, go out and shoot a few! Just remember that photography isn't the only thing in your life that's worth living for.

My hedonic menu also differs a bit from Cresipo's. I, e.g., am not a fan of workouts. I've started a few times working out, did it for a span of two months, and then got bored. Instead, I've

discovered walking out with my dog for a long timespan on a sunny day as an alternative which brings me far more joy and pleasure than 15 min of concentrated workout. In that regard, my own viewpoint differs a bit from that presented in the book, but is nevertheless true to the philosophy. And I most certainly agree that a hedonic menu brings more joy than a regimen. One should leave the strict „force-yourself-to-do-that“ to the Stoics, and go more „with the flow“, without sacrificing some sort of self-moderation.

So yeah, I know that these thoughts don't really answer your post all that much, but I'm too lazy to delete this all and write a better answer. Sorry 😊

Post by “Cassius” of January 7, 2022 at 5:27 AM

[Quote from smoothiekiwi](#)

Stoicism shows a clear path, without other branches: virtue is the only good, so your goal is to focus on virtue. That's it. You like photography and think that you are extraordinarily talented? It doesn't really matter, because your goal is virtue. It's better if you go into politics, because that's where you can be the most virtuous.

I'm beginning to see why I generally like your posts and thought processes -- i think you've tagged Stoicism exactly right. For some reason it's hard for a lot of people to understand this. I tend to think it's because they can't imagine that Stoicism really asserts this, and the modern stoics do try to downplay it. But i think you're exactly right, and once this is called out most of this "Epicurus and the Stoics are so similar!" attitude evaporates.

Post by “smoothiekiwi” of January 7, 2022 at 5:52 AM

Thank you so much, glad to hear!

I think that the biggest contributor to this was the book „Rome's last citizen: The Life and Legacy of Cato, Mortal Enemy of Caesar“. The core dilemma was that when Pompeius and Caesar met in order to avoid a civil war, Caesar offered to lay down all of his legions, except one, and live out his life as the governor of Gallia. Basically, Caesar offered to save the Republic for judicial amnesty.

Cato was the one who called out for justice for Caesar's crimes; he was the one responsible for the rejection of Caesar's offer by Pompeius, and- in the end- he was the one responsible for the fall of the Republic.

This example, I think, shows the main flaw of Stoicism quite clearly. The Epicurean would think: „Caesar is out of the game? Great, lets sign this deal, avoid tens of thousands of dead soldiers and a civil war!“ But Cato, as a Stoic, stayed true to the virtue of justice, and thus condemned the Republic to a civil war against the best military commander of that time.

Virtue more often than not is a good thing, there's no doubt in that. But sometimes, its necessary for a pragmatic person to understand that the law isn't everything, that it's sometimes necessary to step over a virtue in order to ensure the greatest good for all, and avoid a lot of pain in the long process. I was one of the people who thought that Epicureanism might be reconcilable with Stoicism, but this conflict was- and stays- irresolvable for me. And, instead of being a Cato and sacrificing my life for an ideal, I think that it makes far more sense to be an Epicurus, live a good and happy life, and improving the society without sacrificing oneself.

Post by “Cassius” of January 7, 2022 at 5:58 AM

Oh my gosh excellent post, and i am showing my alzheimers again to say that I do cannot recall ever reading this detail about what you state as the offer from Caesar.

Do you know where in the historical sources this is documented? I would like to go back and read the original history of that to try to fix it in my mind.

[Don](#) and [Joshua](#) (who come to mind as really into some of the historical details) do you recall this detail and how well it is documented and your impression of the likelihood of its truth?

Part of the reason I ask is that i think you are exactly right Smoothiekiwi -- Cassius Longinus and probably even Brutus WOULD have accepted such an offer, I would think -- certainly Cassius as an explicit Epicurean in later life would have.

Post by “smoothiekiwi” of January 7, 2022 at 6:12 AM

Thanks! At least in the book, it's described as following:

Quote

„Three days later, they met at Pompey’s villa for a last attempt at peace: Pompey; Caesar’s tribunes; Cicero, struggling to play mediator; Lentulus, the fierce optimas consul; and Cato. In greener months, they could have looked out at gardens among the most beautiful in Rome, but little grew here in January. For two years, the men around Pompey’s table had thrown threats and bluffs at one another. For as long as they could remember, the Republic that gave a shape to their ambitions and a meaning to their lives had been a fragile, faltering thing, the object of all their protective suspicions. Now, they looked across the table through a thick cloud of pride and suspicions and hates, to see if they might save the Republic without war. Caesar, the tribunes opened, had authorized them to offer the following: He would give up the bulk of Gaul. He would give up all legions but two. He would retain immunity through the end of the year and would be consul during the year following. Pompey and the optimates conferred. No: They would not trust Caesar with any troops. Cicero, whose many gifts were not for war, offered a final compromise: one province, out of the way. One legion. Was this acceptable to the tribunes? It was. Was it acceptable to Pompey? A long and heavy pause. Yes. Possibly. “You’re being a fool!” shouted Cato. “You’re being deceived again!”

Post by “Don” of January 7, 2022 at 6:12 AM

No less an authority than Wikipedia 🤔 gives one citation:

Quote

Caesar made numerous attempts to negotiate, at one point even conceding to give up all but one of his provinces and legions, allowing him to retain his immunity while diminishing his authority. This concession satisfied Pompey, but Cato, along with the consul Lentulus, refused to back down. Faced with the alternatives of returning to Rome for the inevitable trial and retiring into voluntary exile, Caesar crossed into Italy with only one legion, implicitly declaring war on the senate. Plutarch, *Pompey* , 59.4

[Plutarch, Pompey, chapter 59, section 4](#)

Post by “Cassius” of January 7, 2022 at 6:15 AM

Excellent - thank you - Plutarch is where I will go!

And this is interesting, that the settlement was suggested by Cicero. So Cicero did seem to have good judgment on things other than his view of Epicurus:

[3] But Lentulus, who was by this time consul, would not call the senate together; Cicero, however, who was just returned from Cilicia, tried to effect a settlement of the dispute on these terms, namely, that Caesar should renounce Gaul and dismiss the rest of his forces, but should retain two legions and Illyricum, and wait for his second consulship.

Post by “Cassius” of January 7, 2022 at 6:20 AM

This episode (Cicero showing good practical judgment; Cato being a stubborn Stoic) would probably afford a very interesting validation that Cicero himself was not primarily a Stoic, and that his criticisms of the Stoics as adding nothing to such insights as the "academics" were very valid.

I can imagine this illustration being very useful in the right circumstances (on those many and varied situations where takedowns of Stoicism are fun and appropriate!)

Post by “Joshua” of January 7, 2022 at 7:43 AM

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

There are several scenes in the HBO series *Rome*

that deal with this historical question...for whatever *that* is worth! It plays out over a series of deliberations like the one shown here.

Post by “Cassius” of January 7, 2022 at 8:16 AM

Good dramatization. It is so hard to determine what was really going on. One uniform observation though is that regardless of how we assess any of the others, Mark Antony always seems to come out looking like a jerk 😊