

Episode One Hundred Four - More Torquatus and a Question: Was The Ancient Epicurean Movement A Cult?

Post by "Cassius" of January 7, 2022 at 8:18 AM

Welcome to Episode One Hundred Four of Lucretius Today.

This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the only complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

I am your host Cassius, and together with our panelists from the EpicureanFriends.com forum, we'll walk you through the six books of Lucretius' poem, and we'll discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. We encourage you to study Epicurus for yourself, and we suggest the best place to start is the book "Epicurus and His Philosophy" by Canadian professor Norman DeWitt.

If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

At this point in our podcast we have completed our first line-by-line review of the poem, and we have turned to the presentation of Epicurean ethics found in Cicero's On Ends. Today we continue examine a number of important corollaries of Epicurean doctrine.

Now let's join (Charles or Joshua) reading today's text:

[62] XIX. But these doctrines may be stated in a certain manner so as not merely to disarm our criticism, but actually to secure our sanction. For this is the way in which Epicurus represents the wise man as continually happy; he keeps his passions within bounds; about death he is indifferent; he holds true views concerning the eternal gods apart from all dread; he has no hesitation in crossing the boundary of life, if that be the better course. Furnished with these advantages he is continually in a state of pleasure, and there is in truth no moment at which he does not experience more pleasures than pains. For he remembers the past with thankfulness, and the present is so much his own that he is aware of its importance and its agreeableness, nor is he in dependence on the future, but awaits it while enjoying the present; he is also very far removed from those defects of character which I quoted a little time ago, and when he compares the fool's life with his own, he feels great pleasure. And pains, if any befall him, have never power enough to prevent the wise man from finding more reasons for joy than for

vexation.

[63] It was indeed excellently said by Epicurus that fortune only in a small degree crosses the wise man's path, and that his greatest and most important undertakings are executed in accordance with his own design and his own principles, and that no greater pleasure can be reaped from a life which is without end in time, than is reaped from this which we know to have its allotted end. He judged that the logic of your school possesses no efficacy either for the amelioration of life or for the facilitation of debate. He laid the greatest stress on natural science. That branch of knowledge enables us to realize clearly the force of words and the natural conditions of speech and the theory of consistent and contradictory expressions; and when we have learned the constitution of the universe we are relieved of superstition, are emancipated from the dread of death, are not agitated through ignorance of phenomena, from which ignorance, more than any thing else, terrible panics often arise; finally, our characters will also be improved when we have learned what it is that nature craves. Then again if we grasp a firm knowledge of phenomena, and uphold that canon, which almost fell from heaven into human ken, that test to which we are to bring all our judgments concerning things, we shall never succumb to any man's eloquence and abandon our opinions.

Post by "Cassius" of January 7, 2022 at 8:29 AM

I just set up Episode 104. I included only two "paragraphs" because once again (and maybe even more) they appear to me almost like outlines or bullet points - rapid fire listings of main points of the philosophy. So probably no need to bite off more than two at most.

In fact I wrote this as a private message to the podcast team but I think it's better to post it publicly. [These paragraphs of Torquatus, starting with 55 and probably going all the way to the end of what we're covering, at 72](#), might be the greatest and most clear summary of Epicurean philosophy available anywhere.

It almost cries out to be separated into bullet points as an outline of its own as a "map" of the entire philosophy.

I picked up the word "Corollaries" because I see that used as the word that is translated from the text, but I am not sure that word conveys the right meaning. "Corollaries" to me implies some kind of subsidiary status. Maybe in fact all of these are subsidiary to "pleasure is the goal and virtue isn't" in this letter, but I think it's more accurate to separate these out and consider the importance of each of them, especially since they touch on physics and epistemology with which people often don't concern themselves today.

Another analogy comes to mind: I used to have more than a few friends (I still have a few) who are really into fundamentalist Christianity. One analogy I observed them making is that they liked to talk about the "[Romans Road to Salvation](#)." (I picked the first link that came up on google so not sure how good it is.)

The analogy of course is obvious: This section of Cicero's "On Ends" is almost like a "[Torquatus Road To Understanding Epicurus](#)."

And since the commentators seem to agree that Cicero was largely quoting from one of more Epicurean handbooks as he was writing this, it's altogether possible that this presentation didn't originate in Cicero's mind but was an approved Epicurean community text laying out an outline of the points the Epicureans of that age felt it most important to be understood. And if that is indeed the case, this is a summary that predates Diogenes Laertius by as much as a hundred years or more.

Post by “Don” of January 7, 2022 at 8:50 AM

That is fascinating. These do echo Diogenes Laertius's later list of the sage's characteristics. I didn't read On Ends closely enough to pick this up! I took the liberty to put this into an actual outline. You're right. It was easy.

For this is the way in which Epicurus represents the wise man as continually happy:

- he keeps his passions within bounds;
- about death he is indifferent;
- he holds true views concerning the eternal gods apart from all dread;
- he has no hesitation in crossing the boundary of life, if that be the better course.
- Furnished with these advantages he is continually in a state of pleasure, and there is in truth no moment at which he does not experience more pleasures than pains.
- For he remembers the past with thankfulness, and the present is so much his own that he is aware of its importance and its agreeableness, nor is he in dependence on the future, but awaits it while enjoying the present;
- he is also very far removed from those defects of character which I quoted a little time ago, and when he compares the fool's life with his own, he feels great pleasure.
- And pains, if any befall him, have never power enough to prevent the wise man from finding more reasons for joy than for vexation.
- [63] It was indeed excellently said by Epicurus that fortune only in a small degree crosses the wise man's path, and that
 - his greatest and most important undertakings are executed in accordance with his own design and his own principles,

- and that no greater pleasure can be reaped from a life which is without end in time, than is reaped from this which we know to have its allotted end.
 - He judged that the logic of your school possesses no efficacy either for the amelioration of life or for the facilitation of debate.
 - He laid the greatest stress on natural science. That branch of knowledge enables us to realize clearly the force of words and the natural conditions of speech and the theory of consistent and contradictory expressions; and
 - when we have learned the constitution of the universe we are
 - relieved of superstition,
 - are emancipated from the dread of death,
 - are not agitated through ignorance of phenomena, from which ignorance, more than any thing else, terrible panics often arise;
 - finally, our characters will also be improved when we have learned what it is that nature craves.
 - Then again if we grasp a firm knowledge of phenomena, and uphold that canon, which almost fell from heaven into human ken, that test to which we are to bring all our judgments concerning things, we shall never succumb to any man's eloquence and abandon our opinions.
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Post by "Cassius" of January 7, 2022 at 8:55 AM

THANK YOU! It is fascinating to think that the echo indeed goes the other way. I understand Diogenes Laertius dates to maybe 200 AD(?) This from Cicero dates to approximately 50 BC so quite a bit earlier. And of course the Epicureans were notably faithful to the original writings of Epicurus, so the soundness and traceability of these points to Epicurus himself would seem to be very reliable.

LOTS we can do with this material so we will be sure to go through it carefully in the podcast.

Post by "Cassius" of January 7, 2022 at 9:13 AM

You know, we now have [a copy of Joshua reading this entire section](#), so we'll always be able to refer to that for inspiration.

I know, however, that we have some other really good "readers" here too with radio-style voices. [Matt](#) and @EricR immediately come to mind, as well as [Don](#). And although I have not heard [Kalosyni](#) read anything, I bet she could read well too, and a female voice tends to both appeal to the men and to be relatable to other women.

If any of these people ever feel inspired I would hope they would consider taking a stab at an audio reading of this particular text. All of it of course that we've pasted [here is very good, but if that's too much to tackle, I would recommend starting at this paragraph XVIII and going as far as possible to the end. \(Don't want to miss the part about how we should be ashamed not to have learned these things as children!\)](#)

"XVIII. What a noble and open and plain and straight avenue to a happy life! It being certain that nothing can be better for man than to be relieved of all pain and annoyance, and to have full enjoyment of the greatest pleasures both of mind and of body, do you not see how nothing is neglected which assists our life more easily to attain that which is its aim, the supreme good? Epicurus, the man whom you charge with being an extravagant devotee of pleasures, cries aloud that no one can live agreeably unless he lives a wise, moral and righteous life, and that no one can live a wise, moral and righteous life without living agreeably."

On the page linked above we also have the Rackham version, and it is possible that some of us might prefer that version. It's actually a little smoother, and in some ways superior, but occasionally it seems less literal and that's why we went with Reid for the podcast.

If anyone decides to take up this challenge please post and we'll promote the results. I am sure a lot of us would get endless enjoyment by listening to this selection over and over in different voices.

Post by "Don" of January 7, 2022 at 9:43 AM



I laugh when I think I had originally thought when I was involved in the Cicero portion of the podcast that that Torquatus material could be all covered in six weeks. LOL! You all are doing a great job really digging into this work! As always thank you for this and keep up the good work!

Post by "Kalosyni" of January 7, 2022 at 2:25 PM

[Don](#) the above outline you made is great!!!!!!

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 7, 2022 at 3:15 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

And although I have not heard Kalosyni read anything, I bet she could read well too

I would be up for doing some audio reading (as long as I know beforehand how to correctly pronounce some of the proper names)...and would enjoy the process of making something enjoyable to listen to. 😊

Post by “Cassius” of January 9, 2022 at 11:29 AM

I am happy to say that we spent the *entirety* of today's show addressing @smoothiekiwi 's questions on arrogance and cultism, and I think we'll conclude eventually that this was one of our better episodes. I'll get it published asap but it's a long one so will be a couple of days.

This event makes an obvious point: we really ought to look over the list of [FAQs](#), clean them up, and consider devoting a podcast to going through each one.

Post by “Joshua” of January 9, 2022 at 12:20 PM

Quote



I laugh when I think I had originally thought when I was involved in the Cicero portion of the podcast that that Torquatus material could be all covered in six weeks.

Oh, you'll love this episode! 😄

Show Notes:

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2320-episode-one-hundred-four-more-torquatus-and-a-question-was-the-ancient-epicurean/>

Because we are looking at a passage that has Torquatus speaking extensively about "the wise man", we took the opportunity to discuss---and at great length---two recent questions raised by @smoothiekiwi.

[Was Epicurus a cult-like figure?](#) And,

[Was Epicurus arrogant?](#)

The first thing we want to do is thank smoothiekiwi for participating in the forum, for reading Norman Dewitt's book, and most of all for raising these excellent and fair questions. We spoke for an hour and a half about these two threads, but I don't want anyone to think that ours is the last word on these subjects. I hope to see more activity in those threads, and I have more to add myself.

On Epicurus' Portrait;

The best resource for this is [The Sculpted Word](#), by Bernard Frischer, who writes extensively on the statues, frescoes and portrait-rings of Epicurus, and how they relate to his philosophy.

On rings;

[A few threads](#) on the subject at this forum.

On [Cults](#);

[A checklist](#)

[Inscription](#) of Diogenes of Oenoanda, translated by Martin Ferguson Smith

Alexander the Oracle Monger, by [Lucian](#)

On the character of Epicurus, by [Diogenes Laertius](#);

It is an open question how reliable Diogenes Laertius is as a biographer of Epicurus. It is widely agreed by scholars that his biography of Epicurus is the best one he wrote, and this does indicate some sympathy or partisanship on the biographers' part. It is an absolutely key surviving text for our school.

On the Pythagoreans;

[This](#) website is very spammy with ads, but it does explore the cultlike behavior of the Pythagorean school. If someone finds a better resource, we can replace this one.

[A Few Days in Athens](#), by [Frances Wright](#)

This book, written by an extraordinary woman in the nineteenth century and highly praised by Thomas Jefferson, is great "light-reading" on Epicurean philosophy. It is written as a novel, and is perhaps not thoroughly accurate--but it is very engaging.

We had a very pleasant conversation today, and I hope others will enjoy it as well. I once again thank @smoothiekiwi for raising some very important questions!

Post by “Joshua” of January 9, 2022 at 12:33 PM

More Notes;

Two more threads that are highly relevant;

[Episode Thirty-Eight](#): Epicurus as father-figure

[Reverence and Awe in Epicurean Philosophy](#)

Post by “Cassius” of January 9, 2022 at 3:36 PM

Thank you for those notes Joshua!!! For all that work the "trophy" icon is just not enough.

Post by “Joshua” of January 9, 2022 at 4:18 PM

The hardest part is remembering what we talked about 45 minutes before-hand.

But happy birthday to the podcast! At 1 a week for 52 weeks in a year, episode 104 is the two-year mark. Thanks to all involved---including the listeners! The 7th of January sounds like a good day to celebrate that, right? ☐☐

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2320-episode-one-hundred-four-more-torquatus-and-a-question-was-the-ancient-epicurean/>

I was sufficiently impressed by the line-by-line reading of Lucretius. Here's to the coming year!

Post by “Cassius” of January 11, 2022 at 7:26 AM

Couple of quotes that come to mind more as Epicurus' Birthday material than anything else, but touched upon in this episode:

This is the opening to Book Three, comparing Epicurus to a father figure. I think we mentioned this on the podcast episode and it is a good reflection of what I think is a healthy attitude of respect and appreciation without crossing the line into cultism. Is it "enthusiastic"? Yes. But is it over the line into cultism, or unjustified given the prominence he achieved? I don't think so.

Quote

THOU, who out of deep darkness didst first avail to raise a torch so clear, shedding light upon the true joys of life, 'tis thee I follow, bright star of the Greek race, and in thy deepset prints firmly now I plant my footsteps, not in eager emulation, but rather because for love I long to copy thee; for how could a swallow rival swans, or what might kids with trembling limbs accomplish in a race to compare with the stout strength of a horse? Thou art our father, thou discoverer of truth, thou dost vouchsafe to us a father's precepts, and from thy pages, our hero, even as bees in flowery glades sip every plant, we in like manner browse on all thy sayings of gold, yea, of gold, and always most worthy of life for evermore.

Seems like one of the sections somewhere makes the point that Epicurus' fame had spread much wider after his death than when he was alive. Maybe I am thinking of this from Book 6, or just of another translation that says it differently (this is Bailey):

Quote

IN time gone by Athens, of glorious name, first spread among struggling mortals the fruits that bear corn, and fashioned life afresh, and enacted laws; she, too, first gave sweet solace for life, when she gave birth to the man gifted with the great mind, who once poured forth all wisdom from his truthful lips; yea, even when his light was quenched, thanks to his divine discoveries his glory, noised abroad of old, is now lifted to the sky.

Post by “smoothiekiwi” of January 11, 2022 at 9:47 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2320-episode-one-hundred-four-more-torquatus-and-a-question-was-the-ancient-epicurean/>

Quote

The first thing we want to do is thank smoothiekiwi for participating in the forum, for reading Norman Dewitt's book, and most of all for raising these excellent and fair questions. We spoke for an hour and a half about these two threads, but I don't want anyone to think that ours is the last word on these subjects. I hope to see more activity in those threads, and I have more to add myself.

[Joshua](#), thank you very much! It almost feels as if every time I came here, there's some nice person waiting out there to say something nice. Feels good, and thank y'all 😊

And I'm honestly very interested in listening into this episode (although I've to admit that there are over 90 episodes which I've yet to listen), but your whole podcast is a pure pleasure to listen to- although it requires a bit of concentration, which isn't easy to get. Still, it brings a lot of fun to listen to it!

By the way, @Cassius- I was, when I listened to it the first time, really surprised about the audio quality. It seems as if there's some sort of compression going on, because the audio quality isn't the best. Do you know anything about this? It honestly took me a bit of time to "adjust" myself to the audio quality, which one might interpret as worse compared to other podcasts. By no means I want to discredit your work or the quality of the podcast- I myself love listening to it-, but it might help in understanding and attracting more listeners if the audio quality was higher.

Post by “Joshua” of January 11, 2022 at 10:07 AM

We're a fairly hodge-podge operation right now 😊

We record through Skype with a combination of cell service and internet, and I'm currently recording in a car for lack of a better alternative. Improvements can certainly be made!

Post by “Cassius” of January 11, 2022 at 10:13 AM

I think Joshua is correct that the quality issue is probably related to Skype, but it's not clear that that's the whole problem. I don't think any of us are using super-professional equipment so

that's probably part of the issue. If you are good with technology and have suggestions, let me know.

(Also, I know that I AM compressing somewhat to reduce the audio file size from the raw skype to the final file uploaded to the podcast provider. I will look into that issue as well.)

Post by “smoothiekiwi” of January 11, 2022 at 10:43 AM

I also thought that out might have something to do with your recording tool or the microphone, but the introductory music seems to be already compressed- I'm almost certain that the "original" soundtrack had a better audio quality, so that has nothing to do with the Skype recording. By the way, how is the track called?

Post by “Cassius” of January 11, 2022 at 10:53 AM

If I get your question, it is uploaded as an MP3. I will experiment with a larger file size when I upload the next episode

Post by “Cassius” of January 11, 2022 at 8:00 PM

This is a long podcast taking time to edit into final form but I'll occasionally add a note for future listeners. When talking about the potential for Epicurus being arrogant we touched on the issue of Epicurus having his father celebrate the birthday of his mother and brother (if I remember correctly). The point I'd like to drop in here is that while that may sound strange, most arrogant people I know generally ask that their own birthday be celebrated, rather than someone else's. Of course you could say that the strangeness increases the arrogance, but I think everything can be viewed from multiple perspectives and each person has to add the the whole picture for themselves.

Post by “Don” of January 11, 2022 at 8:41 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2320-episode-one-hundred-four-more-torquatus-and-a-question-was-the-ancient-epicurean/>

FYI: Diogenes Laertius, book X.18.

"And from the revenues made over by me to Aynomachus and Timocrates let them to the best of their power in consultation with Hermarchus make separate provision (1) for the funeral offerings to my father, mother, and brothers, and (2) for the customary celebration of my birthday on the tenth day of Gamelion in each year, and for the meeting of all my School held every month on the twentieth day to commemorate Metrodorus and myself according to the rules now in force.³¹ Let them also join in celebrating the day in Poseideon which commemorates my brothers, and likewise the day in Metageitnion which commemorates Polyaeus, as I have done hitherto."

Post by "Don" of January 11, 2022 at 10:41 PM

Using that last post: There are a lot of offerings and celebrations that Epicurus makes provisions for in his will:

- for the funeral offerings separately to
 - my father
 - mother
 - and brothers
- for the customary celebration of my birthday on the tenth day of Gamelion in each year [oops! So it's the 10th and not the 7th??]
- for the meeting of all my School held every month on the twentieth day to commemorate Metrodorus and myself according to the rules now
- join in celebrating the day in Poseideon which commemorates my brothers
- likewise the day in Metageitnion which commemorates Polyaeus, as I have done hitherto.

From the wording, it appears most if not all of these events were going on already, and Epicurus was just making plans for them to continue after he died. And everyone who is being commemorated here is dead already, except Epicurus himself. So, Epicurus commemorates the lives of those who have died on an annual basis and monthly in the case of Metrodorus being commemorated on each 20th. I'm curious if all this was common practice in ancient Greece with birthdays and commemorating the dead. This is a little off target but here is one perspective: <https://news.uark.edu/articles/12089...ancient-history>

It seems that the dead - although Epicurus's philosophy clearly states that the dead no longer exist - are still "part of the family," they have a continued influence on the living through memory of them. How much more influence on the living community of Epicureans would

Metrodorus, Polyaeus, and eventually Epicurus himself have, even after they ceased to exist.

Post by “smoothiekiwi” of January 12, 2022 at 9:22 AM

[Don](#), that's a good point, you've convinced me... still, did Epicurus introduce the celebration of his birthday while he was alive, or when he was dead? Because, as strangely as it sounds, that might be an important difference.

Post by “Cassius” of January 12, 2022 at 2:17 PM

On the "Was Epicurus Arrogant" issue, probably [this text reference from Cicero's "On The Nature of The Gods"](#) is relevant:

Quote

Hereupon Velleius began, in the confident manner (I need not say) that is customary with Epicureans, afraid of nothing so much as lest he should appear to have doubts about anything. One would have supposed he had just come down from the assembly of the gods in the intermundane spaces of Epicurus! “I am not going to expound to you doctrines that are mere baseless figments of the imagination, such as the artisan deity and world-builder of Plato's *Timaeus*, or that old hag of a fortuneteller the *Pronoia* (which, we may render ‘Providence’) of the Stoics; nor yet a world endowed with a mind and senses of its own, a spherical, rotatory god of burning fire; these are the marvels and monstrosities of philosophers who do not reason but dream.

Post by “Cassius” of January 12, 2022 at 10:26 PM

Episode 104 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. This week our episode is devoted mostly to the questions about Epicurus being arrogant and whether his movement was a cult. Thanks for the questions!

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/48275567>

Post by “smoothiekiwi” of January 13, 2022 at 8:56 AM

Hurrah! 😁

Post by “Cassius” of January 13, 2022 at 9:17 AM

You're the star of the show, except I am afraid that I sometimes botched your name as "smoothkiwi" instead of "smoothiekiwi."

Post by “smoothiekiwi” of January 13, 2022 at 1:41 PM

Wait, what? I appear in one of my favorite podcasts? That's honestly one of the coolest things I could've imagined... well, to be honest, I never could've imagined that, because it simply seems so unreal that wise people speak over my little thoughts, but I'm still very glad :)))

Post by “smoothiekiwi” of January 13, 2022 at 4:28 PM

By the way, I've started listening on it- and [Joshua](#) , you read beautifully! I really enjoy your style of reading, and your calm voice. It sounds great!

Post by “Godfrey” of January 13, 2022 at 5:01 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2320-episode-one-hundred-four-more-torquatus-and-a-question-was-the-ancient-epicurean/>

Also of interest to the "arrogance" of Epicurus is a paper regarding Leucippus that I've attached here:

Post

[RE: Epicurus On The Issue of Materiality - Ultimate Particles](#)

Attached are two brief papers on the origins of ancient atomism, discussing how it was a response to Parmenides' theory of Being.



Godfrey

January 13, 2022 at 4:53 PM

Post by "Don" of January 13, 2022 at 10:35 PM

I'm only half way through the episode, but this is definitely an enjoyable one! Nicely done.

I was going to post this over in the arrogance thread, but thought this was also appropriate.

I seemed to remember in Sedley's translation and commentary of Epicurus's On Nature, Book XXVIII, Epicurus being a little self-deprecating. One example comes at the very end:

Quote

So let the words which we have prattled suffice for the present. And you others, try ten thousand times over to commit to memory what I and Metrodorus here have just said.

And now I think I have finished prattling to you this twenty-eighth instalment of our consecutive lecture series.

Epicurus actually does use the word ἀδολεσχέω which means "talk idly, prate [talk foolishly or at tedious length about something]" So I get the image of him and Metrodorus having a "bull session" in front of the students in the Garden, and then laughing and going "Okay, I think we're done for now."

That never struck me as the behavior of someone who was arrogant.

Post by "Cassius" of January 14, 2022 at 7:43 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2320-episode-one-hundred-four-more-torquatus-and-a-question-was-the-ancient-epicurean/>

Thanks for that! Seems like there are also instances in Cicero of an Epicurean saying something "with a smile" in a similar way to what you are referring to here. And Ciceros jabs at Velleius in On the Nature of the Gods as talking as if he had just come from the intermundia, and his remarks to Cassius in his letters also seem goodhumored and not nasty. And of course Lucians works are full of humor in conveying Epicurean points.

I would go so far as to say i think it would be generally out of character for an Epicurean to have a "sour" disposition.

Post by “Don” of January 14, 2022 at 10:15 PM

Finally finished up on the way home tonight.

Incidentally, thanks for the couple shout-outs 😊

This was a good episode, gentlemen. Well done. These more freewheeling discussions are very helpful and engaging. I really liked the specific mentions of the forum and our extended discussions here. 👍👍

Post by “Don” of January 14, 2022 at 10:34 PM

I did have a question and observation:

(1) Both [Joshua](#) in this episode and DeWitt in his book say that Epicurus was definitely not a complete empiricist. I'm curious why that is.

To me, Epicurus seemed exactly to be described as that:

Quote

a person who supports the theory that all knowledge is based on experience derived from the senses.

Am I misunderstanding something in the definition of empiricism? I'm also not being argumentative, just curious.

On the topic of Epicurus's being "dogmatic," the word used in Diogenes Laërtius's work is

δογματιεῖν

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, δ , δμω-ή , δογμα^τ-ζω](#)

with the sense of decree or "lay down as an opinion."

From the context of DL, I get the sense that it is a counter to the Cynics and Skeptics in that the wise one will take a firm stand and not be wishy-washy.

[Epicurean Sage - Declare their beliefs and not remain in doubt](#)

Hicks: He will be a dogmatist but not a mere sceptic; Yonge: he will pronounce dogmas, and will express no doubts; Mensch: He will assert his opinions and will...

sites.google.com

Post by “Joshua” of January 15, 2022 at 12:49 AM

Quote

Both [Joshua](#) in this episode and DeWitt in his book say that Epicurus was definitely not a complete empiricist. I'm curious why that is.

Well, of course I'm influenced by DeWitt in arriving at this conclusion, but I think it's a good one.

Quote

a person who supports the theory that all knowledge is based on experience derived from the senses.

Sensation, in my view, is the body's (and by extension, the mind's) system for the passive collection of environmental data. Like a Mars rover, the human body has "instrumentation" that gathers information about it's surroundings--unlike a Mars rover, these instruments are biological.

I use the word *passive* advisedly; the ancient Epicureans used the classic example of a 'square tower seen from far away' to demonstrate that the sensations were always *accurate* (another term chosen with care); the fact that a square tower looks round from far away is not, to the Epicureans, a case of failed sensation. "The eye is reporting accurately what a square tower *looks like* from far away".

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2320-episode-one-hundred-four-more-torquatus-and-a-question-was-the-ancient-epicurean/>

This appears at first glance to be a kind of fudging--an end-run around the Skeptics' objection to the reliability of sensation. But the job of the senses is merely to report data. The senses do not have a role in analyzing that data. Analyzing sensory input is a higher-level function, and therefore not directly epistemic.

A strict empiricist gets that far, and stops. Sensation is the *only* direct source of knowledge. An Epicurean isn't done yet, though. It's true that sensation is a direct source of knowledge, but that gives us just one leg of the canon.

If the canon is to be understood as a valid theory of epistemology, then the other two legs *must not rely on sensation for their source of knowledge*. They must be direct sources of knowledge in their own right.

So when we look at *pathe* and *prolepsis*, we must begin to understand these as co-equal with sensations and not contingent upon them. A mind deprived of sensory organs would not experience sensations, which are oriented toward the external world, but it would still experience *pathe*, 'feelings', because the feelings are oriented toward perceiving the internal world of the mind itself. This is a difficult concept to get hold of! If Epicurus had not allowed for mental pleasure and mental pain, his epistemology would fall apart here.

Prolepsis is an even more difficult concept to get hold of, and I really continue to struggle with it; from my understanding, this involves conceiving of things one has not sensed or felt. You might have sensed a horse with your eyes, and likewise a man; but your "experience" of a centaur is a mental preconception of something you have not sensed. I am VERY open to being corrected on this point!

Each leg of the canon is a refutation of the ideas of other schools. The Skeptics thought knowledge was impossible because the senses were flawed. Epicurus' treatment of sensation is meant to answer this objection.

Plato had argued that teaching someone something they didn't already know was impossible, because unless they had an idea of the thing they could not begin to understand what was being described to them. The Prolepsis answered this quandary by proposing that new images could arise in the mind out of the mingling of previously-imprinted felt or sensory images.

And the inclusion of the feelings meant that the 'good' could be yanked down from Plato's unsubstantiated 'universal form of the good', that it could be known directly and understood by every human of average capacity, and that this good could be pursued by all as pleasure.

To a first-order approximation, I think it's fair to use the word empiricism--with caution!--to describe Epicurus' approach to understanding things in nature. But when we analyze the canon in the fullness of its utility for the student of philosophy, the word 'empiricism' comes up short.

Post by "Cassius" of January 15, 2022 at 5:34 AM

I think Joshua's points are correct as far as they go, but in order to really grapple with DeWitt's full opinion on this we would need to go to his chapters on epistemology to pull out exactly what he says about it, especially the sections where he contrasts Epicurus with John Locke and calls Locke's (or was it Gassendi's?) view of Epicurus's empiricism and calls that "naive."

(I am going to write this from memory first before I check the sources.)

What I recall is that the point is more centered on (1) anticipations, which Joshua touched on, but also (2) Epicurus' use of deductive logic, which firmly depends on the senses, but *does* go beyond them.

Let's take (2) first, and as I write this I am struck by how important this issue is and how it no doubt is something that a Frances Wright will not swallow. In my view this is why she writes her material late in AFDIA about the essence of science being observation, and basically rejecting all turning of observation into theory. (If you want to trace that further, she does that even more explicitly in some of her collected lectures that were published later.)

As I recall DeWitt pointing out, Epicurean physics goes further than just observation to take positions on things that can never be touched or observed directly by the senses -- such things as the existence of atoms and on many basic questions of the universe (Is it eternal? Did it have a beginning in time? Does it have an end in space?)

DeWitt points out that Epicurus took firm positions on these issues through deductive chain reasoning (I clearly recall reference to chain reasoning in this context so we can word search on that too).

As such, the theory of Epicurean physics is validated by observation that the information of the senses does not contradict the theory, and in fact supports the theory so strongly that we can be "certain" of it -- but the theory itself was never first in the senses.

And this goes further into the profound issues to of Death (we've never been there to observe it first hand) and the gods (more complex due to the issue of images, but we've never been to the intermundia to observe it directly as one might argue a "strict empiricist" would demand.

Now yes, DeWitt also links this issue to anticipations, and here is where DeWitt uses the word "intuitionist" in contrast to empiricist. We've had many discussions on this difficult issue but this is where deWitt references the Velleius material and says that at least one aspect of the anticipations is to provide sort of a genetic code that unfolds like a flower which does not at birth contain any stored information (wisdom? knowledge? data?) but which is genetically coded to dispose us to think in particular directions (the two topics Epicurus mentions DeWitt says are justice and divinity - and maybe time too? I would have to check on time).

This puts Epicurus in direct contradiction to Aristotelian and Lockean "blank slate" theory which is more consistent with empiricism ('nothing in the mind that did not first come through the senses').

So I think DeWitt is really ultimately making his statement in the context of the blank slate contention, which I think is tightly related to empiricism (and is or should be findable if we looked up empiricism and studied its origins).

That's a start let me save this before i lose it.

But yes I think DeWitt is correct on this. And in my mind, I link this to the argument I regularly reference in the book by Jackson Barrwis "Dialogue on innate Principles" which is a full-front attack on John Locke based largely on this same issue. (Which I thought highly enough to [make a site about](#), although it appears to need total revamping as only some of the links work.)

Post by “Don” of January 15, 2022 at 6:01 AM

[Joshua](#) and [Cassius](#) , 👍 👍

Both your posts were extremely helpful. Thank you very much for taking the time to compose them! I think I get it now and concur with your conclusions. And, [Joshua](#) , we all (I think) continue to wrestle with the anticipations 😊

This also helps contextualize that word δογματιζω (dogmatizō), too, when you say (emphasis added):

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Epicurus took firm positions on these issues through deductive chain reasoning

That's exactly what I think is meant by the use of the word unfortunately translated by some as the English "dogmatic." The original meaning in the texts strikes me as being exactly aligned with [Cassius](#) 's statement.

Post by “Cassius” of January 15, 2022 at 6:07 AM

Some key paragraphs:

Chapter 7:

Quote

It is an even worse mistake to have confused the tests of truth with the content of truth, that is, the tools of precision with the stones of the wall. This was the blunder of Pierre Gassendi, who revived the study of Epicurus in the seventeenth century. It was his finding "that there is nothing in the intellect which has not been in the senses." From this position John Locke, in turn, set out as the founder of modern empiricism. Thus a misunderstanding of Epicurus underlies a main trend of modern philosophy. This astonishing fact begets an even greater concern for a correct interpretation, which may cause Locke to appear slightly naive.

Example of the chain reasoning issue:

Quote

It still remains to glance at the paradox in which Epicurus involves himself by employing reason to dethrone reason as the chief criterion. He places himself in a position similar to that of the skeptic who denies the possibility of certainty in knowledge, thus depriving his own skepticism of certainty.

This paradox, moreover, does not stand alone. It is also paradoxical that Epicurus should have omitted reason from his Canon and at the same time accepted a great body of truth accumulated by the reasonings of predecessors and set these down among his Twelve Elementary Principles of Physics. From this inconsistency he thought to escape by treating each of these principles as if a theorem of geometry. For example, to demonstrate that the universe is infinite in respect of both matter and space, he resorts to a disjunctive syllogism.¹⁴ If matter were infinite and space finite, the latter could not contain the former. Again, if matter were finite and space infinite, then matter would be lost in space and no clashes or combinations of atoms would occur. Since these alternative assumptions lead to absurdities, the conclusion is that the original proposition is true. With such reasoning even a Stoic logician could find no fault.

Chapter Eight:

Quote

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2320-episode-one-hundred-four-more-torquatus-and-a-question-was-the-ancient-epicurean/>

THE criteria are three, but the prevailing custom is to reduce them to one by merging the Anticipations and the Feelings with the Sensations. This error arises from classifying Epicurus as an empiricist, ascribing to him belief in the infallibility of sensation, and then employing this false assumption as a major premise.

Post by “Cassius” of January 15, 2022 at 6:18 AM

DeWitt's main argument is here:

Quote

EPICURUS NOT AN EMPIRICIST

In the chapter on the New Physics it will be shown that Epicurus set up Twelve Elementary Principles, which he demonstrated like theorems of geometry, thus classifying himself as a deductive reasoner. The presumption that he was an empiricist has been based in large part upon the zest with which he brandished certain arguments in refutation of the skeptics, who denied the validity of sensation. These arguments are succinctly recorded by Laertius and more amply by Lucretius. The succinct account begins: "Nor does anything exist that can refute the sensations, for neither can a sensation in a given class refute the sensation in the same class, because they are of equal validity, nor can the sensation in a given class refute the sensation in another class, because they are not criteria of the same phenomena." *1* The first limb of this statement has reference to the objection urged by the skeptics that one drinker reports the wine to be sour and another sweet or one bather reports the water to be warm and another cold. The answer of Epicurus was sensible, that the difference was in the observers.² Neither does the one judgment cancel the other, because each has validity for the observer, nor does the contradiction prove the fallibility of sensation, because the sensation in each instance performs its function as a criterion.

The second limb of the statement means that the ears cannot contradict the nose if the latter registers the smell of peppermint, which calls for no comment.

A subsequent item in the list of Laertius may seem to support the advocates of empiricism: "nor again can reason refute the sensations, because it depends upon them entirely." However, to interpret this as meaning that the whole content of consciousness is derived from the sensations would be in violation of the Canon, which makes no mention of reason, and would also be contrary to the belief in Anticipations,

that is, innate ideas, which is a kind of intuitionism and incompatible with empiricism. The meaning is rather that bereft of the sensations a human being is virtually dead, which, as already mentioned, we know to have been an argument of Epicurus.⁸

There is still another item in the list of Laertius that has been so translated as to lend plausibility to the charge of empiricism. One version runs, "For all thoughts have their origin in sensations," and another, "For all our notions are derived from perceptions." ⁴ The source of the error is an imprecision. The Greek noun translated above as "thoughts" or "notions" is *epinoiai,* which by virtue of its prefix signifies accessory, derivative or inferential ideas. These secondary ideas are not to be confused with others which to them are primary, *ennoiai* or *ennoemata.* For instance, Epicurus in the Little Epitome outlines seven of his Twelve Elementary Principles and then adds: "Even this brief statement affords an outline of the nature of the real existences sufficient for inferential ideas *(epinoiais\)."* ⁵ To illustrate: the principle that the universe consists of atoms and void is a primary idea; the knowledge that the soul is distributed over the whole organism is secondary; it is inferred from the sensation of touch and other phenomena. ⁶

Other plausible reasons for ascribing empiricism and belief in the infallibility of sensation to Epicurus will disappear if the ambiguities be cleared up that inhere in the statement "[all sensations are true](#)." If "sensation" and *sensus* be a rendering of *aisthesis,* which means the perception of particulars such as color and shape, then it was idle for Cicero to be arguing against Epicurus, because Aristotle often enough declared the perception of particulars to be always true.⁷

It consequently follows that *sensus* must correspond to "phantasia," an inference confirmed by the evidence of Plutarch and Sextus Empiricus.⁸ This term was employed in the same sense by Aristotle and Epicurus; it signifies the composite image of particulars. Both recognized the possibility of error, but Epicurus was more keenly interested in this factor because by his time the vogue of skepticism had made the erection of criteria a vital necessity. He was consequently at pains to locate the source of error, and he found it in the hasty action of the automatic mind. For example, the boat on which the observer is a passenger is standing still but it seems to be moving when a second boat is passing by. In such an instance the eyes are not playing the observer false; it is the hasty judgment of the automatic mind that is in error. However odd it seems in English, Epicurus called this "the addition of opinion." In explanation of this the statement should be recalled, that "sensation is irrational and incapable of adding or subtracting anything." It is the automatic mind that adds motion to the standing ship and subtracts it from the moving ship. Lucretius cites several examples of similar errors.⁹

In order to follow this topic through it is necessary to elucidate a point of terminology and semantic development. In all ages of the Greek language terminology was plastic. Thus Aristotle could employ *phantasia* to denote the imaginative faculty while using *phantasm* of the individual appearance, whether true or false.¹⁰ Epicurus, having a different concern, truth and error, restricted *phantasia* to true and real appearances, using *phantasm* only of the false visions of the insane or of dreamers and also of the phenomena of the heavens, which he declared too remote for clear observation.¹¹ He even urged his disciple to scorn "those who concede dependable vision *(phantasia)* from distances," where the best scholars emend with misplaced ingenuity.¹²

Yet this is only part of the story. With Aristotle the term *phantasia*, not being restricted to true presentations, readily serves to denote visions of the imagination as a faculty. It is from this use that the English language has been enriched by the derivatives *fancy* and *fantasy*, which denote the absolutely unreal. From this same drift of semantic change we have the word *fantastic*. Epicurus, on the contrary, having chosen *phantasia* to denote a true presentation, employed *fantastic* to describe the objectively true or real. It becomes a synonym of *immediate* and opposed to the remote. For instance, it makes no difference whether he writes "the immediate perceptions" or "the fantastic perceptions." Both alike pertain to the joint activity of the senses and the mind, by which it is recognized that the animal standing over there is an ox or that the man approaching is Plato. These perceptions are "fantastic," strange as the usage seems, because they result in recognitions. The imagination is not involved.

While Epicurus was adamant in his determination to defend the validity of the sensations as being the means of direct contact between man and reality and as possessing precedence over reason, he exhibits no desire to defend the individual sensation. The fallacies of those who impute to him belief in the infallibility of sensation lie partly in their failure to observe the ambiguity of the word *true* and in their confusion of "truth" with "value."

It is not difficult to differentiate the various meanings of *true* and it is essential to right understanding. For example, when Epicurus declared that "the phantasms seen by the insane and in dreams are true," he meant that they were "real" and existed independently of the madman or the dreamer, because "they act as a stimulus and that which does not exist does not deliver a stimulus." ¹³ These phantasms, however, are not "true" in the sense that a sensation experienced by the waking observer is true. The dreamer may have a vision of a centaur but no centaurs exist in real life. If the waking man sees an ox, then the sensation is true because the stimulus is delivered by a living ox.

A still different meaning of *true* may be discerned when Epicurus denominates his system as "true philosophy." He means it is true in the sense that his Twelve Elementary Principles are true or in the sense that the modern scientist believes the accepted calculation of the speed of light to be true. This may be called absolute truth, if there is such a thing.

It remains to speak of the relatively true. The views of a tower at various distances may be cited as examples. Each is true relative to the distance; its value as evidence of the facts is another matter. This distinction was no novelty to the ancients; Sextus Empiricus sets it forth at some length in a discussion of Epicureanism.¹⁴

Also worthy of mention is the sensation which is optically true but false to the facts. An example much brandished by the skeptics was the bent image of the oar immersed in the water.¹⁸ Epicurus made logical provision for this difficulty: "Of two sensations the one cannot refute the other,¹⁶ because we give attention to all sensations." This statement alone would acquit him of belief in the infallibility of sensation, because it is distinctly implied that some sensations are employed to correct others.

The example of the tower will serve as a transition from the topic of ambiguity to that of confusion. When modern scholars seize upon the saying "[all sensations are true](#)," which appears nowhere in the extant writings of Epicurus, and stretch it to mean that all sensations are reliable or trustworthy or "that the senses cannot be deceived," they are confusing the concept of truth with the concept of value.¹⁷ They overlook the fact that even a truthful witness may fall short of delivering the whole truth or may even give false evidence. The distant view of the square tower is quite true relative to the distance but it fails to reveal the whole truth about the tower.

To assume that Epicurus was unaware of these plain truths, as one must if belief in the infallibility of sensation is imputed to him, is absurd. It is because he was aware that the value of sensations, apart from their truth, varied all the way from totality to zero, that he exhorted beginners "under all circumstances to watch the sensations and especially the immediate perceptions whether of the intellect or any of the criteria whatsoever." ¹⁸ Obviously, so far from thinking the sensations infallible, he was keenly aware of the possibility of error and drew sharp attention to the superior values of immediate sensations.

When once these ambiguities and confusions have been discerned and eliminated, it is possible to state the teaching of Epicurus with some of that precision by which he set high store. In the meaning of the Canon, then, a sensation is an *aisthesis.* All such sensations may possess value; otherwise there would be no sense in saying, "We pay attention to all sensations." Their values, however, range all the way from totality to zero. The value is total only when the sensation is immediate. For example, when Aristotle says, "The sense of sight is not deceived as to color," this is true only of the

close view, because colors fade in more distant views.

Sensations, however, usually present themselves in combinations of color, shape, size, smell, and so on. An immediate presentation of such a composite unit is a *phantasia.* All such presentations are true, but they do not rank as criteria in the meaning of the Canon, for the reason that the intelligence has come into play. An act of recognition *(epaisthesis)* has taken place in the mind of the observer, which is secondary to the primary reaction that registered color, shape, size, smell, and so forth.

That Epicurus did not regard these composite sensations as criteria is made clear by a statement of his own: "The fidelity of the recognitions guarantees the truth of the sensations." 19 For example, the animal standing yonder is recognized as a dun-colored ox. This is a secondary reaction. Only the primary perceptions of color, shape, size, and so on constitute a direct contact between man and the physical environment. The truth of these perceptions is confirmed by the fidelity of the recognition.

Again, let it be assumed that the quality of sweetness is registered by sensation. It is not, however, sensation that says, "This is honey"; a secondary reaction in the form of a recognition involving intelligence has taken place. This, in the terminology of Epicurus, is "a fantastic perception of the intelligence." These were not given the rank of criteria by Epicurus for the reason already cited. It is on record, however, that later Epicureans did so.20

So far is Epicurus from believing all sensations to be true in the meaning of the Canon that he guards against error in various ways. In the first place, attention must be paid to all sensations, as already mentioned. Next, the sensations of the individual must be checked by those of others: "Consequently attention must be paid to the immediate feelings and to the sensations, in common with others in matters of common concern and individually in matters of private concern and to all clear presentations of every one of the criteria." 21 This guardedness was imperative, because contemporary skepticism was flourishing.

The problem of skepticism is attacked disjunctively in the Authorized Doctrines: either all sensations are rejected as valid evidence or some are admitted and some rejected. The former procedure is dealt with in Doctrine 23: "If you are going to make war on all the sensations, you will not even have a standard by reference to which you shall judge those of them which you say are deceptive." This makes it plain once more that not [all sensations are true](#) but the validity of some must be checked by the evidence of others.

The Doctrine above is directed at the outright skeptics. The second limb of the disjunctive approach deals with the Platonists, who rejected terrestrial phenomena as deceptive while accepting the evidences of celestial phenomena. Epicurus denied "clear vision *(phantasia)* from distances," if only the text be not emended.22 He

wrongly insisted that heavenly phenomena could be explained from the terrestrial. This betrayed him into committing his most notorious blunder; for the reason that the magnitude of a fire does not seem to diminish with distance as does that of concrete objects he declared the sun to be no larger or only a little larger than it appears to be.²³ This ridiculous judgment calls for no comment, but it may be mentioned that Plato's belief in astral gods, however grandiose, is no more acceptable. Epicurus not only censured Plato for accepting the evidence of celestial phenomena while rejecting that of terrestrial phenomena but also condemns him as a mythologer: "Whenever a man admits one phenomenon and rejects another equally compatible with the phenomenon in question, it is manifest that he takes leave of all scientific study of nature and takes refuge in mythology." ²⁴ Hostility to Plato was combined in this case with contempt of mythology.

Nevertheless Doctrine 23 throws light upon the working of the mind in respect of the criteria. Mental activity may be automatic or volitional. It is the automatic mind that errs; it may judge the distant tower to be round; this is the error of "opinion." The discreet observer knows the distant view to be deceptive and suspends judgment until the tower is observed at close hand. A tentative judgment is then confirmed or disproved.²⁵ In the case of the size of the sun, which is visible but never at close hand, the judgment held good, as Epicurus believed, because not contradicted.

The sensations are consistently regarded as witnesses in court.²⁸ Their evidence may be false, as in the case of the oar half-immersed in the water, which appears to be bent. False evidence is to be corrected by that of other sensations. The evidence of all witnesses must receive attention. The volitional mind, as opposed to the automatic mind, which errs, functions as judge.

By way of concluding this account of the Sensations as criteria it is well to present a synoptic view of the evidence. Nowhere in our extant Little Epitome or the Authorized Doctrines do we find the statement "that [all sensations are true](#)." On the contrary, the Epitome begins by urging the student "to give heed to the sensations under all circumstances and especially the immediate perceptions whether of the intelligence or of any criterion whatsoever," which manifestly allows some value to all sensations and special value to immediate sensations.²⁷ At the end of the Epitome the student is warned to check his own observations by those of others.²⁸ These authentic statements are incompatible with belief in the infallibility of sensation. They presume belief in gradations of value among sensations and also the need of perpetual caution against error.

Of three Authorized Doctrines devoted to the topic, 23, 24, and 25, the first urges attention to "all the clear evidence"; the second warns that the rejection of all the sensations leaves the observer without the means of checking sensation by sensation;

the third warns of the confusion resulting from rejecting any particular sensation. All of these are of the nature of warnings and completely belie the reckless verdict of an otherwise meticulous scholar "that the Epicureans boldly said that every impression of sense is true and trustworthy." 29

Lastly, in every instance above mentioned the word for sensation is *aisthesis *and not *phantasia.* That somewhere Epicurus had actually written "all phantasias are true" seems certain; in which of his writings it is unknown, but the evidence is sufficient.³⁰ This statement, as being assailable, was pounced upon by his detractors and zealously ventilated. If, however, the extant texts of Epicurus be taken as a guide, the phantasia or "fantastic" perception is merely the highest grade of evidence; the *aisthesis, *the perception of particulars, is the criterion.

Display More

Post by “smoothiekiwi” of January 15, 2022 at 8:39 AM

By the way- I've finally finished the episode, and you've greatly shown why Epicureanism isn't a cult. I think that the boundary between a nice community and a cult isn't that large, and it's easy to overstep it- but Epicureanism isn't the right candidate for that, in contrast to other communities (looking at you, Christianity!)

So thank you for taking the time in that episode- I'm not sure how the other members of the forum perceived it, but for me it was really pleasurable to listen to your answers. Maybe there's place for both formats- some sort of "questions from the listeners" and text analysis? I think that both formats have their validity; the one is really helpful in attracting new people, the other is great in order to understand the philosophy deeper and better. Just a thought 😊

Post by “Don” of January 15, 2022 at 9:20 AM

btw, I laughed out loud in the car at [Cassius](#) 's mention of our only time limit is "our inevitable death". 😄 Can't argue with that!

Keep up the good work!

Post by “Cassius” of January 15, 2022 at 10:16 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

limit is "our inevitable death"

Yes have to keep the discussion light and breezy! 😊

Post by “Cassius” of January 15, 2022 at 10:17 AM

Yes we are going to find a way to devote some time to questions, either topical from the forums (probably) or going through the FAQ, or both

Post by “Cassius” of January 15, 2022 at 1:29 PM

I very much want to finish our series on Torquatus as efficiently as we can before we add a regular feature to the weekly podcast of answering one or more questions because I think the Torquatus material is a great outline of the most important points that we need to cover as an overview of the basics. We ought to be in the "home stretch" now but it will still take maybe as much as two months to finish - we will see.

In the meantime if questions get posed that are so basic and so frequently asked, like the cult question, we can find a way to work something in.

Do just let us know somewhere if there is a burning issue that needs more than what we do here in threads at the forum.

Cause frankly almost any question that comes up will probably fit within one of the topics Torquatus is about to list in outline form.

Post by “Bryan” of January 17, 2022 at 3:11 PM

Great podcast! It is often suggested that we could think of the senses as "honest witnesses" of the outside world and our brain as the judge sitting inside the courtroom. Sceptics do not trust the witnesses, Epicureans do trust the witnesses. An Epicurean understands that the witnesses (i.e. the senses) honestly report to him what they experienced, but what they experienced may not totally correspond to what actually happened. The larger number of (honest) witnesses the Epicurean judge has, the more accurate his impression of reality will be.

If you think the honest witnesses are liars you will have no ability to find out the truth, if you think the honest witnesses are completely accurate you will have a false impression of the truth -- if you understand the witnesses are honest, but flawed, you can increase your accuracy by generalizing the testimony of the witnesses.

Post by "Cassius" of January 17, 2022 at 4:22 PM

That is a very eloquent statement of the point, and worded like that it seems so obvious and clear that no one in their right minds could ever doubt it. Thank you!