

"Medicine" of Epicurus: Removing Fear and Finding Freedom

Post by "Kalosyni" of May 31, 2022 at 1:09 PM

I found this good post by [Elli](#) which highlights the "medicine" of Epicurus, as dealing with removing the fear of God (gods) and the fear of death. And that these two factors are the cause of the other fears which commonly plague the minds of many. If anyone has more to add or further questions, we could start dialog regarding this "Medicine of Epicurus". And I am wondering how hedonic calculus fits in, which normally I see as dealing with making choices in regard to pleasure. Maybe this is simple, or maybe there is more than what meets the eye?

Quote

Just two greek words that have the same root and these are the "farmako" which means the <<pill>> and the "farmaki" which means the <<poison>>.

"Frugalix" the newly invented medicine that a doctor gives to all of his patients without to examine the first causes and the details of the causes i.e. the symptoms of each one of his patient's illnesses. And then this doctor thinks that he gave the right farmako=pill that for many will be transformed into farmaki=poison. Sorry, but this one is not a doctor, he is a charlatan.

The letter to Meneoceus has such a strong structure that can't be unstructured by any charlatan because it is in accordance with the right study of Nature and the methodology of the Canon.

First thing first is that when someone has the desire to speak in public for EP, he has to examine what are the first causes that make the people for being greed, unfriendly and consumers without prudence. First, we examine the General Picture that is Nature, then we examine the causes, the details of the causes, the things akin to them and then we speak about the consequences. (see the ending paragraph to Pythocles)

The main causes

Fear of god

Fear of death

some details of the causes

Fear of pain

Fear to accept and withstand the reality

Fear to be responsible

Fear to be free

Fear to give and get on the basis of the common benefit that is the basis of friendship.

Fear or embarrassment to accept finally that pleasure is the goal in life as Nature has set for us.

And the tool/methodology

Ignorance of what is the tool/methodology and how Epicurus uses it for making the hedonic calculation that lead to the liberation of those fears.

The main causes and some details of the causes that make someone to be greed, unfriendly, lonely, harsh, arrogant, depressed and a consumer without prudence and that means also that the selling and buying of useless things is the placebo pill to cover the fear of death that is the most important fear that leads to the vicious circle of the mentioned as above fears that are decoded with behaviors that lead to the incoherence of a society and finally its decadence.

Epicurus in his letter to Meneoceus says to us for what purpose and how we can philosophize. He brings and is connecting all the concepts in real life for being experiences and for not being as abstractions and words without meaning. Then he examines the main causes i.e. the fears, some details of the causes and then he examines the consequences for giving his proposals e.g. the algorithm on the desires that lead the people to the : self-sufficiency that is connected with the right study of Nature that is connected with the generosity that is connected with freedom that is connected with prudence and all these that spring from the inner self that possesses eudaemonia which means that when someone possess eudaemonia he possesses himself i.e. he is FREE and that means also that he is not compromised and subordinated to his masters for living like andrapodo=slave.

And all these according to the circumstances of the experiences in the reality that measured rightly and prudently through the hedonic calculation for leading to the natural goal that is pure pleasure.

ES 49. It is impossible for someone to dispel his fears about the most important matters if he does not know the Nature of the universe but still gives some credence to myths. So without the study of Nature there is no enjoyment of pure pleasure. (see Principle

Doctrine 12).

Beauty and virtue and such are worthy of honor, if they bring pleasure; but if not then bid them farewell!

Display More

You can find the original post [here](#).

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 31, 2022 at 1:43 PM

I wonder if some kinds of modern therapy or modern psychology can end up being a kind "false medicine"? I ask this question because if the fear of death is not adequately dealt with, then anxiety persists. I discovered recently that my own sister is taking anti-depressants (and yet she is a devout Christian so her religion seems like it isn't helping).

There are many fears in modern life that we must work through, and then the question is: Does Epicurean philosophy help remove the various fears that can arise?

I think that the fear of the future turning out badly is a primary fear among many. We can't enjoy life if we have fears about the future. And now it seems that climate change is a widespread stimulus for fear. The rate of inflation is also a stimulus for fear (especially among retired folks). Fear of future food shortages -- my own family recently sending text message on the family text thread about an egg shortage.

And then also we must think about what is rational, and what is actually true (and not just a news hype). And support each other in maintaining courage to face the unknowns of the future -- so wise friendship is very important.

Post by “Eikadistes” of May 31, 2022 at 2:26 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

I wonder if some kinds of modern therapy or modern psychology can end up being a kind "false medicine"?

I have *Bipolar 1* so paranoia is part of my makeup and many moons ago I discovered a blind spot owned by Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) for my condition. At the time, I was in the middle of acknowledging paranoid feelings about a group of people I was calling my friends. My Psy.D. and I worked through exercises that slowly desensitized me to anxiety I felt around groups. I went from a period of being recluse and antisocial to performing onstage.

Still, the strides that I made could not prepare me for the following: **that** group *really did* have ill intentions planned for me, and more than one individual was involved in methodically acting on those ill intentions. "You don't have anything to feel anxious about" as a blanket statement was inadvertently poison, because I needed to hear, "You *may* suffer from irrational paranoia, but, *in this case*, your paranoia is justified and the objects thereof are worthy of suspicion."

Having a trusted friend in my corner was as important as a proper chemical balance. A medical professional can only do so much. It takes the support of a trusted friend to know you well enough to offer nuanced advice. A psychologist, therapist, or counselor can only work with so much. Someone close to you has an invested interest in your health, and (in an era of constant moving and job-switching) is more reliable than a doctor you infrequently see.

Anyway, CBT made it easier for me to go on to tolerate *the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune*. What it failed to do was provide direction. In my case, how can I distinguish *justified suspicion* from *unjustified paranoia*? Under a microscope of academic psychology, I seemed to be obsessing over unhealthy thoughts. In a larger context, I was *actually* obsessing over making a critical decision that warranted my anxious behavior.

As a side note, one thing you learn in theatre is that the general anxiety thespians call "first night jitters" is actually a net positive gift from nature. You stop performing as well when you get desensitized to the crowd and stop caring.

Post by "Cassius" of May 31, 2022 at 3:46 PM

Great posts - my comments are not of the same quality but here goes:

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

And I am wondering how hedonic calculus fits in, which normally I see as dealing with making choices in regard to pleasure. Maybe this is simple, or maybe there is more than what meets the eye?

Given that "pleasure" includes everything in life that we find worth pursuing, I see the calculus that Epicurus was suggesting as embracing every single moral choice.

[Quote from Nate](#)

It takes the support of a trusted friend to know you well enough to offer nuanced advice.

Yes, it takes friends to accomplish a lot of things, and to sustain them. The individual acting alone isn't going to go nearly as far as he/she can with friends on their side.

[Quote from Nate](#)

Anyway, CBT made it easier for me to go on to tolerate the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. What it failed to do was provide direction.

That's one of the core criticisms I read about CBT -- it doesn't suggest a positive idea of what a healthy human being will do once "cured" of temporary problems, and without an orientation toward how to proceed positively in life it amounts to looking to Tylenol or Aspirin as the goal of life.

[Quote from Nate](#)

In a larger context, I was actually obsessing over making a critical decision that warranted my anxious behavior.

Yep. I sometimes think that we (in general, in today's world) aren't nearly anxious ENOUGH! We've blinded ourselves with religious-like incantations to endure the anxiety that ought to be there even more than it is now if we fully realized that the train is indeed coming down the track we're standing on.

Post by "Kalosyni" of May 31, 2022 at 4:27 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I sometimes think that we (in general, in today's world) aren't nearly anxious ENOUGH! We've blinded ourselves with religious-like incantions to endure the anxiety that ought to be there even more than it is now if we fully realized that the train is indeed coming down the track we're standing on.

That "train" being death? --- Or the end of civilization?

Either religion/"new age" self-help, or unnecessary consumerism -- Yet now I realize that unpleasant feelings sometimes help motivate action. But optimistic anxiety (knowing what needs to be done and doing it) may give better results than pessimistic anxiety (giving up/hopelessness). But at what point do you decide to keep "partying" even if the "Titanic" may be sinking?

[Quote from Nate](#)

It takes the support of a trusted friend to know you well enough to offer nuanced advice.

That can sometimes be difficult, as even friends don't fully understand the situation. Or you would need to have wise friends.

Post by "Cassius" of May 31, 2022 at 4:41 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

That "train" being death? --- Or the end of civilization?

definitely not the state of being dead, because that brings no pain. Don't want to stray too far into politics here, but I think we can safely make the general observation that there are lot of very unpleasant things potentially on the horizon well short of the end of civilization. That leads to the next comment:

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

But at what point do you decide to keep "partying" even if the "Titanic" may be sinking?

I suppose if you were absolutely sure that you were going to die then a little more partying makes sense.

But in most cases, even if you were actually on the Titanic, I think it would make the most sense to use every second to scour the decks looking for devices that might help you float long enough to be rescued. "Necessity is the mother of invention." So as far as "the end of civilization" goes there are a lot of alternatives for someone really committed to survival and living on happily. It's a basic Epicurean core value that we don't need commercialism or luxury and there are plenty of places left in the world where one can live simply away from the crowd. Most of the things we talk about as the end of civilization are more the loss of luxuries than something that is impossible to survive if we put our minds to it ahead of time and intelligently.

Post by "Godfrey" of May 31, 2022 at 5:04 PM

Quote

Quote

[Quote from Nate](#) Anyway, CBT made it easier for me to go on to tolerate the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. What it failed to do was provide direction.

That's one of the core criticisms I read about CBT -- it doesn't suggest a positive idea of what a healthy human being will do once "cured" of temporary problems, and without an orientation toward how to proceed positively in life it amounts to looking to Tylenol or Aspirin as the goal of life.

For me, one of the keys of EP is that it encourages opening to the nuances of your feelings. I find this far more efficacious than relying on reason or conforming my thinking to religious doctrine. However I have no clinical conditions (that I'm aware of) and I recognize that reason and religion can be effective up to a point, and some people are content to stop there. But, personally, not taking that last step of becoming intimately aware of my feelings falls short of allowing me to live my most pleasant life.

Post by "Kalosyni" of May 31, 2022 at 5:16 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

So as far as "the end of civilization"

Well now I can imagine that there are as many ideas of what this would be like, as there are people -- and also differing ideas of: if or when. And I have my own thoughts as well. I sure hope that I am able to be with good friends, if that great misfortune ever does occur.

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 31, 2022 at 5:45 PM

This seems like a good Epicurean saying to ponder, regarding the future:

41. One must laugh and seek wisdom and tend to one's home life and use one's other goods, and always recount the pronouncements of true philosophy.
-

Post by “Don” of May 31, 2022 at 11:26 PM

Quote from Cassius

But in most cases, even if you were actually on the Titanic, I think it would make the most sense to use every second...

In these contexts, I harken back to a Tibetan Buddhist saying:

Quote

If you were to fall to your death from a very great height it would be a shame not to enjoy the view as you fell, or to appreciate the wind in your hair or warmth of the sun on your face.

So, yes, if there's a chance of survival, work on surviving. If you fall out of an airplane, squeeze the last iota of pleasure from your life.

Post by “Kalosyni” of June 1, 2022 at 8:11 AM

After this last post by [Don](#), just remembered this Zen story:

Quote

A man was walking across a field when he saw a tiger. Fearing for his life, the man fled, but the tiger gave chase. The man reached the edge of a cliff, and just as he thought the tiger would get him, he spotted a vine growing over the edge of the cliff. Grabbing on to it, he swung himself over the edge to safety.

The tiger came to the edge and snarled at him from above. While precariously perched like this, the man saw another tiger growling at him from below. Trembling, he held on to the thin vine that was keeping him from being dinner for the tigers. What could be worse than this, he wondered.

Just then, two mice scampered out and began gnawing at the vine. As they chewed and the man pondered over his fate, he saw a juicy, red strawberry on a ledge next to him. Grasping the vine with one hand, he plucked the strawberry with the other. Ah, how sweet it tasted!

This Zen story always struck me as very different than most Zen stories, as it points toward a sensual pleasure of taste. It is also a kind of contemplation on mortality. For further reading on this koan [click here](#).

I would say this is a very Epicurean way to deal with death.

Post by “Cassius” of June 1, 2022 at 9:08 AM

I see this on that page:

Now, some Googling revealed to me that there are different views of what this story is intended to teach us. Live in the moment is a common interpretation. A contrary perspective is *don't be distracted by pleasure*.

I'm much more in favor of *live in the moment* than *don't be distracted by pleasure*.

If indulging in the strawberry in fact distracts us from finding our way out of the cliffhanging, then indeed it's a bad thing to do even more so from an Epicurean perspective than from any other.

Seems to me the key here - and this is why Don and most of us don't care for hypotheticals is that your choice of contextual facts says as much about you as it does anything else.

To presume that there's no way out of problems becomes an attitude as much as the opposite "can-do" attitude -- the well-known "Captain Kirk" alternative of changing the rules of the game rather than giving in to defeat without every last possible exertion.

So i can see why the quote includes the "don't be distracted" alternative.

Do we see life as suffering where we bounce from one life-threatening dilemma and we have to scrap every little bit of happiness we can before we are devoured by tigers?

Or are we in charge of our lives and moving as aggressively as possible to experience pleasure and avoid pain?

For those who haven't seen it before this portrays the alternative views better than anything else I've seen. While I would say Epicurus wouldn't embrace either alternative exactly as portrayed here, I see the Epicurean view as much closer to that of the Cavell / Raymond Massey (the tall guy who is excited about the moonshot and wants to explore the universe), with Buddhist views as much closer to Parsworthy (the shorter guy who says the moonshot is "monstrous" and calls humanity "so fragile, so weak - little animals" and asks for an "age of happiness" and "rest"):

"it is this, orthat, *all the universe*, or nothing. Which shall it be?"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KRRXtymX50U>

Post by "Cassius" of June 1, 2022 at 9:15 AM

Also to the tiger example, and Epicurean might say: "What the heck are you doing hanging out around cliffs where tigers are everywhere?"

See Lucretius Book Five:

If you think

The feats of Hercules compare with his,

You'll wander in error, almost out of your mind.

How could that gap-mouth, the Nemean lion,

Harm us today? What could the bristly boar

From Arcady do, or the Cretan bull, or the freak

Of Lerna, ruffed with poisonous snakes, accomplish?

Of what avail Geryon's triple menace,

Bronze-plumed Stymphalian marsh birds, or the fire

Blown out by Diomed's horses? And that dragon,

Glowering fierce and huge, coiled round a treetrunk,

Guarding the golden apples of the west

By the Atlantic's merciless rage of rock

And shore - how could he damage us? We never

Go there, not one of us; neither do strangers,

Barbarians, folk uncivilized.

Post by "Joshua" of June 1, 2022 at 10:02 AM

Quote

The twelve labors of Hercules were trifling in comparison with those which my neighbors have undertaken; for they were only twelve, and had an end; but I could

never see that these men slew or captured any monster or finished any labor. They have no friend Iolaus to burn with a hot iron the root of the hydra's head, but as soon as one head is crushed, two spring up.

-Thoreau, Walden

Post by "Cassius" of June 1, 2022 at 10:51 AM

Joshua what is Thoreau referring to a "trifling in comparison with those which my neighbors have undertaken"?

What neighbors and what labors?

This is relevant to something I was considering yesterday. I was re-reading Nietzsche's "Antichrist," and finding myself in agreement with most of it, but with the strong exception of the following "Chapter" 30. The wording here is typically roundabout but to the extent Nietzsche is labeling Epicurus or Epicureanism as "afraid" of pain I think that is absolutely wrong. Nor do I think Epicurus was "extremely susceptible to pain and irritation" or that "touch" was unendurable.... So of course to call Epicurus a "decadent" in these terms I believe to be absolutely incorrect.

That's why I ask about the background of Thoreau's comment..... I definitely see that the accusation Nietzsche raises can be justified in some situations, and I can see the possibility of referring to Hercules' efforts in the wrong way might be a symptom of that. In the Lucretius example, I don't see a motivation of "fear" or "extreme sensitivity" --- I see simple common sense being used to avert mortal danger, and I see Lucretius as praising Epicurus for defeating enemies much more subtle and oppressive than lions. And of course we know that Epicurus said we explicitly sometimes choose pain.

Without knowing Thoreau's comparison however I wonder what Thoreau's point was?

Der Antichrist 30.

The instinctive hatred of reality: the consequence of an extreme susceptibility to pain and irritation—so great that merely to be "touched" becomes unendurable, for every sensation is too profound.

The instinctive exclusion of all aversion, all hostility, all bounds and distances in feeling: the consequence of an extreme susceptibility to pain and irritation—so great that it senses all resistance, all compulsion to resistance, as unbearable anguish (—that is to say, as harmful, as prohibited by the instinct of self-preservation), and regards blessedness (joy) as possible only when it is no longer necessary to offer resistance to anybody or anything, however evil or dangerous—love, as the only, as the ultimate possibility of life...

These are the two *physiological realities* upon and out of which the doctrine of salvation has sprung. I call them a sublime super-development of hedonism upon a thoroughly unsalubrious soil. What stands most closely related to them, though with a large admixture of Greek vitality and nerve-force, is epicureanism, the theory of salvation of paganism. Epicurus was a *typical decadent*: I was the first to recognize him.—The fear of pain, even of infinitely slight pain—the end of this *can* be nothing save a *religion of love*...

Post by “Kalosyni” of June 1, 2022 at 1:18 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Also to the tiger example, and Epicurean might say: "What the heck are you doing hanging out around cliffs where tigers are everywhere?"



True!

[Quote from Cassius](#)

don't care for hypotheticals

Yes, and this hypothetical story could be interpreted many ways. I see it as dealing with things we can't avoid such as "death and taxes". And dealing with the feeling of fear which might arise at death, and we are not immortal -- and this question: Can you be clear minded enough as you become conscious that your death is imminent? Can you be so awake to the unfolding of every moment that you taste and enjoy whatever delicious things come your way?

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Or are we in charge of our lives and moving as aggressively as possible to experience pleasure and avoid pain?

The word "aggressively" conjures up hard work of some kind -- doing hard work to experience pleasure is personally not my cup of tea. The hardest work I think I will ever try to take on for the sake of pleasure will hopefully be sometime in the next three years -- to go on a trip to Greece. I don't travel well (can't sleep on long intercontinental flights) nor adjust to time changes very easily, nor sleep very well in hotels, but I think I am willing to try to make the net result be more pleasureable than the pain that will occur (it may end up being a tie). If there needs to be pain of any kind, it is not for the sake of "looking good" or to appear smart or virtuous, but only as a function of a necessary tool that moves toward pleasure.

Perhaps I have a more delicate constitution than some folks -- too much stress or noise can cause me stomach pains or digestive problems -- I think there is room for all of us under the Epicurean umbrella -- we who are more delicate can root for and applaud the courageous, strong, and daring pleasure-seekers, without needing to apologize or feel guilty or worry about defending our choices and delicate constitutions. 😊

Post by “Joshua” of June 1, 2022 at 1:48 PM

Thoreau was talking about his townspeople that were inheriting or buying unproductive farms. He also wrote a lot about the condition of the Irish immigrants who were clearing bogs and laying in the railroads.

Thoreau was writing about 15 years after the invention and commercialization of the McCormick Reaper, an implement that was perfect for the rolling plains of the prairie states, but ill-suited for the rocky, mountainous and forested land of New England. The farmers in and around Concord were unable to compete with the Midwest, with the railroads ensuring that western crops could swiftly reach Eastern markets.

The result was too often debt and penury for the small-time landowners, and exploitation and abjection for the Irish laborers. Thoreau favored self-sufficiency as a mode of living, and abundant leisure time as its greatest fruit, and felt that others could profit by his example.

But of course he was Harvard educated, unmarried with no children, had the opportunity to stay with family, etc.

Post by “Don” of June 1, 2022 at 8:05 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

the well-known "Captain Kirk" alternative of changing the rules of the game rather than giving in to defeat without every last possible exertion.

Ah, the Kobayashi Maru...

[Kobayashi Maru - Wikipedia](#)

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Also to the tiger example, and Epicurean might say: "What the heck are you doing hanging out around cliffs where tigers are everywhere?"

Well, if you live somewhere where tigers are an actual not uncommon danger (which is I believe the origin of this story), you don't really get a choice of hanging around where tigers are a danger. You're already there.

(I realize your comment was mostly tongue in cheek, but just saying.)

Post by “Kalosyni” of June 2, 2022 at 7:33 AM

Thank you [Don](#), that was an interesting wikipedia:

Quote

[Entertainment Weekly](#) said the *Kobayashi Maru* test is one of the top ten elements of *Star Trek* with which non-fans are likely to be familiar;^[5] writing for Tor, [Keith DeCandido](#) said "everyone knows that the *Kobayashi Maru* refers to a no-win scenario".^[6]

...The term has been applied to real-world scenarios with no perceived positive outcome or that requires out-of-the-box thinking, such as [climate change](#),^[10] constitutional law,^[11] education,^[12] and the casting of the Ancient One character in [Doctor Strange](#).^{[13][14]} Commentators have used Kirk's unorthodox answer to the Kobayashi Maru test as an example of the need to redefine the premises upon which an organization operates—changing the rules rather than playing within them.^{[15][16]} Computer security educators have used the *Kobayashi Maru* to teach students to think like an adversary, and that by stepping outside the rules of the game one can redefine

the game.[17] Ideas and products focusing on immersive learning have also been compared to the realistic, immersive nature of the *Kobayashi Maru* test.

Wondering, do we have a "Kobayashi Maru" situation when it comes to Epicureanism? So perhaps we need to "redefine the rules" -- For Epicurus' ideas to survive, and also our interpretations to survive, we will need to go beyond the scant remaining writings, we will need to thoughtfully express specific Epicurean interpretations and assertions on modern issues -- and the best way may be to write and publish a book outlining these interpretations.

Post by “Kalosyni” of June 5, 2022 at 5:34 PM

Continuing on with more on the "Medicine of Epicurus":

Vatican Saying 81 (from Monadnock)

"One will not banish emotional disturbance or arrive at significant joy through great wealth, fame, celebrity, or anything else which is a result of vague and indefinite causes".

From a practical standpoint, I would say that emotional disturbance is anything above and beyond natural reactions and natural emotions. Both positive and negative emotions are part of life. Emotions give us feedback to know what to move toward and what to move away from in a given situation, so all emotions are life serving, even painful ones.

Yet I would say that there are certain feelings that indicate a need for some kind of intervention (help from friends or a therapist). These would be overwhelming feelings (or emotional disturbances) such as hopelessness, long-lasting anger or sadness, chronic lethargy, or long-lasting feelings of anxiety or overwhelm. I can only recommend finding a therapist to help sort through these kinds of chronic emotional disturbances.

This Vatican Saying 81 also points to the idea that there are specific and definite causes of joy in life. What is joy? Is it the same as happiness? When the naturally good things in life come to us, we feel happiness. A good meal (and the right kind of food and the right amount of food) brings pleasure and we can feel happy in that experience. Also, spending time with those we love brings happiness. Doing activities we enjoy brings happiness. Having work that is interesting and not too taxing on the body (and not too mentally stressful).

Some ideas about: **What are some mental conditions which lead to happiness?**

1. You don't compare yourself to others as being less than in some way, but instead you know what your strengths and weaknesses are and you keep those in mind or in perspective as you

navigate through life.

2. You don't feel badly about yourself or internally put yourself down -- instead you feel effective, and you feel you have a certain amount of control or choice over your circumstances. (See [PD16](#))

3. You have supportive relationships in your life and people who you enjoy talking to, and you can share smiles and laughter, because you have things which you share together that you both can smile about. (See VS 52)

4. You have interesting things that you like to do, and have fun and enjoyment engaging in those activities.

5. You don't spend a lot of your time worrying about the future. (See [PD39](#)).

6. Of the people in your surrounding community, you don't think badly of anyone and they don't think badly of you. (See [PD40](#))

Thoughts? Is there anything else that should be on this list?