

Episode One Hundred Thirty-Seven - The Letter to Menoeceus 04 - On Death (Part Two)

Post by "Cassius" of August 25, 2022 at 5:27 PM

Welcome to Episode One Hundred Thirty-Seven 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 ancient Epicurean texts, 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.

Today we continue our discussion of [Epicurus' Letter to Menoeceus](#), and we complete our discussion of "[Death is Nothing to Us](#)" and related issues. Now let's join Kalosyni reading today's text:

BAILEY:

[126] But the many at one moment shun death as the greatest of evils, at another (yearn for it) as a respite from the (evils) in life. (But the wise man neither seeks to escape life) nor fears the cessation of life, for neither does life offend him nor does the absence of life seem to be any evil. And just as with food he does not seek simply the larger share and nothing else, but rather the most pleasant, so he seeks to enjoy not the longest period of time, but the most pleasant.

And he who counsels the young man to live well, but the old man to make a good end, is foolish, not merely because of the desirability of life, but also because it is the same training which teaches to live well and to die well. Yet much worse still is the man who says it is good not to be born but _'once born make haste to pass the gates of Death'._

[127] For if he says this from conviction why does he not pass away out of life? For it is open to him to do so, if he had firmly made up his mind to this. But if he speaks in jest, his words are idle among men who cannot receive them.

We must then bear in mind that the future is neither ours, nor yet wholly not ours, so that we may not altogether expect it as sure to come, nor abandon hope of it, as if it will certainly not come.

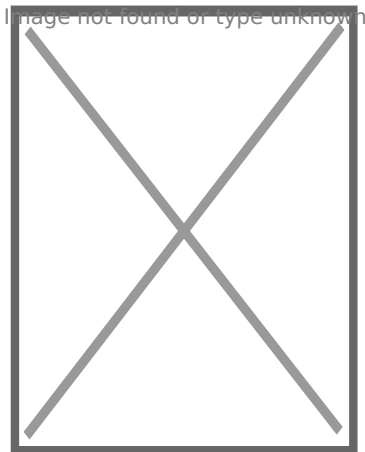
HICKS:

[126] But in the world, at one time men shun death as the greatest of all evils, and at another time choose it as a respite from the evils in life. The wise man does not deprecate life nor does he fear the cessation of life. The thought of life is no offence to him, nor is the cessation of life regarded as an evil. And even as men choose of food not merely and simply the larger portion, but the more pleasant, so the wise seek to enjoy the time which is most pleasant and not merely that which is longest. And he who admonishes the young to live well and the old to make a good end speaks foolishly, not merely because of the desirableness of life, but because the same exercise at once teaches to live well and to die well. Much worse is he who says that it were good not to be born, but when once one is born to pass with all speed through the gates of Hades.

[127] For if he truly believes this, why does he not depart from life? It were easy for him to do so, if once he were firmly convinced. If he speaks only in mockery, his words are foolishness, for those who hear believe him not.

We must remember that the future is neither wholly ours nor wholly not ours, so that neither must we count upon it as quite certain to come nor despair of it as quite certain not to come.

Post by “Don” of August 25, 2022 at 5:34 PM



[Letter To Menoikeus: A New Translation With Commentary : Don Boozer : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

A new translation of the Letter to Menoikeus (Menoecus) by Epicurus with commentary.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2646-episode-one-hundred-thirty-seven-the-letter-to-menoecus-04-on-death-part-two/>

Post by “Cassius” of August 25, 2022 at 7:45 PM

Thank you Don! Also I am going to try to get us to go through the arguments presented in Lucretius Book 3. I seem to remember that people have counted them, let me see if i can quickly separate them by topic. (just a start in this post)

Lucretius Book Three (Bailey)

1 - Death will be no different than the time before we were born:

[830] Death, then, is naught to us, nor does it concern us a whit, inasmuch as the nature of the mind is but a mortal possession. And even as in the time gone by we felt no ill, when the Poeni came from all sides to the shock of battle, when all the world, shaken by the hurrying turmoil of war, shuddered and reeled beneath the high coasts of heaven, in doubt to which people's sway must fall all human power by land and sea; so, when we shall be no more, when there shall have come the parting of body and soul, by whose union we are made one, you may know that nothing at all will be able to happen to us, who then will be no more, or stir our feeling; no, not if earth shall be mingled with sea, and sea with sky.

2 - Even if our atoms come back together in the future we would not remember our past:

[843] And even if the nature of mind and the power of soul has feeling, after it has been rent asunder from our body, yet it is naught to us, who are made one by the mating and marriage of body and soul. Nor, if time should gather together our substance after our decease and bring it back again as it is now placed, if once more the light of life should be vouchsafed to us, yet, even were that done, it would not concern us at all, when once the remembrance of our former selves were snapped in twain. And even now we care not at all for the selves that we once were, not at all are we touched by any torturing pain for them. For when you look back over all the lapse of immeasurable time that now is gone, and think how manifold are the motions of matter, you could easily believe this too, that these same seeds, whereof we now are made, have often been placed in the same order as they are now; and yet we cannot recall that in our mind's memory; for in between lies a break in life, and all the motions have wandered everywhere far astray from sense.

3 - Death is no different than if we had never been born:

[862] For, if by chance there is to be grief and pain for a man, he must needs himself too exist at that time, that ill may befall him. Since death forestalls this, and prevents the being of him,

on whom these misfortunes might crowd, we may know that we have naught to fear in death, and that he who is no more cannot be wretched, and that it were no whit different if he had never at any time been born, when once immortal death hath stolen away mortal life.

[870] And so, when you see a man chafing at his lot, that after death he will either rot away with his body laid in earth, or be destroyed by flames, or the jaws of wild beasts, you may be sure that his words do not ring true, and that deep in his heart lies some secret pang, however much he deny himself that he believes that he will have any feeling in death. For he does not, I trow, grant what he professes, nor the grounds of his profession, nor does he remove and cast himself root and branch out of life, but all unwitting supposes something of himself to live on. For when in life each man pictures to himself that it will come to pass that birds and wild beasts will mangle his body in death, he pities himself; for neither does he separate himself from the corpse, nor withdraw himself enough from the outcast body, but thinks that it is he, and, as he stands watching, taints it with his own feeling.

Hence he chafes that he was born mortal, and sees not that in real death there will be no second self, to live and mourn to himself his own loss, or to stand there and be pained that he lies mangled or burning. For if it is an evil in death to be mauled by the jaws and teeth of wild beasts, I cannot see how it is not sharp pain to be laid upon hot flames and cremated, or to be placed in honey and stifled, and to grow stiff with cold, lying on the surface on the top of an icy rock, or to be crushed and ground by a weight of earth above.

4 - We lose good things after death, but we lose the bad things too!

[894] 'Now no more shall thy glad home welcome thee, nor thy good wife and sweet children run up to snatch the first kisses, and touch thy heart with a silent thrill of joy. No more shalt thou have power to prosper in thy ways, or to be a sure defence to thine own. Pitiful thou art,' men say, 'and pitifully has one malignant day taken from thee all the many prizes of life.' Yet to this they add not: 'nor does there abide with thee any longer any yearning for these things.' But if they saw this clearly in mind, and followed it out in their words, they would free themselves from great anguish and fear of mind.

[904] 'Thou, indeed, even as thou art now fallen asleep in death, shalt so be for all time to come, released from every pain and sorrow. But 'tis we who have wept with tears unquenchable for thee, as thou wert turned to ashes hard by us on the awesome place of burning, and that unending grief no day shall take from our hearts.' But of him who speaks thus we should ask, what there is so exceeding bitter, if it comes at the last to sleep and rest, that any one should waste away in never-ending lamentation.

5 - Death is like sleep, and we don't feel pain while we are asleep.

[912] This too men often do, when they are lying at the board, and hold their cups in their hands, and shade their faces with garlands: they say from the heart, 'Brief is this enjoyment for us puny men: soon it will be past, nor ever thereafter will it be ours to call it back.' As though in

death this were to be foremost among their ills, that thirst would burn the poor wretches and parch them with its drought, or that there would abide with them a yearning for any other thing. For never does any man long for himself and life, when mind and body alike rest in slumber. For all we care sleep may then be never-ending, nor does any yearning for ourselves then beset us. And yet at that time those first-beginnings stray not at all far through our frame away from the motions that bring sense, when a man springs up from sleep and gathers himself together. Much less then should we think that death is to us, if there can be less than what we see to be nothing; for at our dying there follows a greater turmoil and scattering abroad of matter, nor does any one wake and rise again, whom the chill breach of life has once overtaken.

6 - We complain so much about the pains of life, we should be relieved to be rid of them!

[931] Again, suppose that the nature of things should of a sudden lift up her voice, and thus in these words herself rebuke some one of us: 'Why is death so great a thing to thee, mortal, that thou dost give way overmuch to sickly lamentation? why groan and weep at death? For if the life that is past and gone has been pleasant to thee, nor have all its blessings, as though heaped in a vessel full of holes, run through and perished unenjoyed, why dost thou not retire like a guest sated with the banquet of life, and with calm mind embrace, thou fool, a rest that knows no care? But if all thou hast reaped hath been wasted and lost, and life is a stumbling-block, why seek to add more, all to be lost again foolishly and pass away unenjoyed; why not rather make an end of life and trouble? For there is naught more, which I can devise or discover to please thee: all things are ever as they were. If thy body is not yet wasted with years, nor thy limbs worn and decayed, yet all things remain as they were, even if thou shouldst live on to overpass all generations, nay rather, if thou shouldst never die.' What answer can we make, but that nature brings a just charge against us, and sets out in her pleading a true plaint?

7 - We are being ungrateful to focus on death and not the good things life has brought us:

[952] But if now some older man, smitten in years, should make lament, and pitifully bewail his decease more than is just, would she not rightly raise her voice and chide him in sharp tones? 'Away with tears henceforth, thou rogue, set a bridle on thy laments. Thou hast enjoyed all the prizes of life and now dost waste away. But because thou yearnest ever for what is not with thee, and despisest the gifts at hand, uncompleted and unenjoyed thy life has slipped from thee, and, ere thou didst think it, death is standing by thy head, before thou hast the heart to depart filled and sated with good things. Yet now give up all these things so ill-fitted for thy years, and with calm mind, come, yield them to thy sons: for so thou must.'

8 - Out of Death comes New Things.

She would be right, I trow, in her plea, right in her charge and chiding. For the old ever gives place thrust out by new things, and one thing must be restored at the expense of others: nor is any one sent down to the pit and to black Tartarus. There must needs be substance that the generations to come may grow; yet all of them too will follow thee, when they have had their fill

of life; yea, just as thyself, these generations have passed away before, and will pass away again. So one thing shall never cease to rise up out of another, and life is granted to none for freehold, to all on lease.

Look back again to see how the past ages of everlasting time, before we are born, have been as naught to us. These then nature holds up to us as a mirror of the time that is to come, when we are dead and gone. Is there aught that looks terrible in this, aught that seems gloomy? Is it not a calmer rest than any sleep?

[978] Yea, we may be sure, all those things, of which stories tell us in the depths of Acheron, are in our life. Neither does wretched Tantalus fear the great rock that hangs over him in the air, as the tale tells, numbed with idle terror; but rather 'tis in life that the vain fear of the gods threatens mortals; they fear the fall of the blow which chance may deal to each.

[984] Nor do birds make their way into Tityos, as he lies in Acheron, nor can they verily in all the length of time find food to grope for deep in his huge breast. However vast the mass of his outstretched limbs, though he cover not only nine acres with his sprawling limbs, but the whole circle of earth, yet he will not be able to endure everlasting pain, nor for ever to supply food from his own body. But this is our Tityos, whom as he lies smitten with love the birds mangle, yea, aching anguish devours him, or care cuts him deep through some other passion.

[995] The Sisyphus in our life too is clear to see, he who open-mouthed seeks from the people the rods and cruel axes, and evermore comes back conquered and dispirited. For to seek for a power, which is but in name, and is never truly given, and for that to endure for ever grinding toil, this is to thrust uphill with great effort a stone, which after all rolls back from the topmost peak, and headlong makes for the levels of the plain beneath.

[1003] Then to feed for ever the ungrateful nature of the mind, to fill it full with good things, yet never satisfy it, as the seasons of the year do for us, when they come round again, and bring their fruits and their diverse delights, though we are never filled full with the joys of life, this, I trow, is the story of the maidens in the flower of youth, who pile the water into the vessel full of holes, which yet can in no way be filled full.

[1011] Cerberus and the furies, moreover, and the lack of light, Tartarus, belching forth awful vapours from his jaws, which are not anywhere, nor verily can be. But it is fear of punishment for misdeeds in life—fear notable as the deeds are notable—and the atonement for crime, the dungeon and the terrible hurling down from the rock, scourgings, executioners, the rack, pitch, the metal plate, torches; for although they are not with us, yet the conscious mind, fearing for its misdeeds, sets goads to itself, and sears itself with lashings, nor does it see meanwhile what end there can be to its ills, or what limit at last to punishment, yea, and it fears that these same things may grow worse after death. Here after all on earth the life of fools becomes a hell.

[1024] This too you might say to yourself from time to time: 'Even Ancus the good closed his eyes on the light of day, he who was a thousand times thy better, thou knave. And since him many other kings and rulers of empires have fallen, who held sway over mighty nations. Even he himself, who once paved a way over the great sea, and made a path for his legions to pass across the deep, and taught them on foot to pass over the salt pools, and made naught of the roarings of ocean, prancing upon it with his horses, yet lost the light of day, and breathed out his soul from his dying body. The son of the Scipios, thunderbolt of war, terror of Carthage, gave his bones to earth, even as though he had been the meanest house-slave. Yes, and the inventors of sciences and delightful arts, yes and the comrades of the sisters of Helicon: among whom Homer, who sat alone, holding his sceptre, has fallen into the same sleep as the rest. Again, after a ripe old age warned Democritus that the mindful motions of his memory were waning, of his own will he met death and offered her up his head. Epicurus himself died, when he had run his course in the light of life, Epicurus, who surpassed the race of men in understanding and quenched the light of all, even as the sun rising in the sky quenches the stars. Wilt thou then hesitate and chafe to meet thy doom? thou, whose life is wellnigh dead while thou still livest and lookest on the light, who dost waste in sleep the greater part of thy years, and snore when wide awake, nor ever cease to see dream-visions, who hast a mind harassed with empty fear, nor canst discover often what is amiss with thee, when like a sot thou art beset, poor wretch, with countless cares on every side, and dost wander drifting on the shifting currents of thy mind.'

[1053] If only men, even as they clearly feel a weight in their mind, which wears them out with its heaviness, could learn too from what causes that comes to be, and whence so great a mass, as it were, of ill lies upon their breast, they would not pass their lives, as now for the most part we see them; knowing not each one of them what he wants, and longing ever for change of place, as though he could thus lay aside the burden. The man who is tired of staying at home, often goes out abroad from his great mansion, and of a sudden returns again, for indeed abroad he feels no better. He races to his country home, furiously driving his ponies, as though he were hurrying to bring help to a burning house; he yawns at once, when he has set foot on the threshold of the villa, or sinks into a heavy sleep and seeks forgetfulness, or even in hot haste makes for town, eager to be back. In this way each man struggles to escape himself: yet, despite his will he clings to the self, which, we may be sure, in fact he cannot shun, and hates himself, because in his sickness he knows not the cause of his malady; but if he saw it clearly, every man would leave all else, and study first to learn the nature of things, since it is his state for all eternity, and not for a single hour, that is in question, the state in which mortals must expect all their being, that is to come after their death.

[1076] Again, what evil craving for life is this which constrains, us with such force to live so restlessly in doubt and danger? Verily, a sure end of life is ordained for mortals, nor can we avoid death, but we must meet it. Moreover, we move ever, we spend our time amid the same things, nor by length of life is any new pleasure hammered out. But so long as we have not what we crave, it seems to surpass all else; afterward, when that is ours, we crave something else, and the same thirst for life besets us ever, open-mouthed. It is uncertain too what fortune

time to come may carry to us, or what chance may bring us, or what issue is at hand. Nor in truth by prolonging life do we take away a jot from the time of death, nor can we subtract anything whereby we may be perchance less long dead. Therefore you may live on to close as many generations as you will: yet no whit the less that everlasting death will await you, nor will he for a less long time be no more, who has made an end of life with today's light, than he who perished many months or years ago.

Post by "Joshua" of August 28, 2022 at 12:21 PM

Show Notes:

Stephen Greenblatt' mother:

Quote

The young Greenblatt didn't fear his own death, but he was instilled with a deep fear of his mother's death, thanks to his mother, who possessed "an absolute certainty that she was destined for an early grave". Greenblatt writes: "My life was full of extended, operatic scenes of farewell...even when I simply left the house for school, she clung to me tightly, speaking of her fragility and of the distinct possibility that I would never see her again."

Mrs Greenblatt's fears turned out to be unfounded - she lived until she was almost 90 - but Stephen was very struck by how the fear of death could make life unliveable.

Richard Dawkins, *Unweaving the Rainbow*:

Quote

We are going to die, and that makes us the lucky ones. Most people are never going to die because they are never going to be born. The potential people who could have been here in my place but who will in fact never see the light of day outnumber the sand grains of Arabia. Certainly those unborn ghosts include greater poets than Keats, scientists greater than Newton. We know this because the set of possible people allowed by our DNA so massively exceeds the set of actual people. In the teeth of these stupefying odds it is you and I, in our ordinariness, that are here. We privileged few, who won the lottery of birth against all odds, how dare we whine at our inevitable return to that prior state from which the vast majority have never stirred?

John Augustus Shedd

Quote

A ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for.

Michel de Montaigne

Quote

I want death to find me planting my cabbages, but careless of death, and still more of my unfinished garden.”

XKCD

[xkcd: Click and Drag](#)

(Click and drag)

Friar Laurence, *Romeo and Juliet*:

Quote

...Hence from Verona art thou banished:

Be patient, for the world is broad and wide...

I'll give thee armour to keep off that word:

Adversity's sweet milk, philosophy,

To comfort thee, though thou art banished....

Why rail'st thou on thy birth?

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Sophocles

Quote

Never to have been born is best.

Everyone knows that, and a close second,

once you have appeared in this life, is a quick

return, as soon as you can, to where you came from.

In our light-headed youth we carry

blithe ideas, not knowing what blows await,

what hardships are bearing down, closer and closer.

Murder, hatred, strife, resentment, and

envy are lurking, and then, behind them, bitter old age,

powerless, friendless, with evils our only neighbors.

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Ecclesiastes

Quote

But better than both is the one who has never been born, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun.

Post by “Joshua” of August 28, 2022 at 12:40 PM

While I'm at it with quotations, let's add first Menander, and then Lucian;

Quote

Hail, you twin-born sons of Neocles, of whom the one saved his country from slavery, the other from folly.

Quote

Alexander once made himself supremely ridiculous. Coming across Epicurus's [Principal Doctrines](#), the most admirable of his books, as you know, with its terse presentment of his wise conclusions, he brought it into the middle of the marketplace, there burned it on a figwood fire for the sins of its author, and cast its ashes into the sea. He issued an oracle on the occasion: "The dotard's doctrines to the flames be given." The fellow had no conception of the blessings conferred by that book upon its readers, of the peace, tranquillity, and independence of mind it produces, of the protection it gives against terrors, phantoms, and marvels, vain hopes and insubordinate desires, of the judgment

and candor that it fosters, or of its true purging of the spirit, not with torches and squills and such rubbish, but with right reason, truth, and frankness.

Post by “Kalosyni” of August 28, 2022 at 12:43 PM

I brought up *Existential Therapy* today, and thinking I want to set up another thread to further explore how Epicureanism and Existential Therapy could be compatible.

Quote

Existential psychotherapy is a style of therapy that places emphasis on the human condition as a whole. Existential psychotherapy uses a positive approach that applauds human capacities and aspirations while simultaneously acknowledging human limitations.

...Existential therapy developed out of the philosophies of [Friedrich Nietzsche](#) and Soren Kierkegaard. As one of the first existential philosophers, Kierkegaard theorized that human discontent could only be overcome through internal wisdom. Later, Nietzsche further developed the theory of existentialism using concepts such as the will to power and personal responsibility. In the early 1900s, philosophers such as Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre began to explore the role of investigation and interpretation in the healing process. Over the next several decades, other contemporaries started to acknowledge the importance of experiencing in relation to understanding as a method to achieving psychological wellness and balance...

Existential psychotherapy is based upon the fundamental belief that all people experience intrapsychic conflict due to their interaction with certain conditions inherent in human existence, which are known as givens. The theories recognize at least four primary existential givens:

- Freedom and associated responsibility
- Death
- [Isolation](#)
- Meaninglessness

A confrontation with any of the aforementioned conditions, or givens, fills an individual with a type of dread commonly referred to as existential [anxiety](#). This anxiety is thought to reduce a person’s physical, psychological, social, and spiritual awareness, which may lead to significant long-term consequences.

For example, the fact that each one of us and each one of our loved ones must die at some unknown time may be a source of deep anxiety to us, and this may tempt us to ignore the reality and necessity of death in human existence. By reducing our awareness of death, however, we may fail to make decisions that can actually safeguard or even enrich our lives. At the other end of the spectrum, people who are overly conscious of the fact that death is inevitable may be driven to a state of neurosis or [psychosis](#).

The key, according to existential psychotherapy, is to strike a balance between being aware of death without being overwhelmed by it. People who maintain a healthy balance in this way are motivated to make decisions that can positively impact their lives, as well as the lives of their loved ones. Though these people may not know how their decisions will actually turn out, they do appreciate the need to take action while they can. In essence, the reality of death encourages us to make the most of opportunities and to treasure the things we have.

<https://www.goodtherapy.org/learn-about-th...l-psychotherapy>

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Post by “Kalosyni” of August 28, 2022 at 1:05 PM

Further thoughts on the podcast today:

There are several ways to approach this particular passage -- with a clearly rational/philosophical/thinking mind, or with a "feeling" component and therapeutic approach. And now thinking that perhaps *Existential Therapy* could be a way to combine both of these approaches -- the thinking mind and the feeling mind together.

Also, I brought up the importance of friendship for a happy life -- and I feel this is an antidote that should be explored for anyone who feels sad, depressed, or in need of some encouragement toward seeing life as good (so there is no reason to shun life).

Here is a thread I started earlier, on friendship:

Thread

[**Cultivation of Friendship within Epicureanism**](#)

Principle Doctrine 27:

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2646-episode-one-hundred-thirty-seven-the-letter-to-menoceus-04-on-death-part-two/>

27. Of all the things that wisdom provides for the complete happiness of one's entire life, by far the greatest is friendship.

Principle Doctrine 27 is very important for a happy life. Modern life is busy with work and family, and yet we all still need friends. So it is very important to take the time and put the effort into making friends and maintaining friendships. Some people might be satisfied with the number and kind of friendships in their lives, but others...



Kalosyni

January 16, 2022 at 8:54 PM

Post by "Cassius" of August 28, 2022 at 3:40 PM

Lots of good show notes as we complete the section on Death. I will get this edited and postEd ASAP.

A good time to remind everybody that as Kalosyni indicates this issue has many aspects.

For those facing the emotional trauma of losing someone there is also the very well stated chapter in A few Days In Athens about the pain of losing someone.

For those who are looking to pin down the intellectual differences between Epicurus and Abrahamic religion or dealing with the issue of "would it be better to not have been born" there are the quotes that Joshua cited in the show from Sophocles and Ecclesiastes.

For both and everyone this episode is a good way to focus on the answer to the question:. When you and Epicurus both accept that you have been nonexistent for an eternity before death and will be nonexistent for an eternity after you die, do you really think that Epicurus taught that the full description of all you want out of life is to be "calm?"

Post by "Cassius" of August 28, 2022 at 6:14 PM

Quick comment: When Joshua told the story related by Stephen Greenblatt about his mother, Joshua made a comment to the effect that not everyone was a big fan of "The Swerve" (Greenblatt's book). I left the comment in while editing but just to provide background, in the past we've had some debates about the focus of the book (lots of detail on church politics in the

middle ages / not a lot of focus on Epicurean doctrine).

It's also possible that Greenblatt overstates the importance of Lucretius to modern science. But I don't think Joshua or I or most of us here would discourage anyone from reading the book if they find the subjects he covers interesting.

Much of the criticism comes from academic "experts" who aren't really arguing from the point of view of Greenblatt's intended audience (laymen who are not experts in Epicurus or church history).

I have a copy of the book myself and I wouldn't hesitate to recommend it to a generalist reader, but in doing so I would take care to explain what the book is and what it is not. If you go in with proper expectations that it is a generalist history of the church and manuscript preservation with only maybe one strong chapter on Epicurus, then I would say it's a perfectly fine book.

If you want a general big picture combined with details of Epicurean doctrine, go to DeWitt. That's why I always recommend DeWitt first to a reader who really wants to learn about Epicurus.

If you're looking for a generalist book which might perhaps hook a non-philosopher reader to want to read more about Epicurus then "The Swerve" may well be a good choice. Hey, it's a "best seller" if I recall, so that gives the topic some credibility in literary people who might ordinarily shun straight philosophy.

Post by "Don" of August 28, 2022 at 10:00 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

When you and Epicurus both accept that you have been nonexistent for an eternity before death and will be nonexistent for an eternity after you die, do you really think that Epicurus taught that the full description of all you want out of life is to be "calm"?

Of course not, that's not the full description. However, calmness/tranquility of the mind was without question part of the life he promised if one put his philosophy into practice in their life.

I personally welcome the opportunity to face life with a tranquil mind. I want the ability to make decisions calmly, without feeling buffeted by the waves of chance or to rashly react. I want to feel the bite of grief when I lose someone but not to dwell in that grief forever, returning eventually to calm acceptance and to honor them with joyful remembrance of the past. I want to feel free from anxiety and needless stress and to instead live a life that allows me to

embrace challenges with clear eyes and a calm mind with realistic expectations. Having tranquility doesn't mean going through life numb and unfeeling. To me, it means embracing the moments in front of you, being able to savor those, plucking the fruit of the day, without being tossed about by anxiety, anger, stress, without worrying about the future or regretting the past. One can plan for the future without worry and anxiety. One can learn from the past without regret.

I fall short of all these goals to various degrees, but Epicurean philosophy gives me a map by which to steer my boat to a calm harbor in the distance from which I can venture out but to which I can also return.

Post by “Cassius” of August 29, 2022 at 2:49 AM

We do not disagree - that is why I said "full description."

But there are others out there in the world who insist that "tranquility" IS a sufficient description of the Epicurean goal, and that is my reason for the rhetorical question.

Pleasure as defined by normal definitions includes both joy and delight and tranquility. The reverse is not the case in normal or academic discourse - tranquility is not considered to include joy and delight.

As I see it if we want to convey that we value both goals in the online world of discussing Epicurus, the global word which must be emphasized is Pleasure. If we fail to make clear the sweeping definition of Pleasure, the result is that we imply that Tranquility is a separate and equal or even higher goal. At that point we will be indistinguishable from those who consider joy and delight to be second tier goals and that joy and delight are expendable or merely instrumental toward some supposedly higher word.

That's exactly what the elevation of "katastematic pleasure" has done in many cases - dilute and demote the sweeping nature of the word "pleasure." And whether we like it or not, people who focus on "tranquility" and "katastematic pleasure" as replacements for "pleasure" are everywhere in modern online discussion of Epicurus, so this is an issue to keep constantly in mind.

Every time a young person reads somewhere that Epicurus held the highest good to be "Tranquility" or "Ataraxia," another opportunity to reach someone for the message of Epicurus is jeopardized. Some take the time to get to the bottom of the issue, but my belief is that many do not. Had it not been for my reading DeWitt rather than Wikipedia and the Academics, I would have walked away from Epicurus just like Nietzsche did, and this website would not exist.

(And that's not to equate my level of perception as being anywhere Nietzsche's, but only to observe that I would consider his ultimate assessment of Epicurus as insufficient would be correct, did I not take this position about the relationship between pleasure and tranquility.)

It makes sense to pursue tranquility for the sake of experiencing Pleasure without disruption or distraction, but it does not make sense to pursue pleasure for the sake of "absence of disturbance." In the former, Pleasure is clearly communicated to be the goal, and we can all pursue Pleasure in whatever form we find pleasurable. In the latter, no clear goal is conveyed at all, and we are left to look elsewhere for a clear goal. (And this "left to look elsewhere is IMHO exactly why that formulation is so popular.)

The fact that you (Don) thought it appropriate to clarify what I was saying in the question shows that this is an issue where we have no consensus form of communication even here at EpicureanFriends. By no means do I intend to deprecate the value of tranquility to life - I always consider pleasure to include tranquility.

But outside of here there is a consensus - and the consensus is that Tranquility rather than Pleasure is what Epicurus held to be the ultimate goal. And with that switch in words comes a huge transvaluation in meaning.

To me that is why it is very good that we continue to have this back and forth discussion, and why I am glad you raise it. Otherwise the point would be lost on all but the very few who really dig into the reasons for the terminology issues. If this website is to do anything for the world of discussion of Epicurus on the internet, it will be in keeping this issue front and center.

Post by "Don" of August 29, 2022 at 8:25 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

We do not disagree - that is why I said "full description."



I didn't think we did, but I wanted to enter my current position/understanding into the record with regard specifically to tranquility's place in Epicurean philosophy and practice and to encourage discussion from others.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

But there are others out there in the world who insist that "tranquility" IS a sufficient description of the Epicurean goal, and that is my reason for the rhetorical question.

The rhetorical question isn't always best left unanswered. 😊 In fact, the way you posed that question - from my perspective - is a perfect jumping off point to make the argument for pleasure as the goal.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Pleasure as defined by normal definitions includes both joy and delight and tranquility. The reverse is not the case in normal or academic discourse - tranquility is not considered to include joy and delight.

I agree. Academic commentators who elevate ataraxia and aponia at the expense of [khara](#) and [euphrosyne](#) do seem disingenuous or even dishonest. Those four are given together in the infamous katastematic/kinetic categorization. Epicurus included all four of these in his definition of pleasure. That is one of the fundamental doctrines that distinguished his philosophy from the Cyrenaics. He recognized the pleasures of sex, pleasant sights, etc. in the moment like them but also recognized the pleasure of calm, equanimity, and tranquility when a person returns to balance and (to use the modern term) homeostasis.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

As I see it if we want to convey that we value both goals in the online world of discussing Epicurus, the global word which must be emphasized is Pleasure.

👍 👍 No argument there.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Pleasure is clearly communicated to be the goal, and we can all pursue Pleasure in whatever form we find pleasurable.

I push back on (or clarify) that statement a little as it's stated to say that not *everything* one finds pleasurable should *necessarily* be pursued. All pleasures are good but not all pleasures should be chosen if a pleasurable life is the goal. We must choose wisely.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

That's exactly what the elevation of "katastematic pleasure" has done in many cases - dilute and demote the sweeping nature of the word "pleasure." And whether we like it or not, people who focus on "tranquility" and "katastematic pleasure" as replacements for "pleasure" are everywhere in modern online discussion of Epicurus, so this is an issue to keep constantly in mind.

👍 Yes, I don't think "katastematic pleasure" should stand alone at the expense of "kinetic pleasure." But, in regards to my post #10, I also contend that we shouldn't denigrate or dilute the role tranquility can play in an Epicurean life and practice. Note: I don't think you're doing that, [Cassius](#) , but I think it needs to be stated explicitly and to be kept in mind (no pun necessarily intended).

Post by “Kalosyni” of August 29, 2022 at 8:30 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

For both and everyone this episode is a good way to focus on the answer to the question:. When you and Epicurus both accept that you have been nonexistent for an eternity before birth and will be nonexistent for an eternity after you die, do you really think that Epicurus taught that the full description of all you want out of life is to be "calm?"

As I read this: "**You have been nonexistent for an eternity before birth and will be nonexistent for an eternity after you die**" -- it had a rather sobering affect on me -- and a feeling that I needed to sit down to make sense of it. Which points to the possibility that I don't really understand my mortality. It seems then that the next impulse is to then fully understand what it is to be alive, and that must be done through the senses and through experiencing the world. So that would be fully opening up one's awareness and one's senses -- which is a bit of a frightening thing, because if you open your awareness then you are confronted by everything -- both pleasure and pain!

VS 11 - "For most people, to be quiet is to be numb and to be active is to be frenzied."

I think this is a very important Epicurean principle to consider -- that we are going to navigate through the world neither numb, nor frenzied -- and maybe a better word than "calm" would be "grounded" (?)

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Pleasure as defined by normal definitions includes both joy and delight and tranquility. The reverse is not the case in normal or academic discourse - tranquility is not considered to include joy and delight.

As I see it f we want to convey that we value both goals in the online world of

discussing Epicurus, the global word which must be emphasized is Pleasure. If we fail to make clear the sweeping definition of Pleasure, the result is that we imply that Tranquility is a separate and equal or even higher goal. At that point we will be indistinguishable from those who consider joy and delight to be second tier goals and that joy and delight are expendable or merely instrumental toward some supposedly higher word.

Thank you Cassius for your continued explanations and to not let us slip down into something that will be misinterpreted and lead back down to an incorrect interpretation. Word choice is everything it seems, and I see how this will continue to be an issue unless we get creative and write out some modern "principle doctrines" -- pithy ways of explaining core truths of Epicureanism. I myself like the phrase: "sweet life" because of the implications that it includes pleasurable sensations. But a full pithy saying is needed, and maybe more than just one pithy saying to better explain things.

Post by "Kalosyni" of August 29, 2022 at 9:30 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

Academic commentators who elevate ataraxia and aponia at the expense of khara and euphrosyne do seem disingenuous or even dishonest. Those four are given together in the infamous katastematic/kinetic categorization. Epicurus included all four of these in his definition of pleasure.

katastematic:

ataraxia -

eponia -

kinetic:

khara - *joy, delight, joy in or at a thing, in accordance with joyous tidings*

euphrosyne - *mirth, merriment, festivities, good cheer, cheered with glad thoughts*

[Don](#) -- Can you post the links to translation entries for the Greek words ataraxia and eponia on the Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon website (I tried using their search engine but nothing came up on ataraxia, probably a user-error, lol).

Post by "Don" of August 29, 2022 at 9:37 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

I think this is a very important Epicurean principle to consider -- that we are going to navigate through the world neither numb, nor frenzied -- and maybe a better word than "calm" would be "grounded" (?)

I like "grounded" 😊 It even hints at a connotation of a "foundation on which to build" that is becoming my understanding of ataraxia.

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

VS 11 - "For most people, to be quiet is to be numb and to be active is to be frenzied.

I like that VS. To me, it speaks to the unsatisfied way many people experience their lives. This VS to me also is a direct refutation of the Cyrenaic position of a frenzied pursuit of one momentary pleasure after another without taking time to neither calmly reflect on pleasures of the past nor to anticipate the pleasures of the future. Here's my translation:

For the majority of people, to be at rest is to be bored stiff; but to be active is to be raving like a rabid dog.

The "rest" there is [hesykhias](#) which also shows up in [PD14](#):

The purest security is that which comes from a quiet life and withdrawal from the many, after having obtained a certain degree of security with respect to other men by means of comfort and prosperity.

Post by "Don" of August 29, 2022 at 9:44 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Don -- Can you post the links to translation entries for the Greek words ataraxia and eponia on the Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott,

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, ἀταρ-ακτος](#)

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, ἀτα^ρ-αξία](#)

Post by “Don” of August 29, 2022 at 10:01 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

The purest security is that which comes from a quiet life and withdrawal from the many

I want to state that that "withdrawal from the many" doesn't necessarily need to be physical. It is also a withdrawal from the beliefs of the many. The actual word used is ἐκχωρήσεως ek-khōrēseōs which literally means to remove oneself from the chorus as in a Greek tragedy performance. "ἐκχορεύω to break out of the chorus"

PS. That to me doesn't encourage solitude or being a hermit, but breaking away from what everyone else is saying, as the chorus spoke with one voice. To me, it is the same vein as "set sail in your own little boat free from indoctrination."

Post by “Cassius” of August 29, 2022 at 10:14 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

As I read this: "You have been nonexistent for an eternity before birth and will be nonexistent for an eternity after you die" -- it had a rather sobering affect on me -- and a feeling that I needed to sit down to make sense of it.

I think a lot of people do that. Even those who call themselves atheists seem to gloss over the issue, because it is so sobering. I think this is one of the best ways to clarify the urgency of the pleasure question. The "live like you are dying" metaphor is really a pretty good one.

Post by “Cassius” of September 1, 2022 at 6:11 PM

Episode 137 - The Letter to Menoecus 03 - On Death (Part One) - is now available!

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/51110197>

Post by “Don” of September 1, 2022 at 8:27 PM

The quote is actually from Theognis. Here's the section in my commentary:

Which brings us to the last section of verse 126 where Epicurus directly quotes - word for word - from the Elegiac Poems of Theognis

Theognis, lines 425-428:

"The best lot of all for man is never to have been born nor seen the beams of the burning Sun; this failing, to pass the gates of Hades as soon as one may, and lie under a goodly heap of earth."

In Greek:

πάντων μὲν μὴ φῦναι ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἄριστον

μηδ' ἐσιδεῖν ἀγὰς ὀξέος ἡελίου:

φύντα δ' ὅπως ὤκιστα πύλας Αἴδαο περῆσαι καὶ κεῖσθαι πολλὴν γῆν ἐπαμυσάμενον.

Now, compare that highlighted section from Theognis to line 126g in the Letter to Menoikeus:

126g. πολὺ δὲ χεῖρων καὶ ὁ λέγων καλὸν μὲν μὴ φῦναι, φύντα δ' ὅπως ὤκιστα πύλας Αἴδαο περῆσαι.

Those seven words of Epicurus's are clearly meant to be a quote. He paraphrases the first section about it being good to not have been born at all, then quotes Theognis to bring it on home. Theognis calls it ἄριστον "the best" to not have been born; Epicurus simply says that "they say it is καλός." With this being the case then, my recommendation would be to always translate that phrase within "quotation marks" to emphasize Epicurus's erudition and awareness of the common sayings of his day.

Post by “Cassius” of September 1, 2022 at 9:43 PM

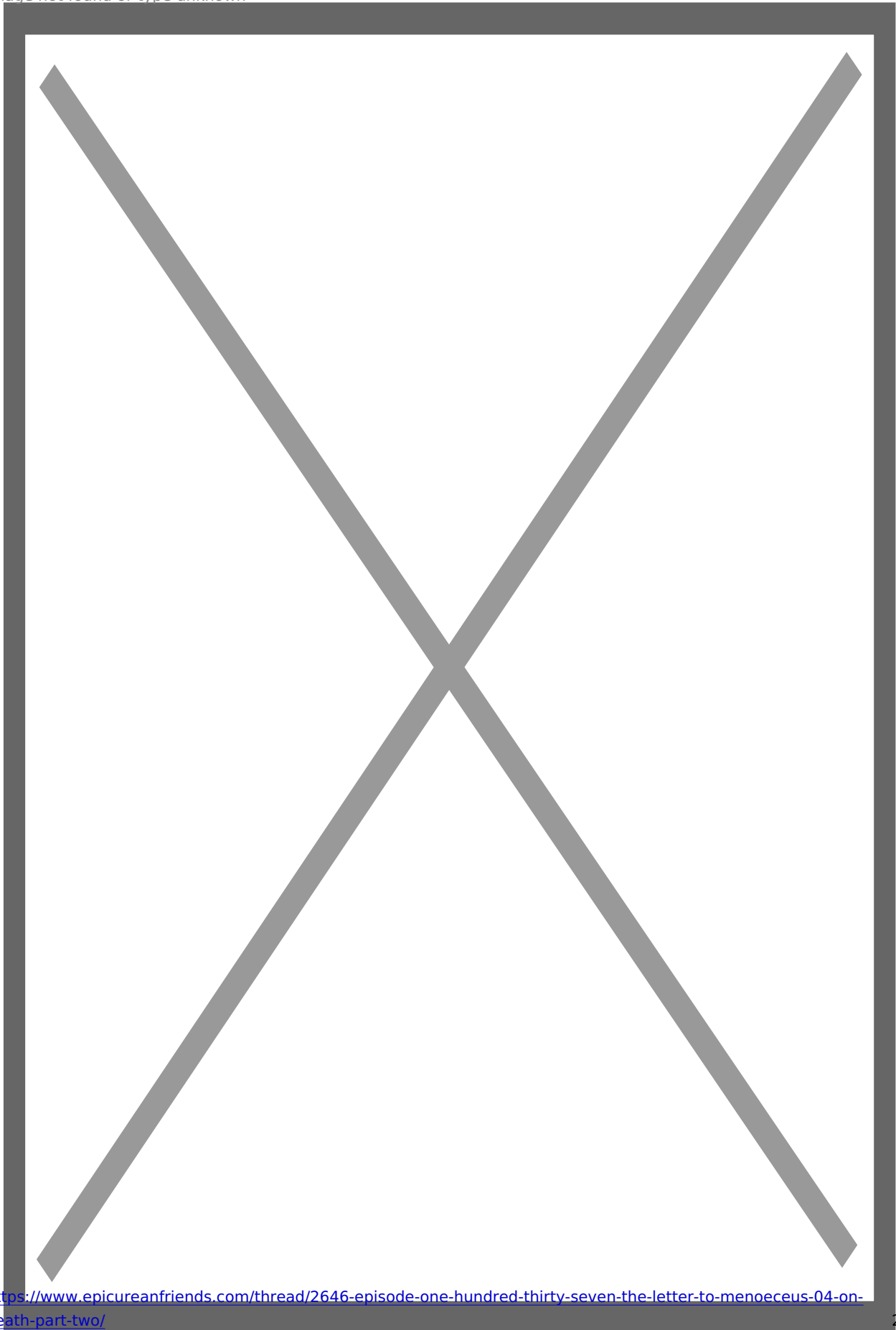
<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2646-episode-one-hundred-thirty-seven-the-letter-to-menoecus-04-on-death-part-two/>

So Don on the point we were debating - is that position truly being advocated by a respectable character or writer?

Post by “Don” of September 1, 2022 at 11:32 PM

Define "respectable"...

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Post by “Cassius” of September 2, 2022 at 5:37 AM

I have already forgotten when we said in the podcast to some extent, but what I meant by respectable was that I got the impression what Joshua was saying was that the statement might have been put in the mouth of a character in a play, rather than made as a direct statement by the playwright... With the implication that if so the statement might have been made by a character in a context which the playwright was clearly not advocating the comment himself.

So if Theognis is the author (and we did not cite him) then we need to explicitly clean up what we said - maybe in this week's episode.

Post by “Don” of September 2, 2022 at 7:36 AM

I can't remember which translation I saw Theognis footnoted for that line, but it was legit.

I certainly didn't uncover that as the source on my own 😊 and the word for word seems like a solid reason to accept it.

As for advocating that position, here's the context with his poem and an excerpt from the Wikipedia article:

He was capable of arresting imagery and memorable statements in the form of terse epigrams. Some of these qualities are evident in the following lines [425-8], considered to be "the classic formulation of Greek pessimism":

Πάντων μὲν μὴ φῦναι ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἄριστον,

μηδ' ἐσιδεῖν αὐγὰς ὀξέος ἡελίου.

φύντα δ' ὅπως ὤκιστα πύλας Αἴδαο περῆσαι

καὶ κεῖσθαι πολλὴν γῆν ἐπαμησάμενον.

Best of all for mortal beings is never to have been born at all

Nor ever to have set eyes on the bright light of the sun

But, since he is born, a man should make utmost haste through the gates of Death

And then repose, the earth piled into a mound round himself.

The lines were much quoted in antiquity, as for example by Stobaeus and Sextus Empiricus, and it was imitated by later poets, such as Sophocles and Bacchylides. Theognis himself might be imitating others: each of the longer hexameter lines is loosely paraphrased in the shorter pentameter lines, as if he borrowed the longer lines from some unknown source(s) and added the shorter lines to create an elegiac version. Moreover, the last line could be imitating an image from Homer's *Odyssey* (5.482), where Odysseus covers himself with leaves though some scholars think the key word ἐπαμυσάμενον might be corrupted. The smothering accumulation of eta (η) sounds in the last line of the Greek is imitated here in the English by mound round.

Post by “Cassius” of September 2, 2022 at 8:39 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

considered to be "the classic formulation of Greek pessimism":

That's an interesting topic in itself. To what extent were the Greeks "pessimists"? Was that an integral part of mainstream (Socrates / Plato / Aristotle) Greek philosophy, or was it a minority viewpoint, and if so held by who?

I don't consider the Romans to have been pessimists -- were the Greeks more so than the Romans? I gather the Romans didn't always have a high opinion about all aspects of Greek civilization and i wonder if this was part of it.

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 2, 2022 at 8:48 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

Best of all for mortal beings is never to have been born at all

Epicurus said not to think this way, so guessing it must have been common enough for it to be mentioned.

I found this article:

A philosophy as old as Homer : Giacomo Leopardi and Greek poetic pessimism

[A philosophy as old as Homer : Giacomo Leopardi and Greek poetic pessimism](#)

Post by “Cassius” of September 2, 2022 at 9:01 AM

"Greek poetic pessimism" -- Maybe that was part of why Epicurus was hostile to at least some aspects of poetry?

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is twofold: it explores Giacomo Leopardi's (1798-1837) interpretation of, and engagement with, Greek pessimistic thought and, through him, it investigates the complex and elusive phenomenon of Greek pessimistic thought itself. This thesis contends that Greek pessimistic thought – epitomised by but not limited to the famous wisdom of Silenus, the $\mu\eta\ \phi\upsilon\nu\alpha\iota$ topos – is an important element of Greek thought, a fundamental part of some of Greece's greatest literary works, and a vital element in the understanding of Greek culture in general. Yet this aspect of ancient thought has not yet received the attention it deserves, and in the history of its interpretation it has often been forgotten, denied, or purposefully obliterated. Furthermore, the pessimistic side of Greek thought plays a crucial role in both the modern history of the interpretation of antiquity and the intellectual history of Europe; I argue that this history is fundamentally incomplete without the appreciation of Leopardi's role in it. By his study of and engagement with ancient sources Leopardi contributed to the 19th century rediscovery of Greek pessimistic wisdom, alongside, though chronologically before, the likes of Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Jacob Burckhardt. Having outlined some fundamental steps in the history of the reception of Greek pessimism, this thesis examines the cardinal components of Leopardi's reception of it: his use of Greek conceptions of humanity to undermine modernity's anthropocentric fallacy, his reinterpretation of the Homeric simile of the leaves and its pessimistic undertones, and his views on the idea that it would be best for man not to be born.

Post by “Don” of September 2, 2022 at 12:18 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Maybe that was part of why Epicurus was hostile to at least some aspects of poetry?

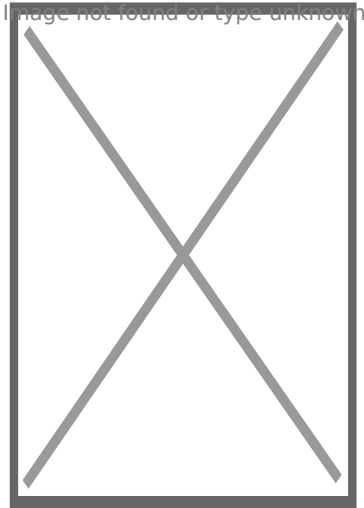
Do you know where that sentiment is in the texts? I'd be curious to see what word is used for poetry. Epic? Lyric? I could understand if it's specifically epic poetry since it dealt with the gods and their messing with humans.

Post by “Cassius” of September 2, 2022 at 1:29 PM

That would be Diogenes Laertius as below - not really a sweeping condemnation of poetry as such. The Greek should be viewable at the link below -

and he is lucky if it has not harmed him.

- 119 Moreover, the wise man will marry and have children, as Epicurus says in the *Problems* and in the work on *Nature*. But he will marry according to the circumstances of his life. He will feel shame in the presence of some persons, and certainly will not insult them in his cups, so Epicurus says in the *Symposium*. Nor will he take part in public life, as he says in the first book *On Lives*. Nor will he act the tyrant, or live like the Cynics, as he writes in the second book *On Lives*. Nor will he beg. Moreover, even if he is deprived of his eyesight, he will not end his whole life, as he says in the same work. Also the wise man will feel grief, as Diogenes says in the fifth book of the *Miscellanies*.
- 120^a He will engage in lawsuits and will leave writings behind him, but will not deliver speeches on public occasions. He will be careful of his possessions and will provide for the future. He will be fond of the country. He will face fortune and never desert a friend. He will be careful of his reputation in so far as to prevent himself from being despised. He will care more than other men for public
- 121^b spectacles. He will erect statues of others, but whether he had one himself or not, he would be indifferent. Only the wise man could discourse rightly on music and poetry, but in practice he would not compose poems. One wise man is not wiser than another. He will be ready to make money, but only when he is in straits and by means of his philosophy. He will pay court to a king, if occasion demands. He will rejoice at another's misfortunes, but only for his correction. And he will gather together a school, but never so as to become a popular leader. He will give lectures in public, but never unless asked; he will give definite teaching and not profess doubt. In his sleep he will be as he is awake, and on occasion he will even die for a friend.



[Epicurus The Extant Remains Bailey Oxford 1926 : Cyril Bailey : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

Epicurus - The Extant Remains - Text, Translation & Notes - By Cyril Bailey - BEST COPY archive.org

Post by “Don” of September 2, 2022 at 1:47 PM

Okay, so it is the word "poetry" writ large:

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, ποι-ητικός](#)

But is that it? That's what everybody pegs Epicurus's dislike and distrust of poetry to?

Here's my take on that verse from my site:

[Epicurean Sage - Living Unknown](#)

The Epicureans are said to have encouraged *lathe biosas*, living unknown or not calling attention to oneself. This is a controversial fragment, but Diogenes...

sites.google.com

Only the wise man will be competent to discuss music and poetry without writing poems of their own. (120)

Hicks: Only the wise man will be able to converse correctly about music and poetry, without however actually writing poems himself.

Yonge: The wise man is the only person who can converse correctly about music and poetry; and he can realise poems, but not become a poet.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2646-episode-one-hundred-thirty-seven-the-letter-to-menoceus-04-on-death-part-two/>

Mensch: Only the wise man will be competent to discuss music and poetry, though he will not write poems himself.

This is apparently due to the wise one's study in multiple subjects connected with music and poetry. So, they have enough knowledge to talk intelligently about music and poetry but find no need to compose works themselves. Consider too that poetry and music would be performed in front of others, most likely in gatherings. This is then akin to the lathe biosas characteristics elsewhere in the list!

Post by "Joshua" of September 2, 2022 at 4:37 PM

I rather think that Epicurus dismissed poetry as a great source of lies, as Lucian expresses in his True History:

Quote

This attraction is in the veiled reference underlying all the details of my narrative; they parody the cock-and-bull stories of ancient poets, historians, and philosophers; I have only refrained from adding a key because I could rely upon you to recognize as you read...as I have no truth to put on record, having lived a very humdrum life, I fall back on falsehood — but falsehood of a more consistent variety; for I now make the only true statement you are to expect — that I am a liar. This confession is, I consider, a full defense against all imputations. My subject is, then, what I have neither seen, experienced, nor been told, what neither exists nor could conceivably do so. I humbly solicit my readers' incredulity.

Lucretius acknowledges this as well. The bitter wormwood of philosophy needs honey, or the people who need it won't accept it--they must be "charmed", not to say deceived, into taking their medicine.

Post by "Cassius" of September 2, 2022 at 6:33 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

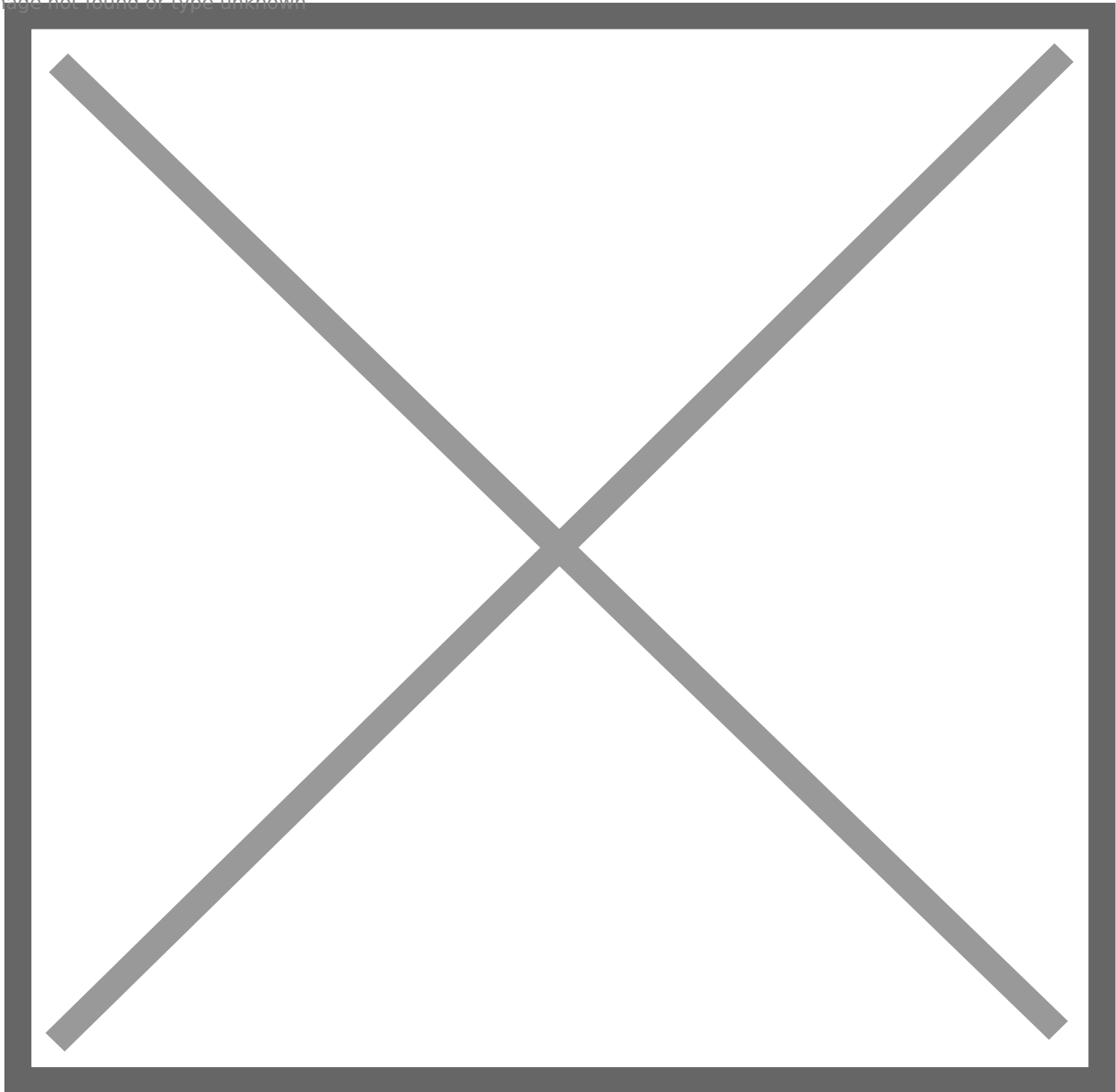
But is that it? That's what everybody pegs Epicurus's dislike and distrust of poetry to?

Joshua's supplemental cites are good to add to the pot.. I think the Diogenes Laertius statement is the main cite as to Epicurus, and yes that is probably the main basis for the allegation, but there's definitely supportive commentary in Lucretius (and maybe others, but I can't recall specific cites).

It's almost as if they are including the poets as purveyors of supernatural religion, but that doesn't seem to be the exclusive basis.

Post by “Don” of September 2, 2022 at 8:57 PM

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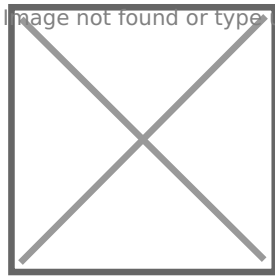
[Lucretius, part 9: the calculating poet | Emma Woolerton](#)

Emma Woolerton: How to believe: Why did Lucretius choose to write in poetry? The answer lies in his evangelism for both Epicureanism and his own legacy
www.theguardian.com

Just found that from 2013. Oh, it seems Woolerton wrote a whole series on Lucretius:

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2646-episode-one-hundred-thirty-seven-the-letter-to-menoceus-04-on-death-part-two/>

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[Emma Woolerton | The Guardian](#)

Emma Woolerton wrote her PhD on Lucretius at Cambridge, where she taught for several years. She now works in London
www.theguardian.com

Post by “Don” of September 2, 2022 at 9:11 PM

Looks like there's also Usener Fragment 228

[U228]

Plutarch, *That Epicurus actually makes a pleasant life impossible*, 2, p. 1086F-: Heraclides then, a student of literature, is repaying his debt to Epicurus for such favors of theirs "as rabble of poets" and "Homer's idiocies" and the verity of abuse that Metrodorus has in so many writings heaped upon the poet.

Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies*, V.14, p. 257.52: Homer, while representing the gods as subject to human passions, appears to know the Divine Being, whom Epicurus does not so revere.

[Epicurus: Fragments - translation \(2\)](#)

So, from that it does appear - to me - that Epicurus (and Metrodorus) were most concerned with Homer and the depiction of the gods in poetry.

There's also U227:

Cicero, *On End-Goals, Good and Bad*, II.4.12: Your school {Epicureanism} argues decisively that there is no need for the aspirant to philosophy to study literature at all.

Cf., *Ibid.*, I.21, 71-72 (Torquatus to Cicero): You are disposed to think him uneducated. The reason is that he refused to consider any education worth the name that did not help to school us in happiness. Was he to spend his time, as you encourage Triarius and me to do, in perusing poets, who give us nothing solid and useful, but merely childish amusement?

And U341:

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2646-episode-one-hundred-thirty-seven-the-letter-to-menoceus-04-on-death-part-two/>

Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, VII.7.13: Zeno, the Stoic, taught that there was a hell, and that the abodes of the virtuous were separated from the wicked, and that the former inhabited quiet and delightful regions, while the latter paid their penalty in dark places and horrible caverns of mud. The prophets made the same thing clear to us. Therefore, Epicurus was in error who thought that this was a figment of the poet's imagination, and took those punishments of hell to be those which are borne in this life.

And U364:

Dionysius the Episcopalian, *On Nature*, by way of Eusebius of Caesarea, *Preparation for the Gospel*, XIV 27, 8 p. 782C: As for the gods of whom their poets sing as "Givers of good things," {Homer, Od. viii. 325} these philosophers with mocking reverence say, The gods are neither givers nor partakers of any good things. In what way then do they show evidence of the existence of gods, if they neither see them present and doing something, as those who in admiration of the sun and moon and stars said that they were called gods (θεοός) because of their running (θεειν), nor assign to them any work of creation or arrangement, that they might call them gods from setting (θεϊναι), that is making (for in this respect in truth the Creator and Artificer of the universe alone is God), nor exhibit any administration, or judgment, or favor of theirs towards mankind, that we should owe them fear or honor, and therefore worship them? Or did Epicurus peep out from the world, and pass beyond the compass of the heavens, or go out through some secret gates known only to himself, and behold the gods dwelling in the void, and deem them and their abundant luxury blessed? And did he thence become a devotee of pleasure, and an admirer of their life in the void, and so exhort all who are to be made like unto those gods to participate in this blessing, [etc.]