

# An Epicurean Study of Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics

**Post by “Don” of October 7, 2022 at 6:26 PM**

[Epicurean Sage - An Epicurean Study of Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics](#)

This is an exploration of Nicomachean Ethics by Aristotle through an Epicurean lens. The Aristotle translations used are by Martin Ostwald (1962, Liberal Arts... sites.google.com

As I mentioned elsewhere, I'm starting an Epicurean study of Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics. Instead of posting my 11-pages of notes here on the forum, I decided to just use a sub-page of my current website (see above). The opening page is a short intro with a link to my notes on Book 1.

I do not plan to apply myself to this project in any kind of speedy manner. This is a curiosity project, a chance to engage with a text or at least ideas that Epicurus himself no doubt had access to and with which he probably wrestled when devising his own philosophy. I hope - at some point - to maybe put in more links to resources, etc., but that's a maybe. Please think of these notes - if you think of them at all 😊 - as first thoughts, reactions, etc. to a text I've been meaning to get around to for years! Enjoy the ride if you stop by the site!

---

**Post by “Cassius” of October 7, 2022 at 9:53 PM**

I look forward to reading it. FWIW, For some reason the link doesn't seem to work on my phone, but works fine in a browser. Probably just me but if anyone else runs into that Don might like to know.

---

**Post by “Godfrey” of October 7, 2022 at 11:34 PM**

Thanks for posting these [Don](#) ! I've been meaning to read this for quite some time as well, but still haven't got around to it.

One minor detail (correct me if I'm wrong): looking at the dates it appears that Aristotle died *after* Epicurus was born. Aristotle still would have been an aging (and soon, dead) superstar in relation to the young Epicurus however.

---

**Post by “Don” of October 8, 2022 at 7:06 AM**

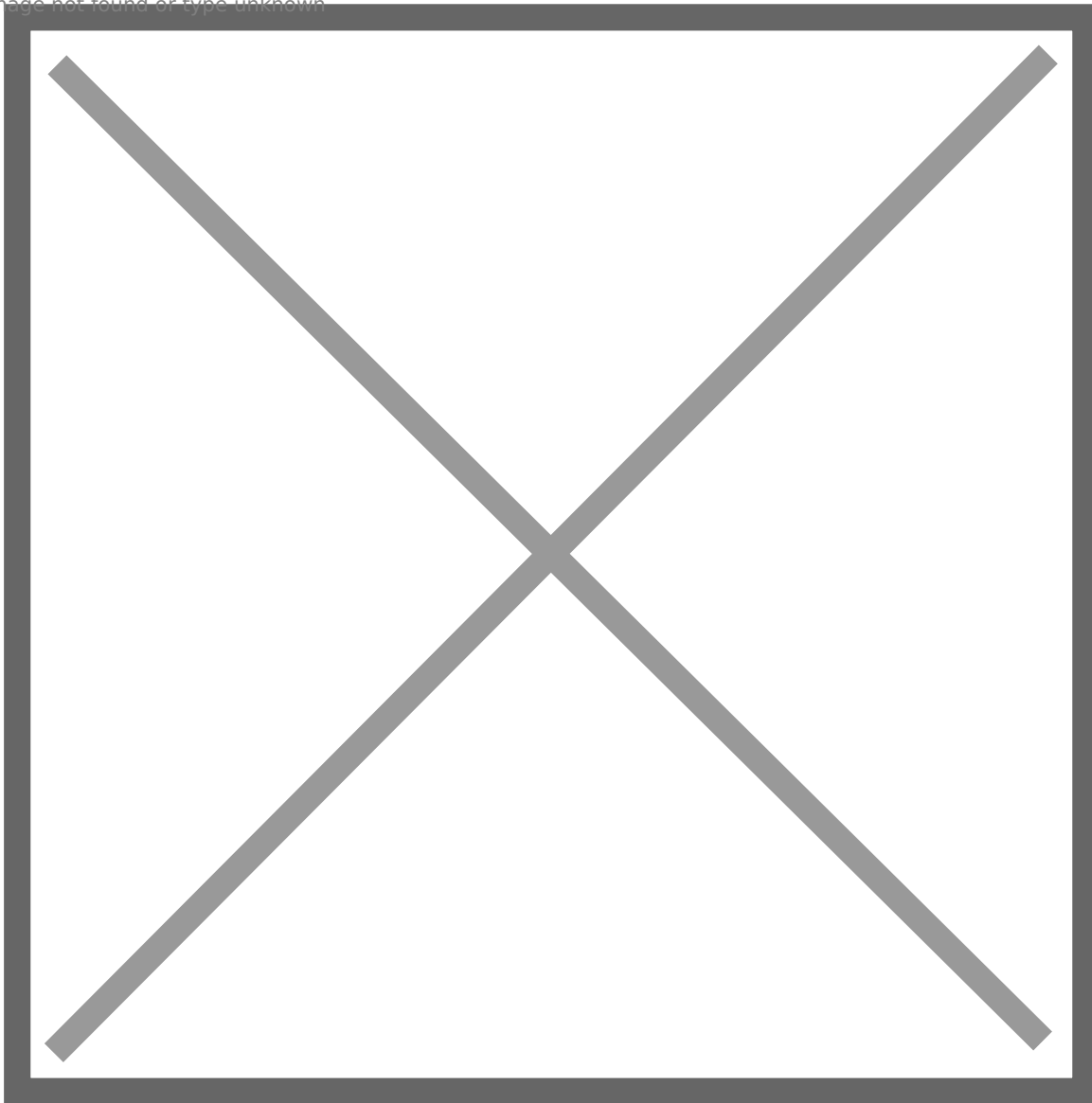
[Quote from Godfrey](#)

One minor detail (correct me if I'm wrong): looking at the dates it appears that Aristotle died after Epicurus was born. Aristotle still would have been an aging (and soon, dead) superstar in relation to the young Epicurus however

Egads! Thank you!!! I always mess up the BCE's negative numbers!! I'll get that fixed!

I wish we'd just do away with that and use... I don't know ... Kurzgesagt's "Human Era" (HE) reckoning and just count forward!

Image not found or type unknown



### [12,023 Human Era Calendar](#)

Available only for a short time: the 12,023 Human Era Calendar is here! This year you can join us on a journey through the hidden worlds of the microcosm.11" x...  
[shop-us.kurzgesagt.org](http://shop-us.kurzgesagt.org)

They, only somewhat tongue in cheek, say we should just start arbitrarily reckoning dates from the beginning of settled agriculture 10,000 years BCE and count forward! So, we're living in 12,022 HE.

In which case, Epicurus would have been born in 9,659 HE and Aristotle died in 9,678 HE! Well, look at that 9678 is after 9659! How easy was that! 😊

It also makes it much easier to see at a glance how long ago it was from us when we're talking about something that happened in "BCE" dates.

---

## Post by “Kalosyni” of October 8, 2022 at 9:10 AM

I feel the sense of "domination" of all of history, and the undercurrent of Christianity continues with the use of BC/AD. I would say we all need to stand up for freedom from religion by using neutral year signifiers. Unfortunately "HE" may be too big of a shift for many people, and of course Christians would not go for it at all. (although I can image that people of other faiths would support it).

And there at times seems to be little use of BCE and CE -- Wikipedia doesn't use it.

Quote

### **Style Guides on Religious Neutrality**

The choice may be up to you and your style guide. The 17th edition of the "[Chicago Manual of Style](#) (published in 2017) suggests that the choice is up to the writer and should be flagged only if the customs of a specific field or community are being violated:

Quote

"Many authors use BC and AD because they are familiar and conventionally understood. Those who want to avoid reference to Christianity are free to do so."

In terms of secular journalism, the 2019 version of the Associated Press Stylebook uses B.C. and A.D. (using the periods); as does the fourth edition of the UPI Style Guide, published in 2004. The use of BC and BCE is commonly found in articles concerning academic and lay historical research—including ThoughtCo.com—but not exclusively.

Despite [rumors to the contrary](#), the entire BBC has not dropped the use of AD/BC, but its Religion & Ethics department, which prides itself on providing religion-neutral stories, has:

Quote

"As the BBC is committed to impartiality, it is appropriate that we use terms that do not offend or alienate non-Christians. In line with modern practice, B.C.E./C.E. (Before Common Era/Common Era) are used as a religiously neutral alternative to B.C./A.D."

<https://www.thoughtco.com/when-to-use-ad-or-ce-116687>

(Anyway, just had to throw this in).

Don, looking forward to reading your notes on Nichomachean Ethics!

---

## Post by “Joshua” of October 8, 2022 at 9:39 AM

I, too, have long been an enthusiast of the Human or, as I prefer, the Holocene Calendar. It has the feel of a very deep sense of time.

---

## Post by “Cassius” of October 8, 2022 at 10:23 AM

If the ancients had used it more themselves I would be perfectly willing to us A.U.C. Unfortunately for the Roman substitute I am not very good at remembering sequences of consuls.

### ***Ab urbe condita***

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

[Jump to navigation](#)[Jump to search](#)*This article is about the year numbering system. For the book, see [Ab urbe condita \(Livy\)](#).*

A small image showing a coin, likely an Antoninianus, with the inscription 'ROMAE AETER[NAE] AN[NO] MIL[LESIMO] ET PRIMO'.

[Antoninianus](#) of [Pacatian](#), [usurper](#) of Roman emperor [Philip](#) in 248. It reads *ROMAE AETER[NAE] AN[NO] MIL[LESIMO] ET PRIMO*, 'To eternal Rome, in its one thousand and first year.'

A small image showing a decorated initial 'A' from a medieval manuscript, likely the Chronicle of Saint Pantaleon.

*Anno ab urbe condita*, [rubricated](#) and with a decorated [initial](#), from the medieval [Chronicle of Saint Pantaleon](#).

***Ab urbe condita*** (Latin: [ab ˈurbɛ ˈkɔnditaː] 'from the [founding of the City](#)'), or ***anno urbis conditae*** (Latin: [ˈan.no ˈurbis ˈkɔnditae]; 'in the year since the city's founding'),[\[note 1\]](#) abbreviated as **AUC** or **AVC**, expresses a date in years since [753 BC](#), the traditional founding of Rome.[\[1\]\[2\]](#) It is an expression used in antiquity and by [classical historians](#) to refer to a given year in [Ancient Rome](#). In reference to the traditional year of the foundation of Rome, the year [1 BC](#) would be written AUC 753, whereas [AD 1](#) would be AUC 754. The foundation of the [Roman Empire](#) in [27 BC](#) would be AUC 727.

Usage of the term was more common during the [Renaissance](#), when editors sometimes added AUC to Roman manuscripts they published, giving the false impression that the convention was commonly used in antiquity. In reality, the dominant method of identifying years in Roman times was to name the two [consuls](#) who held office that year.<sup>[3]</sup> In late antiquity, [regnal years](#) were also in use, as in [Roman Egypt](#) during the [Diocletian era](#) after [AD 293](#), and in the [Byzantine Empire](#) from AD 537, following a decree by [Justinian](#).

---

## Post by “Cassius” of October 8, 2022 at 10:28 AM

Quote from Don

That section also shows that Aristotle is NOT a fan of the emotions, Greek *πάθη* *pathe*. Epicurus includes the *pathe* (feelings, emotions) of pleasure and pain as part of his Canon of Truth! Aristotle simply says they can't be trusted and young people get led astray by them. The two couldn't be farther apart!

Starting around 1095b, Aristotle appears to stake his flag against pleasure as the Good:

“The common run of people and the most vulgar identify [the highest good] with pleasure, and for that reason are satisfied with a life of enjoyment...a life suitable to cattle.”

LOL! Oh, a life of enjoyment! Perish the thought!

He goes on to say that there are really three notable kinds of life:

- The life of enjoyment/pleasure
- The political life (remember, life in service to the polis)
- The contemplative life

However, Aristotle continues to refine his definition of the good and says “the good is a man's own possession which cannot easily be taken away from him.” It seems to me something could not be more one's own than one's feelings of pleasure (and pain).

Display More

This part reminds me of one of the things that I think is most important to stress early and often: that "pleasure" is a sweeping term that embraces every possible experience in life that we find desirable in itself. If it is desirable in itself, it is pleasurable. Once it is established that we are not just talking about immediate sensory stimulation it seems to me that the superiority of the Epicurean position is much more clear. Why would anyone do anything if they do not

receive benefit from it, and what is "benefit" if not pleasure (under the Epicurean perspective in which all feelings are either pleasure or pain).

I think if I were in a debate with Aristotelians or any of them, that's a point I would want to stake out almost immediately before going in any other direction.

---

## Post by "Don" of October 14, 2022 at 6:27 AM

Update: About half way through Book 2's commentary. I didn't say I was going through it quickly 😊

[Epicurean Sage - Nichomachean Ethics: Book 2](#)

< Back to Book 1 Commentary In Book 2, Aristotle starts to fill in some details of what he means by "virtue." Aristotle claims virtue is of two kinds: 1)...  
sites.google.com

My favorite discovery so far in this book:

### Quote

"An index of our dispositions is afforded by the pleasure or pain that accompanies our actions. A man is temperate (σώφρων "sophron") if he abstains from bodily pleasures and finds this abstinence itself enjoyable (χαίρω "khairo"), profligate if he feels it irksome; he is brave if he faces danger with pleasure or at all events without pain, cowardly if he does so with pain."

By Zeus!! Even in his annoyance with pleasure he says that the temperate person "finds this abstinence itself enjoyable"!! Finding something enjoyable IS PLEASURE, Aristotle!! In fact, the "enjoyable" part in that translation is, in fact, the word khairon which is directly related to one of the "kinetic pleasures" (khara) noted by Epicurus as a pleasure deriving from "κίνησις ἐνεργεία" "moving activity" (notice energeia!!)!! Sorry, Aristotle, but you can't have it both ways. Pleasure is a danger, but you can take pleasure in temperance?? Go on...

---

## Post by "Cassius" of October 14, 2022 at 7:58 AM

Very good point!

Even Christianity ultimately grounds itself in the desirability of eternal life, and that surely means finding pleasure in the reward. I grant that religions or viewpoints (Buddhism, etc?) that seem to call for the extinguishment of individuality or personality do appear to be elevating something other than the experience of pleasure as the goal, but those seem to me to fit in the "better to never have been born" category which I would argue most sane people would reject out of hand (and surely Epicurus rejected that too).

Once we make clear that "pleasure" is a sweeping term that embraces every form of desirable experience (and I think Epicurus is very clear about this) then it seems to me that setting "pleasure" as the goal of life is a compelling argument that is hard to reject by anyone except by rejecting life itself.

---

### **Post by “Don” of October 14, 2022 at 8:55 AM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

except by rejecting life itself.

Which is basically what Christianity does: this life only counts for what your afterlife - you're "going home" life - is like. Bah! Carpe \*this\* diem.

---

### **Post by “Cassius” of October 14, 2022 at 9:23 AM**

Yes, I agree with your observation. But for purposes of persuading those of them who may be "well-constituted" or "well-disposed" towards us, I think we probably have different paths of argument for the different groups.

Most every Judeo-Christian I have ever run into, if you push them hard enough, admits that they are following the religion because they want eternal happiness for themselves and their friends, not just because they feel a general duty to be religious.

But for those viewpoints (and I think true Stoicism fits into this, if their ultimate viewpoint is the merging of individual consciousness into divine fire) that seem to contemplate the eventual loss

of individuality, I would say they are in a much worse place and would require a different approach for any hope of success in opening their eyes. Lots of them are superficial, but to the extent they really understand their viewpoints and buy into it, they are much worse lost.

So I guess I am saying I see the root of our attachment to life as being our love of it and our desire not to lose it. For this purpose I'm abstracting this life and any other life and giving them the benefit of the doubt that if someone loves "life" then they are open to seeing how short it is and how best to live it.

But for those who wish they had never been born or wish to cease to exist, and buy deeply into that argument, seems to me that's a much harder nut to crack.

---

### **Post by “Don” of October 14, 2022 at 9:49 AM**

The thought that comes to mind is: is it our responsibility to convert or to simply evangelize. I don't think those are the same thing. Epicurus seemed to hold a dim view in some regards of the hoi polloi. He made his philosophy available but he wasn't handing out leaflets and screaming on the street corner.

---

### **Post by “Kalosyni” of October 14, 2022 at 10:01 AM**

Quote from Don:

Quote

Starting around 1095b, Aristotle appears to stake his flag against pleasure as the Good:

“The common run of people and the most vulgar identify [the highest good] with pleasure, and for that reason are satisfied with a life of enjoyment...a life suitable to cattle.”

LOL! Oh, a life of enjoyment! Perish the thought!

He goes on to say that there are really three notable kinds of life:

- The life of enjoyment/pleasure

- The political life (remember, life in service to the polis)
- The contemplative life

Could we correctly say that Epicureanism actually combines:

a) a life of enjoyment/pleasure

-AND-

c) the contemplative life (contemplating the nature of things)

---

### **Post by “Cassius” of October 14, 2022 at 10:05 AM**

#### [Quote from Don](#)

The thought that comes to mind is: is it our responsibility to convert or to simply evangelize. I don't think those are the same thing. Epicurus seemed to hold a dim view in some regards of the hoi polloi. He made his philosophy available but he wasn't handing out leaflets and screaming on the street corner.

Absolutely right. I am not sure that the Epicureans thought we have a "responsibility" to do either one. My reading of Lucretius and Diogenes both is that they had a benevolent general interest in "getting the word out" for those who were inclined to listen, so that might be akin to "evangelizing." But I definitely don't think they saw a responsibility to "convert" and they specifically seemed to acknowledge that not everyone was "well constituted" (seems I remember that in both Oinoanda and in Diogenes Laertius) so I bet they were clear-eyed about not converting everyone.

However it enhances our happiness to have more friends, and helps make us more secure if we at least don't have enemies (unnecessarily have enemies I guess I should say), so I see that as the primary way to describe the motivation to talk about the philosophy with others.

So definitely I would not scream on a street corner. Would I hand out leaflets (which appears to be exactly what the Roman Epicureans were doing)? Probably so, but I would be sure I did it unobtrusively and just mainly made them available.

---

### **Post by “Cassius” of October 14, 2022 at 10:07 AM**

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Could we correctly say that Epicureanism actually combines:

a) a life of enjoyment/pleasure

-AND-

c) the contemplative life (contemplating the nature of things)

I would say that the way to express that would have to be that Epicureanism teaches the pursuit of a life of enjoyment/pleasure, of which the pleasures of contemplation are pleasures and therefore are included in the goal of enjoyment/pleasure.

The word "and" is pretty easy to read as "separate goals" in that context and I would think that implication would need to be avoided.

---

## **Post by “Kalosyni” of October 14, 2022 at 10:23 AM**

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

So I guess I am saying I see the root of our attachment to life as being our love of it and our desire not to lose it. For this purpose I'm abstracting this life and any other life and giving them the benefit of the doubt that if someone loves "life" then they are open to seeing how short it is and how best to live it.

But for those who wish they had never been born or wish to cease to exist, and buy deeply into that argument, seems to me that's a much harder nut to crack.

I just posted about both getting help of a therapist and finding more meaning in life, in this thread:

Post

### **[Overcome Suicidal Ideation and Find Greater Meaning in Life](#)**

Occasionally on this forum and on the podcasts the topic of suicide, and also choosing to end one's own life when terminally ill, etc. has come up. And I feel the need to bring up and share some "therapeutics".

Given that we believe that we only have this one life to live (no-rebirth, no second chance) this means that ending one's life is rarely ever chosen unless out of great necessity ( @Cassius I know there are sources for this in Epicurean writings but can't remember off hand).

Ideally I...



Kalosyni

October 14, 2022 at 10:19 AM

---

## Post by “Don” of October 15, 2022 at 11:51 AM

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Quote from Don:

Quote

Starting around 1095b, Aristotle appears to stake his flag against pleasure as the Good:

“The common run of people and the most vulgar identify [the highest good] with pleasure, and for that reason are satisfied with a life of enjoyment...a life suitable to cattle.”

LOL! Oh, a life of enjoyment! Perish the thought!

He goes on to say that there are really three notable kinds of life:

- The life of enjoyment/pleasure
- The political life (remember, life in service to the polis)
- The contemplative life

Could we correctly say that Epicureanism actually combines:

a) a life of enjoyment/pleasure

-AND-

c) the contemplative life (contemplating the nature of things)

Display More

[Epicurean Sage - ...enjoy themselves more than others in contemplation](#)

Hicks: He will take more delight than other men in state festivals. Yonge: ...and he will find more pleasure than other men in speculations. Yonge appears to...  
sites.google.com

---

### **Post by “Don” of October 18, 2022 at 11:51 PM**

Okay, I've finished up my take on Book 2:

[Epicurean Sage - Nichomachean Ethics: Book 2](#)

< Back to Book 1 Commentary In Book 2, Aristotle starts to fill in some details of what he means by “virtue.” Aristotle claims virtue is of two kinds: 1)...  
sites.google.com

I had to break it up into 2 parts (Part 1 and Part 2). There's a lot going on, but, as you'll see I've come away thinking "I'm not seeing much more than obfuscation and some nice-looking word salad made up mostly of celery and lettuce and not much nutrition."

I'm still finding it interesting, especially Aristotle tying himself up in knots trying to talk trash about pleasure.

Enjoy.

---

### **Post by “Godfrey” of October 19, 2022 at 1:41 AM**

Thanks [Don](#) , interesting reading!

I really appreciate having your distillation of the material: I intend to read at least this much Aristotle someday, but somehow that someday keeps slipping further into the future. Obviously, the perfect time to read it will be at that time when the present is the mean between the past and the future, weighted toward the future because there is the potential for more people to live in the future than have lived in the past, and therefore the median in time of the combined intellect of the human race will likewise be weighted toward the future. Hmmm, some quick mental calculations indicate that that median point will be well after I'm dead! Maybe I shouldn't weight it! I'll have to find an Aristotelian to help me figure out what to do!

---

**Post by “Cassius” of October 19, 2022 at 5:05 AM**

There is some well known characterization I which reading Aristotle is like eating straw, right? Excellent dramatization Godfrey ... and now to read what Don wrote!

---

**Post by “Don” of October 19, 2022 at 7:00 AM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

There is some well known characterization I which reading Aristotle is like eating straw, right

"Reading Aristotle is a bit like eating dried hay."

Thomas Gray (1716 - 1771)

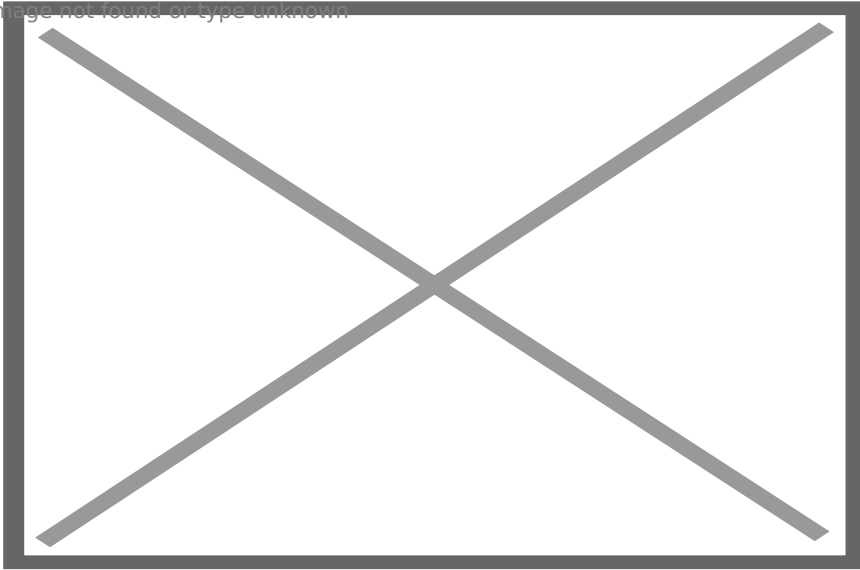
At least you could lie down in a pile of hay and take a nap.

---

**Post by “Joshua” of October 19, 2022 at 8:11 AM**

THE Thomas Gray!?

Image not found or type unknown



[Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard by Thomas... | Poetry Foundation](#)

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,  
[www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org)

This was a favored poem in my youth. Eclipsed now perhaps by Philip Larkin's poem in a similar vein:

[Philip Larkin poem Church Going](#)

---

## Post by “Don” of October 19, 2022 at 8:27 AM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

THE Thomas Gray!?

[Thomas Gray Archive : Texts : Letters : Letter ID letters.0139](#)

Quote

for my Part I read Aristotle; his Poeticks, Politicks, and Morals, tho' I don't well know, wch is which. in the first Place he is the hardest Author by far I ever meddled with. then he has a dry Conciseness, that makes one imagine one is perusing a Table of Contents rather than a Book: it tasts for all the World like chop'd Hay, or rather like chop'd Logick; for he has a violent Affection to that Art, being in some Sort his own Invention; so that he often loses himself in little trifling Distinctions & verbal Niceties, & what is

worse leaves you to extricate yourself as you can. thirdly he has suffer'd vastly by the Transcribblers, as all Authors of great Brevity necessarily must.

---

### **Post by “Don” of October 19, 2022 at 2:02 PM**

I have to agree with Gray that Aristotle "often loses himself in little trifling Distinctions & verbal Niceties, & what is worse leaves you to extricate yourself as you can."

I expected to be overwhelmed and intimidated by *Nichomachean Ethics*, but I've just been disappointed. Aristotle has been this all-powerful bugaboo of Western Civilization, I expected to be in awe or something. I'm not getting that vibe. It's just a slog sometimes to work through his verbage.

Oh, and Socrates is still a jerk in my opinion. Just saying.

---

### **Post by “Cassius” of October 19, 2022 at 3:57 PM**

#### [Quote from Don](#)

Aristotle has been this all-powerful bugaboo of Western Civilization, I expected to be in awe or something.

Which is exactly the message that is drummed into the minds of anyone who reads the work of Ayn Rand and her supporters. "Underwhelming" is the best way to describe my reaction to the Aristotle I have read. I presume (or hope) that in context and in the original he was better. And he seems to have pushed back against Plato and deserves a lot of credit for that. But is he worth being held up as the paragon of Western thought? I can't see that at all.

My opinion of Socrates is a ditto as well. Many of the other philosophers listed by Diogenes Laertius seem to have been just as sharp, and much more helpful, than this Socrates-Plato-Aristotle axis that we are supposed to worship as the best the west has to offer.

---

### **Post by “Don” of October 26, 2022 at 11:39 PM**

Commentary for Part 1 of Book 3 is now available:

[Epicurean Sage - Book 3 Part 1 Nichomachean Ethics](#)

< Back to Book 2, Part 2, Commentary Book 3 begins with more categorizing by Aristotle. The first importance categories he identifies are actions and emotions...

sites.google.com

I found some of Aristotle's observations interesting in this section, but still aggravated about his being obstinate with respect to the role of pleasure in decision-making. I don't expect that to change.

---

### **Post by “Godfrey” of October 27, 2022 at 12:51 AM**

At first I was thinking that *hekousion* and *akiusion* might have become what the Stoics call giving assent and not giving assent (I can't remember if those are the exact terms) but, reading on, maybe not. Any thoughts on that?

---

### **Post by “Don” of October 27, 2022 at 7:48 AM**

#### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

At first I was thinking that *hekousion* and *akiusion* might have become what the Stoics call giving assent and not giving assent (I can't remember if those are the exact terms) but, reading on, maybe not. Any thoughts on that?

Excellent observation. I think both your initial thought and subsequent rethinking are on the right track. I'll admit that I was unfamiliar with Stoic "assent." I think there is something in Stoicism similar to voluntary/involuntary but assent doesn't seem to be it. I found the [excerpt from Stanford](#) below helpful on assent.

Stoic assent appears to be connected with accepting sense impressions or not (from my 15 minutes poking around the Internet!). Voluntary/involuntary would seem more about taking responsibility - or being held responsible - for our actions. Virtue - in Aristotle - seems like it will be bound up with this idea.

And thanks for reading my notes, [Godfrey](#) !! 😊

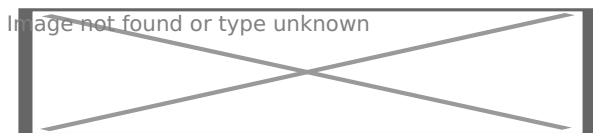
#### Quote

Though a person may have no choice about whether she has a particular rational impression, there is another power of the commanding faculty which the Stoics call 'assent' and whether one assents to a rational impression is a matter of volition. To assent to an impression is to take its content as true. To withhold assent is to suspend judgement about whether it is true. Because both impression and assent are part of one and the same commanding faculty, there can be no conflict between separate and distinct rational and nonrational elements within oneself – a fight which reason might lose. Compare this situation with Plato's description of the conflict between the inferior soul within us which is taken in by sensory illusions and the calculating part which is not (Rep. X, 602e). There is no reason to think that the calculating part can always win the epistemological civil war which Plato imagines to take place within us. But because the impression and assent are both aspects of one and the same commanding faculty according to the Stoics, they think that we can always avoid falling into error if only our reason is sufficiently disciplined. In a similar fashion, impulses or desires are movements of the soul toward something. In a rational creature, these are exercises of the rational faculty which do not arise without assent. Thus, a movement of the soul toward X is not automatically consequent upon the impression that X is desirable. This is what the Stoics' opponents, the Academic Sceptics, argue against them is possible (Plutarch, 69A.) The Stoics, however, claim that there will be no impulse toward X – much less an action – unless one assents to the impression (Plutarch, 53S). The upshot of this is that all desires are not only (at least potentially) under the control of reason, they are acts of reason. Thus there could be no gap between forming the decisive judgement that one ought to do X and an effective impulse to do X.

---

### Post by “Don” of October 27, 2022 at 8:39 AM

This is a little of track but I had to share this while I was poking around:



[CHANCE \(τύχη\), FATE \(εἰμαρμένη\), 'WHATDEPENDS ON US' \(τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν\) AND PROVIDENCE \(πρόνοια\) IN PLUTARCH'S QUAESTIONES CONVIVALES](#)

ABSTRACT One of the many philosophical issues discussed throughout Plutarch's Quaestiones...

#### Quote

When, during a discussion on the use of flowers during the symposium, it is argued that their only natural purpose is to produce visual and olfactory pleasure, it is not implied the Epicurean doctrine of ἡδονή as τέλος.<sup>17</sup> According to Erato (a friend of Plutarch), flowers produce pleasure only because they were created with that particular purpose:

[...] ἔν γὰρ αὐτὸ δοκεῖ τούναντίον, εἰ μηδὲν ἢ φύσις, ὡς ὑμεῖς φατε, μάτην πεποίηκε, ταῦτα τῆς ἡδονῆς πεποιῆσθαι χάριν, ἃ μηδὲν ἄλλο χρήσιμον ἔχοντα μόνον εὐφραίνειν πέφυκεν. (646C3-5)

[...] for I think, on the contrary, that if nature has made nothing in vain (as you claim, I believe), it is for pleasure's sake that she has made what by their nature only serve to delight us and possess no other useful quality.

That is a VERY narrow view of the natural world from Plutarch.

---

### Post by "Cassius" of October 27, 2022 at 9:41 AM

I am sorry I am slow in reading the commentary but I will eventually get there. As to the Stoic assent issue, it seems to me that either in DeWitt or one of the commentaries I've read in the past, an analogy is made (by someone, can't remember who) between the "assent" issue and the Epicurean discussion of "phantastic" impressions. I know that DeWitt has a section on this but I don't think that's the only place I have read this.

I seem to also recall that the parallels or similarities are wrapped up in something else that we've not discussed very much, that the Stoics were in a way "materialists" too (perhaps in relation to sensation that is what I am remembering). There's a lot of confusing discussion in the commentaries about thought processes and how the mind "grasps" things, but I don't have any impression as to where Aristotle was on grasping /assent.

---

### Post by "Don" of October 27, 2022 at 11:33 AM

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I am sorry I am slow in reading the commentary

No reason at all to apologize... And keep your expectations low 😊

---

### Post by “Cassius” of October 27, 2022 at 1:38 PM

Maybe no need but I will anyway. I think you're on the track of what quite possibly is the very most important aspect of Epicurus which as always impressed me as not so much the conclusion ("pleasure" as the highest good) but the method of establishing confidence that the conclusion is correct.

We will never be omnipotent or omniscient and therefore to hold "confidence" to that standard or proof is nonsensical. But that's what 2000 years has told us to do.

Aristotle was apparently in the process of breaking free from Plato but did not go nearly far enough. Artificial rules and categories are just as misleading as platonic absolutes. (That's the critique of "essentialism" that Dawkins makes.) Epicurus finished the job, but that aspect has been buried.

There is a lot to be uncovered in the final step from Aristotle to Epicurus (some of it is in Philodemus on Signs) but I am convinced if we uncover and expose to a wider audience the insufficiency of Aristotle then we not only blow a hole in Objectivism (desirable in itself) but we show the way to a common sense method of thinking that also finally kicks the supports out from supernatural religion.

And going through Nichomachean ethics is a good place to start

---

### Post by “Pacatus” of October 28, 2022 at 2:03 PM

Just a couple of comments from the far bleachers:

**First**, while we might agree on the failings of Aristotle (and certainly Plato), I think we are well-served to remember that Epicurus did owe them an intellectual debt – and that his project was of a different order, even as it required him to jettison errors of his predecessors and, in the interest of *therapeía*, to simplify (at least in the limited Epicurean corpus available to us).

For example, I posted before (in a different context) this paper: [https://www.academia.edu/34402398/What ...card=view-paper](https://www.academia.edu/34402398/What...card=view-paper), which examines Epicurus' debt to Plato – as well as some of what Epicurus rejected or corrected, e.g.:

“Appropriating Plato’s premise of the immediacy of apprehension and the affinity of knower to known, Epicurus declares the real immediacy and affinity to be physical.<sup>42</sup> He has even pirated Plato’s argument, that mere re[1]presentations cannot be knowledge.<sup>43</sup> Hence the odd sounding, now physicalist, Epicurean claim that what we know is reality. What Plato said of sense perception, that it cannot be knowledge since it does not capture the being (ousias) of things but must remain irredeemably subjective, reflecting only the way things seem to an individual (ta idia) has been turned against Plato by Epicurus: Our perceptions are what is real; ideas are the mere representations.”

And Aristotle (as I recall in my thickly mist-shrouded memory), did at least define telos in terms of a fully lived life. But Cassius’ comment – “Aristotle was apparently in the process of breaking free from Plato but did not go nearly far enough. Artificial rules and categories are just as misleading as platonic absolutes. (That’s the critique of “essentialism” that Dawkins makes.) Epicurus finished the job, but that aspect has been buried.” – seems surely on the mark.

**Second**, with regard to telos and the summum bonum, DeWitt (under the heading “The Summum Bonum Fallacy in Chapter XII “The New Hedonism,” beginning on P. 219) thought it was an error to conflate the two: “To Epicurus pleasure was the telos and life itself was the greatest good. ... The belief that life itself is the greatest good conditions the whole ethical doctrine of Epicurus.”

DeWitt goes on to unpack how he thought the error of conflation came about.

Now, back to the beer and popcorn bleachers ... and Philodemus’ poetry ... 😊

---

## Post by “Don” of October 28, 2022 at 6:19 PM

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

comments from the far bleachers

All comments always welcome! We're all learning. 😊

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

First, while we might agree on the failings of Aristotle (and certainly Plato), I think we are well-served to remember that Epicurus did owe them an intellectual debt – and that his project was of a different order, even as it required him to jettison errors of his predecessors and, in the interest of *therapeía*, to simplify (at least in the limited Epicurean corpus available to us).

I'll admit that my impatience with Aristotle is sometimes – let's say – overly enthusiastic. I need to remind myself that he's basically making things up as he goes along – \*literally\*! His is some of the – if not \*the\* – first attempts to systematically examine these ideas. For all my, pooh-pooing in my notes, I do have respect (but not unquestioning awe!) for his place in Western intellectual history.

I also need to read that paper you referenced again (I've skimmed it in the past), but – at this time – I'm not sure I would phrase it that Epicurus owed Plato and Aristotle "an intellectual debt." It seems to me that Epicurus owed much, much more to the Democritean strain of Greek philosophy than he did to Plato & Aristotle. However, all the schools – and there were a myriad of them – all knew of each other, sparred with each other, responded to each other. Several of Epicurus's and Metrodorus's works were responses to other schools.

When I write this post, I see Epicurus as more of a reactionary against the Socratic lineage than owing a debt to it, other than the debt a knife owes a whetstone.

So, one of my goals for this reading of *Nichomachean Ethics (NE)* is to get an idea of what Epicurus would have had access to, what was the intellectual background like in which he was formulating his own ideas. Epicurus claimed he was "self-taught" but that's never, of course, entirely true.

#### [Quote from Pacatus](#)

Aristotle (as I recall in my thickly mist-shrouded memory), did at least define *telos* in terms of a fully lived life.

That's one of the areas I'd say Epicurus disagreed with Aristotle. My reading of *NE* is that Aristotle didn't think you could call anyone "happy" – no one could be said to have "well-being" (*eudaimonia*) – until they had lived their entire life and were dead. "Oh, she lived a happy life." Epicurus taught that we can have *eudaimonia* here and now.

#### [Quote from Pacatus](#)

Second, with regard to *telos* and the *summum bonum*, DeWitt (under the heading "The *Summum Bonum* Fallacy in Chapter XII "The New Hedonism," beginning on P. 219)

thought it was an error to conflate the two: "To Epicurus pleasure was the telos and life itself was the greatest good. ... The belief that life itself is the greatest good conditions the whole ethical doctrine of Epicurus."

DeWitt goes on to unpack how he thought the error of conflation came about.

I've posted elsewhere on this forum that I reject Dewitt's "Epicurus said life is the greatest good" assertion. I see no evidence for this in the extant texts, and, to me, DeWitt's evidence doesn't hold up to scrutiny.

Now, pass me that popcorn and hand me a beer 😊

---

## Post by "Pacatus" of October 28, 2022 at 6:29 PM

### [Quote from Don](#)

other than the debt a knife owes a whetstone.

Well put!

### [Quote from Don](#)

That's one of the areas I'd say Epicurus disagreed with Aristotle. My reading of NE is that Aristotle didn't think you could call anyone "happy" - no one could be said to have "well-being" (eudaimonia) - until they had lived their entire life and were dead. "Oh, she lived a happy life." Epicurus taught that we can have eudaimonia here and now.

I agree. And I sometimes think the Stoics made that a kind of self-righteous pat on the back.

### [Quote from Don](#)

I've posted elsewhere on this forum that I reject Dewitt's "Epicurus said life is the greatest good" assertion. I see no evidence for this in the extant texts, and, to me, DeWitt's evidence doesn't hold up to scrutiny.

Hmmm. I'll have to give DeWitt a more thorough scrutiny on this. Being alive certainly is an existential requirement for any telos -- albeit that is likely a trivial parsing ...

### [Quote from Don](#)

Now, pass me that popcorn and hand me a beer

With pleasure, my friend! 😊

---

## Post by “Cassius” of October 28, 2022 at 10:54 PM

### [Quote from Pacatus](#)

Hmmm. I'll have to give DeWitt a more thorough scrutiny on this. Being alive certainly is an existential requirement for any telos -- albeit that is likely a trivial parsing ...

My take on this is that DeWitt is clearly onto something, but might not be framing it exactly as it should be. Not saying I can do better, but as you note, "being alive" \*is\* a requirement for any telos, or as I think DeWitt put it in a more memorable way, something like "pleasure has no meaning except to the living."

And I feel sure that Don would agree with that point -- that pleasure has meaning only to the living.

So the issue of clarity seems to me to come in unwinding what it means to use the phrase "the greatest good." The word "good" has multiple meanings or subtleties, just like the word "true" as Dewitt discusses, more successfully I think, in discussing "[all sensations are true](#)." And even "greatest" might be open to shades of meaning.

In the end my view of this is that DeWitt is making a very important point, but he's not explaining it as well as he does with "[all sensations are true](#)," The issue seems to me is to be that we need to attack the shades of meaning and ambiguities in the word "good" -- which we know that Epicurus was challenging given his other statement against walking around uselessly harping on the meaning of "good."

I give credit to DeWitt for highlighting the issue, even if he doesn't drive it home to an optimum conclusion.

---

## Post by “Cassius” of October 28, 2022 at 11:16 PM

Going a little further, I think the way we unwind [\\*all sensations are true\\*](#) gives us a good pattern. Sounds like Epicurus did say something like that, but if we take it at face value and unthinkingly, then we and he both look like fools. The statement has to be considered and understood at a deeper level - at the level in which we see "true" means "honest" in this context, rather than "fully consistent with the actual and verifiable facts."

Same goes with considering pleasure to be the highest or greatest good. If we pursue a particular pleasure recklessly and singlemindedly we can easily get ourselves killed and again look like - or be - a fool. Words have to be evaluated in context, and our human context requires us to be alive in order for pleasure to have any meaning to us. Getting ourselves killed is generally not the best way to maximize our future net pleasure. So considering these words ("pursue pleasure!") outside of our human context can get us into big trouble very fast. The penalty for misunderstanding this might not just be more pain than pleasure - the penalty might well be premature death. (And looked at in that way, this ultimate issue is outside the weighing of net pleasure vs pain. If you get yourself killed instantly driving 200 miles an hour you don't in fact experience more pain than pleasure from that choice, you die instantly. So this too is a point that the mind has to understand and isn't revealed purely through the senses.)

That's what I think Dewitt grasps and is on to, and this is an example of aggressive thinking which I think makes him one of the best interpreters of Epicurus for practical application of the philosophy. Yes pursue pleasure as the end (because virtue and holiness are illusions), but unless you are sure about your choice (dying for a friend might be an example) don't get yourself killed doing it. Life comes first in order that you may have pleasure.

Its kind of hard to accept it, but it may have taken Dewitt to bring down to earth something that should always have been obvious in the teachings of Epicurus. I don't know any other commentator who has raised this point as well as Dewitt or even thought it significant to talk about. Most commentators are content to let Epicurus sound superficially like a spoiled child without going to bat for a reasonable interpretation of what he was saying.

In contrast, I suspect this relationship was in fact obvious to Epicurus' followers in the ancient world before the Great Corruption took over.

---

## **Post by "Godfrey" of October 29, 2022 at 1:25 AM**

[Don](#) 's posts here have inspired me to finally delve into the NE, and I'm finding it quite fascinating. I'm working my way through Book 1, where Aristotle at great length dissects various meanings of good in an attempt to determine the good. Even though I don't expect to come to the conclusion that he does, going through his process (which to my limited knowledge

is considered the gold standard for this subject) is a good exercise to refine my own Epicurean ideas.

Along the way, various phrases pop out which Epicurus must have latched onto either to agree with or to refute. For me, the most prominent so far is the idea early in Book 1 that the greatest good must relate to the polis (politics) as that encompasses so many other endeavors. Of course Epicurus is often said to counsel against getting caught up in politics: this then becomes fundamental to his critique of Aristotle's analysis of the good. It would appear that rather than requiring his followers to avoid politics, he's telling them how to think about the good.

---

### **Post by "Godfrey" of October 29, 2022 at 1:35 AM**

[Don](#) I just reread your commentary on Book 1. Having started into the book and begun to grapple with the ideas, I have to say you're doing a great job! ☐☐

---

### **Post by "Don" of October 29, 2022 at 7:39 AM**

#### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

Inspired me to finally delve into the NE, and I'm finding it quite fascinating. I'm working my way through Book 1...

Glad to hear! 😊 I'm going to have to increase my progress if I want to keep up then!

#### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

the greatest good must relate to the polis (politics)

Yeah, my take on Aristotle's position is that the individual is subservient to the polis, the city-state. Humans are social animals but social in support of the state. "political" animals means not our political in the sense of campaigns etc but that we belong in a "polis." Epicurus on the other hand seems to have had more respect for the individual, still social in that friendship and smaller communities were important, but Epicureans "love the countryside."

BUT epicurus still taught that people should actively participate in the state festivals and religious rites that bound a city-state together.

So, yeah, I found book 1 both intriguing but frustrating in Aristotle's insistence on the subservience of the individual's "good", goal, telos being subservient to the state.

But is that my modern, Western bias or is that coming from a genuine Epicurean perspective?

---

### **Post by “Cassius” of October 29, 2022 at 8:03 AM**

#### [Quote from Don](#)

So, yeah, I found book 1 both intriguing but frustrating in Aristotle's insistence on the subservience of the individual's "good", goal, telos being subservient to the state.

But is that my modern, Western bias or is that coming from a genuine Epicurean perspective

I could see Epicurus holding that for individuals who do in fact find their greatest happiness in being part of a particular group of people, then for those people they are pursuing pleasure by pursuing their collectively defined interests.

But I would also expect Epicurus to hold that for those individuals who do not find their greatest happiness in a particular group of people, or who find their greatest happiness in another or smaller or separate group of people than "the polis," then the interests of the polis would not be their primary concern.

To hold otherwise would be to allow for something else other than the feeling of the person perceiving the feeling to override the guidance of nature. I read Epicurus as being rigorously logical that there can be no possible exception to the general rule that Nature gives humans only feeling (pleasure and pain) for guidance. I do not think Epicurus would admit that polis / states are living beings which have feelings of their own.

States may be the most efficient method of organization of large groups of people for living happily, but they are not strictly necessary for human survival so I bet he would say that they don't count in the same way that "life" is a prerequisite to pleasure. Like "virtue" I would expect Epicurus to see states as a tool and not as an end in themselves.

---

### **Post by “Don” of October 29, 2022 at 8:26 AM**

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I could see Epicurus holding that for individuals who do in fact find their greatest happiness in being part of a particular group of people, then for those people they are pursuing pleasure by pursuing their collectively defined interests.

I would agree with that.

Aristotle goes all in with his "The human is a 'political animal' (Zoon politikon, ζῷον πολιτικόν)." And, again to flog the deceased equine animal, he's not talking political as in serving in government, running a campaign, etc. He's talking about being an integral cog in the social, cultural milieu of the city-state, the polis (hence "politikon"). Here's where he says it again in his [Politics](#):

### Quote from Aristotle Politics Book 1 Section 1253a

From these things therefore it is clear that the city-state is a natural growth, and that man is by nature a political animal, and a man that is by nature and not merely by fortune citiless is either low in the scale of humanity or above it [like the "clanless, lawless, hearthless" man reviled by Homer, for one by nature unsocial is also 'a lover of war') inasmuch as he is solitary, like an isolated piece at draughts. And why man is a political animal in a greater measure than any bee or any gregarious animal is clear. For nature, as we declare, does nothing without purpose; and man alone of the animals possesses speech. The mere voice, it is true, can indicate pain and pleasure, and therefore is possessed by the other animals as well [for their nature has been developed so far as to have sensations of what is painful and pleasant and to indicate those sensations to one another], but speech is designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the right and the wrong; for it is the special property of man in distinction from the other animals that he alone has perception of good and bad and right and wrong and the other moral qualities, and it is partnership in these things that makes a household and a city-state.

Thus also the city-state is prior in nature to the household and to each of us individually.

So, I doubt Epicurus would advocate for someone to be "citiless" but not necessarily for the reasons outlined by Aristotle. Diogenes Laertius says that the Epicurean sage will love the countryside, but the countryside is STILL part of the city-state/polis. The polis provides protection, security, a sense of identity. Epicurus was, after all, an Athenian citizen and had certain privileges and protections (as well as responsibilities! like his compulsory military service) that came from that citizenship. But we have to balance that along with his disdain for the paideia/education/acclturation/indoctrination that was advocated by Aristotle.

---

## **Post by “Don” of October 31, 2022 at 11:35 PM**

Okay, commentary for up through section 1112b.20 (Book 3, section 3.20) is now available:

[Epicurean Sage - Book 3 Part 2 Nichomachean Ethics \(google.com\)](#)

Book 3 is very long... longer than I realized. So, if [Godfrey](#) has thoughts on parts I haven't posted yet, please feel free to share them here. I'm reading forward, but it just takes longer to write up notes and get them published on the website. I'm finding his deliberations on deliberation more enjoyable than the previous parts, BUT there's still a LOT of hair-splitting. I'll be very interested to read [Godfrey](#) 's take!

---

## **Post by “Godfrey” of November 1, 2022 at 1:20 AM**

I'm just starting Book 2, so you're comfortably ahead [Don](#) !

My very general take is that this is really interesting reading, reading it from an Epicurean perspective. If I was reading this with no other background I think it would drive me batty. There's a lot of value in this, but without a grounding in reality it would very easily lead off into the rabbit hole of absolutes. Epicurus did quite a service in building on the reasonable parts and excising the ungrounded.

---

## **Post by “Don” of November 1, 2022 at 8:12 AM**

btw, I'm trying to find the exact quote from Epicurus about "prattling on endlessly about the good" (to paraphrase).

Who knows that exact citation?

---

## **Post by “Cassius” of November 1, 2022 at 8:32 AM**

I always find that in the Usener collections ... Let me look

---

### **Post by “Don” of November 1, 2022 at 8:33 AM**

Got it!

[ U423 ]

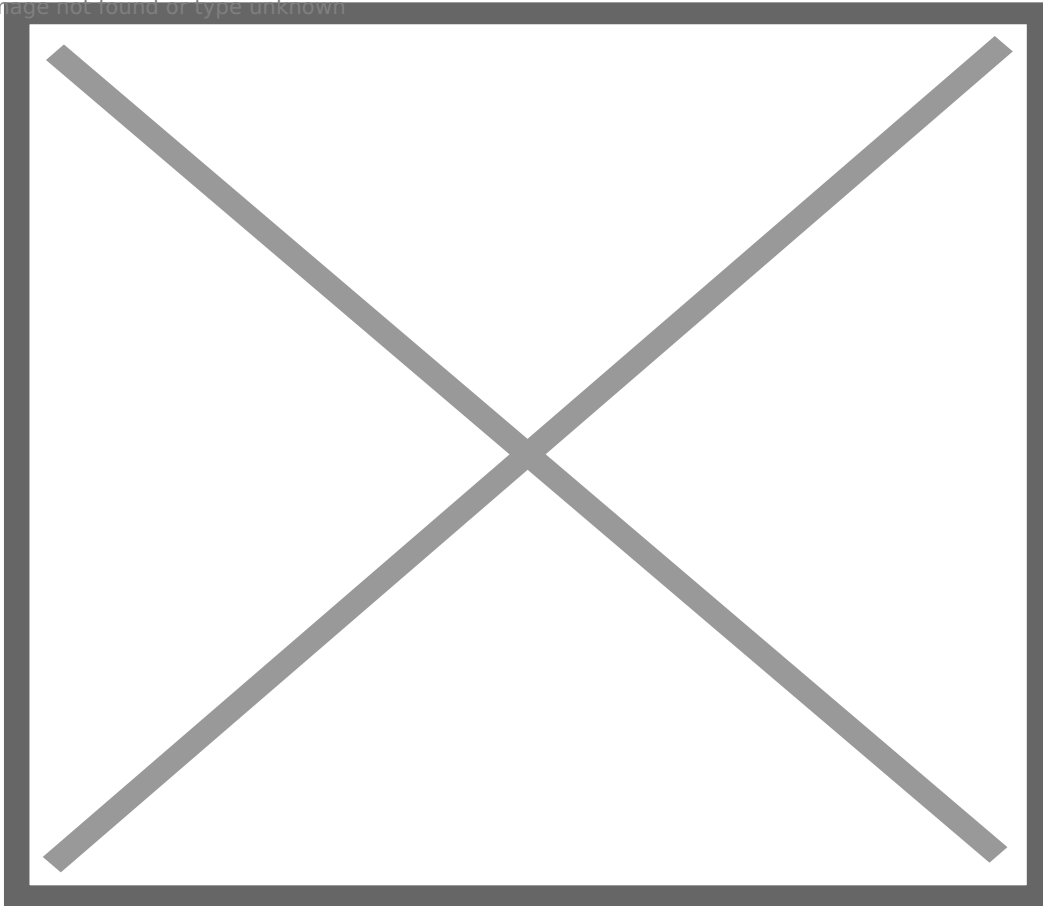
Plutarch, That Epicurus actually makes a pleasant life impossible, 7, p. 1091A: Not only is the basis that they assume for the pleasurable life untrustworthy and insecure, it is quite trivial and paltry as well, inasmuch as their "thing delighted" - their good - is an escape from ills, and they say that they can conceive of no other, and indeed that our nature has no place at all in which to put its good except the place left when its evil is expelled. ... Epicurus too makes a similar statement to the effect that the good is a thing that arises out of your very escape from evil and from your memory and reflection and gratitude that this has happened to you. His words are these: "That which produces a jubilation unsurpassed is the nature of good, if you apply your mind rightly and then stand firm and do not stroll about {a jibe at the Peripatetics}, prating meaninglessly about the good."

---

### **Post by “Cassius” of November 1, 2022 at 8:38 AM**

Yep it's on this page here too:

Image not found or type unknown



[Usener's Fragments Edited By Erik Anderson - Epicureanfriends.com](http://www.epicureanfriends.com)

[www.epicureanfriends.com](http://www.epicureanfriends.com)

As I was looking for that I am reminded that there is a lot of interesting material in that collection which we rarely if ever talk about but which is very worthwhile. Hard to assess the accuracy of some of it but still can be very helpful.

---

**Post by “Cassius” of November 1, 2022 at 8:42 AM**

For example U417:

U417

**Plutarch, *That Epicurus actually makes a pleasant life impossible*, 3, p. 1088C:**  
Epicurus has imposed a limit on pleasures that applies to all of them alike: the removal of all pain. For he believes that our nature adds to pleasure only up to the point where pain is

abolished and does not allow it any further increase in magnitude (although the pleasure, when the state of painlessness is reached, admits of certain unessential variations). But to proceed to this point, accompanied by desire, is our stint of pleasure, and the journey is indeed short and quick. Hence it is that becoming aware of the poverty here they transfer their final good from the body, as from an unproductive piece of land, to the soul, persuaded that there they will find pastures and meadows lush with pleasures.

To me that variation makes clear in saying "adds to pleasure only up to the point where pain is abolished" that there's nothing different in kind when all pain is absent. The step from 99% pleasures 1% pains is simply the addition of 1% more pleasure -- the 100% level is not something different in and of itself.

---

### **Post by "Don" of November 1, 2022 at 9:38 AM**

Hmmm .. maybe I'll have to tackle Plutarch after the 10 books of Nichomachean Ethics. 😊

---

### **Post by "Cassius" of November 1, 2022 at 9:41 AM**

That would be great - I think areas we've not hid hard enough so far include Plutarch, Sextus Empiricus, and the sections of Cicero on Epicurus outside of Book 1 of On Ends (where we've focused our attention on the Torquatus presentation).

And of course that doesn't even mention the works of Philodemus of which there are many we've barely touched.

There's certainly no lack of things to do!

---

### **Post by "Don" of November 1, 2022 at 11:53 PM**

Okay, I got a little side-tracked with the Plutarch quote this evening. I didn't get any further in commenting on Aristotle, but thought I'd share the "work-in-progress" which is Book 3, Part 3:

## [Epicurean Sage - Book 3 Part 3 Nichomachean Ethics](#)

< Back to Book 3, Part 2, Commentary Aristotle now turns his attention to wishes/wishing (βούλησις). Choice, he maintains, is about the means to an end....  
sites.google.com

I really went down the rabbit hole with Plutarch, looking for alternative translations and tracking down the Greek I wanted. I think it fits where I put in the Aristotle commentary, but I need to get back on track soon. But... I was getting pleasure from the endeavor, so I suppose I shouldn't apologize 😊

---

### Post by “Cassius” of November 2, 2022 at 5:19 AM

I am kind of late to the party in saying this but i wonder if it might not be desirable to have some way to categorize these comments other than chronologically in this thread. Does your website allow for discussion comments by page? Or should we try to somehow find a way here to be able to reference, and make new comments, by section of the book?

I ask that because in going back and picking up i am about to make a very out-of-sequence comment to the very opening of book one:

#### Quote

Nicomachean Ethics starts out with:

“Every art and every investigation, and likewise every practical pursuit or undertaking, seems to aim at some good: hence it has been well said that the Good is That at which all things aim.”

This sets up the difference between “some good” ἀγαθοῦ and The Good τἀγαθόν. The latter is the exact word Epicurus uses in:

"I know not how to conceive the good, apart from the pleasures of taste, sexual pleasures, the pleasures of sound and the pleasures of beautiful form." (On the Ethical End)

Using Aristotle’s definition (and this appears to possibly trace back as far as Eudoxus of Cnidus (c. 400-350 BCE; Aristotle was 384-322 BCE) we could get:

"I know not how to conceive That at Which All Things Aim, apart from the pleasures of taste, sexual pleasures, the pleasures of sound and the pleasures of beautiful form."

Display More

Why is it not objectionable to seem to presume, without proof, that such a thing as "THE good" ("it has been well said that the Good is That at which all things aim.") is not only NOT well said, but stupidly said? And why is not Epicurus' response ("I know not how to conceive...") best understood as a statement that such a thing as a single good does not really even exist at all except as a construct of the mind useful for debate but not as something which truly has an independent existence?

Combining that with the Plutarch comment it begins to seem to me like it is very important from the beginning to establish that Epicurus was drawing a bright line of warning against the entire endeavor of obsessing over the discussion that such a thing as a single good applicable to everyone even exists at all.

Within the confines of philosophical debate it may make sense to talk about a single concept ("Pleasure") but seen from this perspective the entire project of setting up a single word (even "pleasure") as some kind of semi-mystical conceptual goal has to be viewed with suspicion and limitation.

In saying this, to be clear, I am not criticizing Epicurus, but suggesting that what Epicurus was saying in large part is that in the initial discussion of setting up any words - pleasure or happiness or joy or tranquility or anything else - as goals, we need to first establish that the entire discussion must be kept in check lest we think that our words are in themselves capable of creating something from nothing.

It looks like a lot of Epicurus' point was to warn again, in the phrase we've been using, that while the map can be very useful the map is not the territory and we don't live in a map.

-----

So if I now or new people in the future come across Don's series of articles, should we just post comments here in thread order, or subdivide the thread somehow, or what would make sense? Because reviewing N.E. is something that lots of people are going to want to do in their study of Epicurus.

---

**Post by "Cassius" of November 2, 2022 at 5:25 AM**

So maybe one huge topic is the question of what 'good' even means? For example:

Quote

In 1094b15-20, Aristotle writes something that I think Epicurus would actually agree with:

“In many cases good things bring harmful results. There are instances of men ruined by wealth, and others by courage.”

Carrying on my last comment about challenging whether there is a single good, I think Epicurus might object that if you're being rigorous about the meaning of 'good' then wealth and courage (in that example) are in fact not good in themselves at all - that they are only contextually good - and that thus Aristotle was wrong in even talking about them as 'good' if he is going to be true to a single definition.

And is this not why we end up with the formulation that there is in fact nothing good but Pleasure, nothing bad but Pain? (Do we have that in Epicurus himself or is that Frances Wright's summary of his point?)

I think this points in the same direction:

Quote

However, his next statement struck me and I'm going to quote Rackham's translation at length:

“And further, the life of active virtue is essentially pleasant. For the feeling of pleasure is an experience of the soul, and a thing gives a man pleasure in regard to which he is described as ‘fond of’ so-and-so: for instance a horse gives pleasure to one fond of horses, a play to one fond of the theater, and similarly just actions are pleasant to the lover of justice (δικαία dikaia “just”), and acts conforming with virtue generally to the lover of virtue. [11] But whereas the mass of mankind take pleasure in things that conflict with one another,<sup>2</sup> because they are not pleasant of their own nature, things pleasant by nature are pleasant to lovers of what is noble, and so always are actions in conformity with virtue, so that they are pleasant essentially as well as pleasant to lovers of the noble. [12] Therefore their life has no need of pleasure as a sort of ornamental appendage,<sup>3</sup> but contains its pleasure in itself. For there is the further consideration that the man who does not enjoy doing noble actions is not a good man at all: no one would call a man just if he did not like acting justly, nor liberal if he did not like doing liberal things, and similarly with the other virtues. [13] But if so, actions in conformity with virtue must be essentially pleasant.”

To me Aristotle seems to be setting up an abstraction of the pleasures of "virtue" or "what is noble" as being somehow absolutely good in themselves all the time and for everyone.

OK maybe so if you want to talk in map-like terms, but again that's a map and doesn't really exist except in our minds as a construct that is useful when understood to be limited, deadly when imagined to be reality itself.

#### Quote

And again the same thing here: This also sets up another stark distinction between Aristotle and Epicurus in that that latter insisted that no one was ever too young or too old to practice philosophy and let it benefit you! Aristotle seems to say, "Are you happy? Can you be happy? Well, certainly not until you're dead I can't say one way or the other."

Aristotle is trying to set up the cold hard piece of paper as the standard by which we judge life itself, rather than recognizing it as a map that is useful for communication but a trap if considered to be handed down from a divine creator of the universe!

---

### **Post by "Cassius" of November 2, 2022 at 5:51 AM**

#### Quote

Book 3 begins with more categorizing by Aristotle.

That "categorizing" is kind of a summary of the whole project isn't it?

Aristotle is at best a kind of mapmaker, which is all well and good if you remember the limitations of maps, but a fatal error if you start to worship maps and think that they were produced by someone drawing with god-like authority.

Reading through this after being aware of Epicurus' fundamental viewpoints is, as Don says, not really a very intimidating experience at all, because the limitations jump out at you. But I shudder to think at the negative impact to the world brought about by holding Aristotle up as some kind of paragon of god-like wisdom. And that's exactly what the "Objectivists" (and no doubt others) still do today.

---

### **Post by "Cassius" of November 2, 2022 at 6:14 AM**

OK as to this:

#### Quote

Metrodorus asserts in his Reply to the Sophists: 'Hence this very thing is the Good (τὸ ἀγαθόν > τὰγαθοῦ), escape from the evil; for there is nowhere for the Good (τὰγαθὸν) to be put when nothing painful to the body or distressing to the mind is any longer making way for it.' Epicurus too makes a similar statement to the effect that the Good is a thing that arises out of your very escape from evil and from your memory and reflexion and gratitude that this has happened to you. His words are these: 'For what produces a jubilation unsurpassed is the contrast of the great evil escaped; and this is the nature of good, (τὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ φύσιν) if you apply your mind rightly and then stand firm and do not stroll about (περιπατῆ) prating meaninglessly about good (περὶ ἀγαθοῦ).' Oh, the great pleasure and blessed state this company enjoy, as they revel in suffering no hardship or anxiety or pain! (Usener Fragment 423 (Plutarch, That Epicurus Actually Makes a Pleasant Life Impossible, Section 7, Greek text. See also here for Loeb.)

So, the Epicureans had a very clear definition of what The Good was. It was simple and direct, and they didn't see any need to "stroll about prating meaninglessly about good." And remember, especially in the context of the above Plutarch excerpt, that Epicurus said, "I do not think I could conceive of the good without the joys of taste, of sex, of hearing, and without the pleasing motions caused by the sight of bodies and forms." (Usener 67) If we are filled to the top with pleasure (The Good), "there is nowhere for the Good (τὰγαθὸν) to be put when nothing painful to the body or distressing to the mind is any longer making way for it." Aristotle's slicing, dicing, hair-splitting, micro-analysis becomes superfluous and "meaningless," literally κενῶς kenos "meaninglessly, emptily, vainly" (the same word Epicurus uses for "the void").

"So, the Epicureans had a very clear definition of what The Good was. It was simple and direct,  
" <<<<

I agree with that and I think maybe it is important to discuss how it is clear and simple and direct.

Isn't the reason it is clear and simple and direct something close to this:

Since there is not in reality some single good that everything is aiming toward, any any single definition of words, we can only define "the good" in hypothetical terms. Since we have to use words to communicate, we define "pleasure" as that which we feel to be pleasurable, and 'pain' as that which we feel to be painful. Thus there is no more accurate way to define 'the good' and

'the bad' in words other than as the opposite of one another. Since we are forcing ourselves to discuss what to choose and what to avoid, we can define "Pleasure" in words no more specifically than the absence of its opposite (pain). Likewise we can define 'pain' in words no more specifically than the absence of its opposite - pleasure. We can list examples of pleasures and pains til the cows come home but those examples always remain examples. We can never reduce pleasure and pain or good and bad to real experiences other than to point to individual instances, because rightly understood pleasure and pain are feelings, and our words aren't feelings - discussion of feelings as words or concepts is nothing more than artificial 'categorizing' or word-play. And wordplay is mapmaking -- fun and useful but not to be viewed as creating a kind of supernatural reality which we should defer to and worship.

----

I think I have now caught up in my reading of Don's series so I look forward to more!

---

## Post by “Don” of November 2, 2022 at 7:27 AM

Wow! You dove right in!

I'm honored that you think my ramblings are interesting enough to comment on and to think about how to make it easier for others to comment on. This really started as a personal investigation to assuage my own curiosity. I was initially reluctant to go public, but then figured why not. The Google Sites don't allow for comments. As I mentioned previously, I'm just fitting this into my day as I can/want/am able, so I'm not sure how long it'll take to complete all 10 books. But I'm encouraged by your interest and am open to your ideas on how to point to it or allow people to comment on it on this forum.

With that, I have some comments on your comments...

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Why is it not objectionable to seem to presume, without proof, that such a thing as "THE good" ("it has been well said that the Good is That at which all things aim.") is not only NOT well said, but stupidly said? And why is not Epicurus' response ("I know not how to conceive....") best understood as a statement that such a thing as a single good does not really even exist at all except as a construct of the mind useful for debate but not as something which truly has an independent existence?

Hmm... Unfortunately, I don't agree with your general point in this excerpt and your other general comments in this direction. My perspective and interpretation of the Epicurean position

as I see it laid out by, at least, Epicurus, Metrodorus, and Philodemus, was that the discussion of the good  $\tau\alpha\gamma\alpha\theta\omicron\nu$  (tagathon < ton agathon, literally "the good") appears to have been a question every Greek philosopher wanted to answer at least as far back as Eudoxus of Cnidus (c. 400-350 BCE). Aristotle was 384-322 BCE. And they all used that word  $\tau\alpha\gamma\alpha\theta\omicron\nu$ , including Epicurus, Metrodorus, and Philodemus, to drive home their point. I don't see the Epicureans denigrating the idea of "the good" or thinking it was a silly or meaningless discussion. My perspective is that the Epicureans, starting from Epicurus himself, felt that they had answered the question "what is  $\tau\alpha\gamma\alpha\theta\omicron\nu$  'the good'?" once and for all. They all used that word  $\tau\alpha\gamma\alpha\theta\omicron\nu$  deliberately and purposefully to drive the point home that they had answered that question decisively, finally, and there was no need - had never been a need! - to "stroll around endlessly prattling on about the good." The answer had been staring everyone in the face for at least 100 years since the whole discussion began. \*Pleasure\* is that to which every action and thought points. We experience pleasure for itself and not as a means to an end. And it is pleasure writ large, including \*every\* pleasurable feeling, both katastematic and kinetic.

So when you say...

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

it is very important from the beginning to establish that Epicurus was drawing a bright line of warning against the entire endeavor of obsessing over the discussion that such a thing as a single good applicable to everyone even exists at all.

I don't think Epicurus was doing that at all. I think Epicurus \*was\* in fact saying there is a "single" good - "the good"  $\tau\alpha\gamma\alpha\theta\omicron\nu$  - and that good is pleasure. But importantly, it is NOT an abstract or idealized good like virtue, or an unattainable good open to only a select few. It is the concrete, physical feeling of pleasure as felt by human beings, pleasure in ALL its multifariousness. THAT is the good. THAT is "That at which all things aim." Epicurus felt he had definitively answered the question that had vexed Eudoxus, Plato, Aristotle, and all the rest. To me, he's saying, "Quit your endless prattling and simply acknowledge that feeling of pleasure is that at which all things aim."

I'll have more to say (and I'm thinking you might as well, [Cassius](#) ) but that's it for now. The day calls.

---

## **Post by "Don" of November 2, 2022 at 8:40 AM**

To digress to Plutarch for a moment, I found it interesting that Lucretius's image of seeing a shipwreck or battle from afar and being thankful it wasn't happening to oneself an echo of the

quotations from Metrodorus and Epicurus:

#### Quote from Metrodorus

Metrodorus asserts in his *Reply to the Sophists*: 'Hence this very thing is the Good (τὸ ἀγαθόν > τὰγαθοῦ), escape from the evil; for there is nowhere for the Good (τὰγαθόν) to be put when nothing painful to the body or distressing to the mind is any longer making way for it.'

#### Quote from Epicurus

For what produces a jubilation unsurpassed is the contrast of the great evil escaped; and this is the nature of good, (τὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ φύσιν) if you apply your mind rightly and then stand firm and do not stroll about (περιπατῆ) prating meaninglessly about good

---

### Post by "Cassius" of November 2, 2022 at 9:44 AM

#### [Quote from Don](#)

I don't think Epicurus was doing that at all. I think Epicurus \*was\* in fact saying there is a "single" good - "the good" τὰγαθον - and that good is pleasure.

Yes I think that we'll want to continue to discuss this point and discuss multiple layers of meaning, such as DeWitt does with "[all sensations are true](#)." I think that is a very clear example that words have to be defined in context. All sensations are reported honestly, for example, but all sensations do not reveal the full "truth" of the full context.

So I would say the same with "pleasure." Pleasure is considered as a feeling is absolutely the only positive guide given by nature to point to things to choose. But the word "Pleasure" can also be considered as a general concept (same with "happiness") and from that perspective the word is like a map that can be very useful but is not at all the same as the real world that it seeks to describe.

If someone wants a "map" and wants to drill down to a single word that is usable to describe all feelings of pleasure, then "Pleasure" fills the bill and within that philosophical framework is very useful. But the word "Pleasure" does not and cannot contain within it the full feeling of every experience of pleasure, and so people chafe under the idea that the single term embraces all instances of enjoyment.

So while I can agree with you that "there is a 'single' good ... and that good is pleasure" I think the problem that Epicurus is pointing to is that this statement has to be viewed in full context and not considered to be anything but a formulation of words. Words have meaning, but they only have the limited meaning that we give to them by definitions.

As I see it that's your whole problem (and I agree with you) about Aristotle: he's chopping words into definitions that suit his preferences. The problem is not that his preferences are "wrong," the problem is that there is in fact no absolute standard of right and wrong as to how to define words. Choice of language is only one of the first and most obvious problems - shades of meaning aren't defined by God or by ideal forms, so the definitions we choose to give to words are entirely up to us. And if we don't always keep that in mind, we start thinking that Aristotle is some brilliant genius of the ages who somehow figured out things that weren't there to be observed by anyone else who cares to take the time to pay attention.

That's what I think is being indicated by this sentence in the letter to Herodotus: "First of all, Herodotus, we must grasp the ideas attached to words, in order that we may be able to refer to them and so to judge the inferences of opinion or problems of investigation or reflection, so that we may not either leave everything uncertain and go on explaining to infinity or use words devoid of meaning." I think we all agree that Epicurus rejected Plato's version of "ideas" - the ideal forms - as being divine or absolute. If they aren't divine or absolute, then the logical conclusion is we assign them meaning according to our choice to describe what we observe through the senses.

I think we have previously had different opinions on this next statement, but this is what I think is also indicated by Diognes Laertius when he recorded:

"The internal sensations they say are two, pleasure and pain, which occur to every living creature, and the one is akin to nature and the other alien: by means of these two choice and avoidance are determined. Of investigations some concern actual things, others mere words. This is a brief summary of the division of their philosophy and their views on the criterion of truth."

So this is indeed a big issue and I think that you are rightly rejecting Aristotle's arbitrary categorization, but the next step - which I think that Epicurus was making clear - is that ALL categorization (all maps) are "artificial." I think Epicurus was that that in the end all we can do is assign words to what we observe. We always need to be clear that those assignments are our own choices. We work hard to make sure that the assignments are consistent across words and across sensory observations, but we always have to be clear that the assignments aren't universal or established by gods or even by Nature.

All leading back to when we decide to talk about a "single good" we're talking about a concept that we as humans have invented. We've hopefully defined it honestly based on our

observations of the way nature works, but in deciding to use a single word to describe the way nature works we are making that formulation / drawing that map ourselves.

I would expect we'll see example after example of that as you go forward through the rest of N.E..

---

### **Post by “Cassius” of November 2, 2022 at 9:46 AM**

#### [Quote from Don](#)

The Google Sites don't allow for comments. As I mentioned previously, I'm just fitting this into my day as I can/want/am able, so I'm not sure how long it'll take to complete all 10 books. But I'm encouraged by your interest and am open to your ideas on how to point to it or allow people to comment on it on this forum.

Oh yes Nichomachean Ethics surely must be one of the key books that needs to be reviewed over and over. The same would go with several other works which would no doubt include Plato's [Philebus](#) as well.

I'm not sure how it can be set up and it might not be possible to do much more than we are doing now, but hopefully we can eventually come up with some ideas. a Wiki format might work but lots of effort involved in anything like that so we probably just ought to plow through the material as best we can and then work on organization a little later.

---

### **Post by “Pacatus” of November 2, 2022 at 12:34 PM**

Another long-winded (but non-obsessive! 😎 ) "talking to myself out loud" as I sort through some of the posts here:

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

there is in fact no absolute standard of right and wrong as to how to define words

Which is something even the dictionarists grapple with; and their standard really is evolving conventional usage. Reminds me of a quote by Wittgenstein (in *On Certainty*, I think): “Don’t

look for the meaning, look for the use.”

And whatever other standards there are, are contextual – as you point out; e.g. the word “utility” has a different meaning in economics (borrowed from the philosophical utilitarians) than in everyday discourse.

Folks like Aristotle and Plato (and others) seem to want to make a map that is a standard to judge the territory – whereas any map must be judged **by** the territory, **not** the other way round. Epicurus’ mapping (because if you’re a teacher or a therapist, you need to map) seems more designed to point to the territory (reality in all its existential and experiential variability) – a bit like the Zen parable about fingers pointing to the moon. And that certainly does not require the kind of “religious” faith that, say, Plato does. Whatever faith there is a testable faith, meant to be tested in everyday life in all its everydayness.

~ ~ ~

You mentioned “obsessing” earlier. I think that Epicurus wanted to free us from all obsessiveness – which is just another form of tarache. Even the task of unpacking and interpreting Epicurus’ maps is measured, in its goodness, by pleasure and enjoyment, as per VS27: “In the case of other occupations the fruit (of one’s labors) comes upon completion of a task while (in the case) of philosophy pleasure is concurrent with knowledge because enjoyment does not come after learning but at the same time (with) learning.”

[One of the reasons I liked Frances Wright’s book so much was that her portrait of Epicurus as anything but obsessive; in fact sometimes disarming others’ obsessiveness with humor, and always in an easygoing manner – but without surrender.]

---

### **Post by “Pacatus” of November 2, 2022 at 12:43 PM**

Some of what I post here is just an attempt to put what others have said (that strikes me at the moment) into my own words, both so I can see if I understand them rightly and to personalize the stuff for myself and my own use ...

---

### **Post by “Cassius” of November 2, 2022 at 12:57 PM**

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

Some of what I post here is just an attempt to put what others have said (that strikes me at the moment) into my own words, both so I can see if I understand them rightly and to personalize the stuff for myself and my own use ...

I think that is all any of us can do. That's not to minimize the usefulness of words and ideas but to mark their limitations. And to mark their limitations is not to undercut them so much as it is to prevent their being used as tools of oppression or manipulation of other people. Words and ideas are great! But their aren't to be used as voodoo. Many people are too nice and think "no one is trying to do that!". But tell that to Paul of Tarsus and his friends. I am with Nietzsche and I think they destroyed Rome and the rest of the ancient world using just that methodology. In the beginning was the Word - and the Word was God! 😊

---

### **Post by “Godfrey” of November 2, 2022 at 2:08 PM**

It seems like the simplest way to deal with the discussion on the NE is to have a separate thread for each of the ten books. There may be overlap between the books, in which case maybe there could be an overall thread as well to cover such things. Anyway, that's easy to implement before the discussion gets too far along....

---

### **Post by “Cassius” of November 2, 2022 at 2:23 PM**

what do you think about that Don? We could create the threads under the Aristotle section here: [Epicurean Philosophy vs. Aristotle](#)

...and move this thread into that section too

---

### **Post by “Don” of November 2, 2022 at 3:08 PM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

what do you think about that Don? We could create the threads under the Aristotle section here: [Epicurean Philosophy vs. Aristotle](#)

...and move this thread into that section too

Sounds good to me.

Did you want to try and move the individual posts about the 3 books to their threads there and leave the general ones in the "overall thread."?

All that is beyond me so the logistics would be your bailiwick.

---

### **Post by “Don” of November 2, 2022 at 4:47 PM**

If we're going to go down the route of discussing words and their relationship to physical phenomenon and mental concepts, I think we'll need to review the following papers:

David Sedley, On Nature, Book 28

File

[On Nature Book 28 - Reconstruction By David Sedley - 1973 Article](#)



Sedley reconstruction of fragments from Book 28

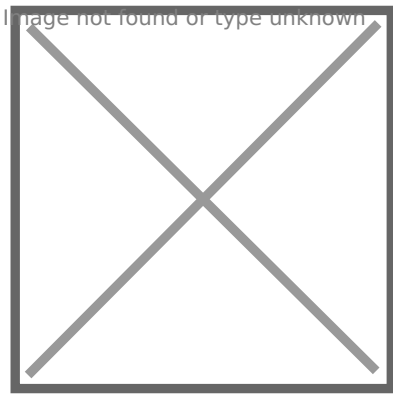


Cassius

April 15, 2019 at 10:55 AM

And maybe this one:

“New Evidence for the Epicurean Theory of the Origin of Language: Philodemus, On Poems 5 (PHerc. 403, fr. 5, col. i),” Cronache Ercolanesi (2015) 45: 67-84.



["New Evidence for the Epicurean Theory of the Origin of Language: Philodemus, On Poems 5 \(PHerc. 403, fr. 5, col. i\)," Cronache Ercolanesi \(2015\) 45: 67-84.](#)

This article presents new evidence from the Herculaneum papyri for the Epicurean theory on the origin and development of language. After a brief overview of...

[www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu)

---

### Post by "Cassius" of November 2, 2022 at 7:55 PM

As to the first article there's lots of preliminary material not particularly on point with our current discussion, but good background. Looks to me like the article really gets going around page 12 and this statement:

(c) *The Philosophical Content.* (i) The Theme.

Of the overall theme of *Περὶ φύσεως* Book XXVIII, little can be said with certainty beyond the obvious fact that it concerns epistemology. Two recurring topics are error (ψεῦδος, πλάνη, ἁμαρτία, ἡμαρτημένον, διημαρτημένον) and language (λέξεις, ὀνόματα, φθόγγοι, φωναί, ἐρμηνεία, ῥήσεις). The later sections deal with the use of empirical reasoning (ἐπιλογισμός) in detecting error; and the closing remarks imply that a particular species of error has been the subject of the whole book.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps then the stated theme of the book was the kind of error that can arise through language.

**Post by “Cassius” of November 2, 2022 at 8:04 PM**

Lots of interesting stuff in the Sedley article. Samples:

anyone could have realised the usefulness of names.

However, Epicurus’ other writings, and especially *Περὶ φύσεως* Book XXVIII, show that also on the more important question of the epistemological value of language his sympathies lie with the naturalist view. Throughout our text we see the fundamental principle of the naturalist that to apply a name to an object is to express an opinion, and that language can represent true or false opinion.<sup>101</sup> We also find polemical references to the conventionalist doctrine of the school

19 DAVID SEDLEY

also

has a correct understanding of its history.

How does Epicurus' attitude to language compare with those of contemporary Megarians?<sup>107</sup> The view that a fixed meaning naturally underlies every word puts him much closer to the extreme naturalist standpoint of Stilpo than to the extreme conventionalism of Diodorus Cronus, to which polemical references are made in *Περὶ φύσεως* Book XXVIII. As for Stilpo's theory that only identical predication is admissible, the obvious Epicurean objection to it is the practical one voiced by the Epicurean Colotes,<sup>108</sup> 'How shall we live without saying that a man is good or a general, but only that a man is a man, good is good, and a general is a general...?' On the other hand, Epicurus himself is no great defender of predication as a tool of the philosopher. He wants concepts to be clarified by reference to the data of perceptions and feelings, not through mere verbal predication. Thus he shows strong doubts about the usefulness of definitions,<sup>109</sup> and, when dealing with the special case of the concept of time, he specifically rejects the view that anything else should 'be predicated of it as sharing the same essence as it'.<sup>110</sup> This attitude falls far short of the dogmatic denial of predicability expressed by Stilpo, but may nevertheless be thought to show the influence of the Antisthenean school of thought, and in general of the naturalist's quest for one and only one name for every object.

One thing I have always liked about David Sedley is that he is very free in his criticism of Cyril Bailey:

In our text, this 'empirical' thought is distinguished from 'theoretical' thought about sensible entities (especially in 35 VIII 23-24); it is characterized as thought about particulars by contrast with inductive thought about universals (13 X 9 inf. 2); and is included in a list of all the chief thought-processes recognized by Epicurus (13 VI 1 inf. 8). It is antithetical to all abstract forms of thought.<sup>107</sup> Bailey<sup>108</sup> argues that an ἐπιπέδιον τῆς θεωρίας can be used to appositively not only the objects of perception, but also scientific concepts. This is done, he suggests, by juxtaposing already established facts about atoms and void and then 'intuitively' drawing from them an inescapable conclusion. The ἐπιπέδιον τῆς θεωρίας is thus the ultimate criterion in the investigation of the *κοσμήματα*. If there were any truth in this account, it would be fatal to my explanation of ἀσφάλεια, as 'empirical', but fortunately there is none. Bailey has himself chiefly on the motion of the *leaves de Dioscorus*<sup>109</sup> in which the motion of atoms in a moving body is discussed. A distinction is made between the 'smallest period of continuous time' and 'periods of time imaginable in thought'<sup>110</sup> and we are told that although within the former kind of time not the atoms in a moving body move in one direction, within the latter kind they move in all directions, but because of such other at such a high rate as to give the visual impression of moving in one only. He adds the explanation: 'ὅτι γὰρ ἀποσπαστικῶς καὶ οὐ διακρίτως, ἀλλ' ἀπὸ καὶ τῶν λίγων διασπαστικῶς ἔχοντες τὴν ἀσφάλειαν τῆς κινήσεως, οὐκ ἀσφάλειαν ἀπὸ τῆς κινήσεως ἀλλ' ἀπὸ τῆς ἀσφάλειας τῆς κινήσεως'. Bailey's interpretation of this last phrase ('not...') is that 'ἀπὸ τῆς ἀσφάλειας τῆς κινήσεως' alludes back to the observed fact that in a continuous period of time the parts of a moving body move in one direction only, and that 'not' ἐπιπέδιον ἀσφάλειαν τῆς κινήσεως refers to the smallest *divisum* that this same rule does not apply in an atomic period of time. Thus he makes these words explanatory not just of the immediately preceding sentence ('ὅτι γὰρ ἀποσπαστικῶς...'), but of two separate points in the whole argument that goes before. Any reader with a healthy scepticism that the text as it stands cannot be understood in this way. The clause beginning (καὶ) ... can only be explanatory of

Post by "Cassius" of November 2, 2022 at 8:17 PM

Boy this quote attributed to Philodemus on page 28 is highly useful in many contexts to affirm the Epicurean rejection of the view that things can be considered absolutely to be praised or denounced:

The equation of this hedonistic calculus with ἐπιλογισμός is confirmed by a passage in which Philodemus discusses the apportioning of praise and blame:<sup>132</sup>  
οὐ μὴν ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ | πρᾶγμα καθ' ἑαυτὸ τοῖς | ὄλοις οὐθ[έ]ν [έ]στιν ἐπαι[[νε]-  
τὸν ἢ ψεκτόν, ἀλλὰ | [γε]ίνεται τὸ μὲν καθόσον ὁμολογεῖ τῷ τέλει | τῶν  
ἀγαθῶν, τὸ δὲ καθόσον τῷ τῶν κακῶν, | ὁ μὴ ταῦτ' ἐγνωκῶς ἐπιλελογισμέ-  
ως οὐδὲ κατὰ τὴν ἀναφορὰν τὴν | ἐπ' αὐτὰ δ[ι]ορίζειν δυνή|σεται τὰ  
λαμβάνόμενα | πρὸς τοὺς ἐπαίνους ..... 'Nevertheless, since nothing is in  
itself universally commendable or blameworthy, but becomes commendable  
insofar as it conforms to the end of the good, and blameworthy insofar as it  
conforms to the end of the bad, the man who has not by an empirical calcul-  
ation obtained this knowledge will not be able to use it as a standard of  
reference for analysing that which is under consideration for commendation...'.  

---

## Post by “Don” of November 9, 2022 at 8:40 AM

Just when you thought I forgot about this project....

I posted a little more on Book 3 this morning:

[Epicurean Sage - Book 3 Part 3 Nichomachean Ethics](#)

< Back to Book 3, Part 2, Commentary Aristotle now turns his attention to wishes/wishing (βούλησις). Choice, he maintains, is about the means to an end....

sites.google.com

I'm finding points of agreement with Epicurus, but I'm getting bogged down in minutiae. After a little more of this, I need to pull back out and cover more ground from a birds eye view... Until it becomes necessary to swoop back down.

---

## Post by “Cassius” of November 9, 2022 at 10:51 AM

Can someone else who uses Android confirm that Don's link above works for them on their phone? On my desktop it works fine but whenever I use my Android phone, on any of these browsers, it does not want to open a page but rather tried to download something . Anyone else having that issue?

Edit: Thanks for the responses below: must be me.

---

### **Post by “Don” of November 9, 2022 at 11:12 AM**

It works on my Android here and in different browsers.

---

### **Post by “Godfrey” of November 9, 2022 at 2:42 PM**

It works fine on my Android tablet.

---

### **Post by “Godfrey” of November 9, 2022 at 2:53 PM**

#### [Quote from Don](#)

but I'm getting bogged down in minutiae.

Ain't that the truth! I've become totally bogged down in my attempt to read the NE. I've been reading through and highlighting, then going back and parsing my highlights. The parsing is where everything grinds to a halt. I've read the first two books, but I'm haven't even made it through parsing the first book.

Keep up the good work! There's interesting stuff in the book, but what a slog!