

Episode 167 - "Epicurus And His Philosophy" Part 20

- Chapter 9 - The New Physics 02

Post by "Cassius" of March 25, 2023 at 3:42 PM

Welcome to Episode 167 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the only complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world. Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

We are now in the process of a series of podcasts intended to provide a general overview of Epicurean philosophy based on the organizational structure employed by Norman DeWitt in his book "Epicurus and His Philosophy."

This week we continue our discussion of Chapter 9, entitled "The New Physics."

- Motion
- Linear and Vibratory Motion
- Swerve Of The Atom
- Acceleration and Retardation
- "Up" and "Down" In An Infinite Universe
- A Perpendicular Universe
- The Problem Of Cause

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/53373392>

Post by "Cassius" of March 26, 2023 at 10:04 AM

On the issue of motion - Thomas Paine, who is otherwise very similar to Epicurus in arguing against supernatural gods, stumbles and concludes that motion proves the existence of god. This show the significance of epicurus' position on motion:

[Thomas Paine Existence Of God » Internet Infidels](#)

Order books by Thomas Paine now. A Discourse At The Society Of Theophilanthropists, Paris [NOTE: Theophilanthropy, in its six years in France, gave rise to a...

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2973-episode-167-epicurus-and-his-philosophy-part-20-chapter-9-the-new-physics-02/>

[Quote from Thomas Paine - On The Existence of God](#)

Let us examine this subject; it is worth examining; for if we examine it through all its cases, the result will be, that the existence of a SUPERIOR CAUSE, or that which man calls GOD, will be discoverable by philosophical principles.

In the first place, admitting matter to have properties, as we see it has, the question still remains, how came matter by those properties? To this they will answer, that matter possessed those properties eternally. This is not solution, but assertion; and to deny it is equally as impossible of proof as to assert it. It is then necessary to go further; and therefore I say, — if there exist a circumstance that is 'not' a property of matter, and without which the universe, or to speak in a limited degree, the solar system composed of planets and a sun, could not exist a moment, all the arguments of Atheism, drawn from properties of matter, and applied to account for the universe, will be overthrown, and the existence of a superior cause, or that which man calls God, becomes discoverable, as is before said, by natural philosophy.

I go now to show that such a circumstance exists, and what it is.

The universe is composed of matter, and, as a system, is sustained by motion. Motion is 'not a property' of matter, and without this motion, the solar system could not exist. Were motion a property of matter, that undiscovered and undiscoverable thing called perpetual motion would establish itself. It is because motion is not a property of matter, that perpetual motion is an impossibility in the hand of every being but that of the Creator of motion. When the pretenders to Atheism can produce perpetual motion, and not till then, they may expect to be credited.

The natural state of matter, as to place, is a state of rest. Motion, or change of place, is the effect of an external cause acting upon matter. As to that faculty of matter that is called gravitation, it is the influence which two or more bodies have reciprocally on each other to unite and be at rest. Every thing which has hitherto been discovered, with respect to the motion of the planets in the system, relates only to the laws by which motion acts, and not to the cause of motion. Gravitation, so far from being the cause of motion to the planets that compose the solar system, would be the destruction of the solar system, were revolutionary motion to cease; for as the action of spinning upholds a top, the revolutionary motion upholds the planets in their orbits, and prevents them from gravitating and forming one mass with the sun. In one sense of the word, philosophy knows, and atheism says, that matter is in perpetual motion. But the motion here meant refers to the state of matter, and that only on the surface of the earth. It is

either decomposition, which is continually destroying the form of bodies of matter, or recomposition, which renews that matter in the same or another form, as the decomposition of animal or vegetable substances enter into the composition of other bodies. But the motion that upholds the solar system is of an entire different kind, and is not a property of matter. It operates also to an entire different effect. It operates to 'perpetual preservation,' and to prevent any change in the state of the system.

Giving then to matter all the properties which philosophy knows it has, or all that atheism ascribes to it, and can prove, and even supposing matter to be eternal, it will not account for the system of the universe, or of the solar system, because it will not account for motion, and it is motion that preserves it. When, therefore, we discover a circumstance of such immense importance, that without it the universe could not exist, and for which neither matter, nor any nor all the properties can account, we are by necessity forced into the rational conformable belief of the existence of a cause superior to matter, and that cause man calls GOD.

As to that which is called nature, it is no other than the laws by which motion and action of every kind, with respect to unintelligible matter, is regulated. And when we speak of looking through nature up to nature's God, we speak philosophically the same rational language as when we speak of looking through human laws up to the power that ordained them.

God is the power of first cause, nature is the law, and matter is the subject acted upon.

But infidelity, by ascribing every phenomenon to properties of matter, conceives a system for which it cannot account, and yet it pretends to demonstration. It reasons from what it sees on the surface of the earth, but it does not carry itself on the solar system existing by motion. It sees upon the surface a perpetual decomposition and recomposition of matter. It sees that an oak produces an acorn, an acorn an oak, a bird an egg, an egg a bird, and so on. In things of this kind it sees something which it calls a natural cause, but none of the causes it sees is the cause of that motion which preserves the solar system.

Let us contemplate this wonderful and stupendous system consisting of matter, and existing by motion. It is not matter in a state of rest, nor in a state of decomposition or recomposition. It is matter systematized in perpetual orbicular or circular motion. As a system that motion is the life of it: as animation is life to an animal body, deprive the system of motion, and, as a system, it must expire. Who then breathed into the system the life of motion? What power impelled the planets to move, since motion is not a property of the matter of which they are composed? If we contemplate the immense velocity of this motion, our wonder becomes increased, and our adoration enlarges itself in the same proportion. To instance only one of the planets, that of the earth we inhabit, its distance from the sun, the centre of the orbits of all the planets, is,

according to observations of the transit of the planet Venus, about one hundred million miles; consequently, the diameter of the orbit, or circle in which the earth moves round the sun, is double that distance; and the measure of the circumference of the orbit, taken as three times its diameter, is six hundred million miles. The earth performs this voyage in three hundred and sixty-five days and some hours, and consequently moves at the rate of more than one million six hundred thousand miles every twenty-four hours.

Where will infidelity, where will atheism, find cause for this astonishing velocity of motion, never ceasing, never varying, and which is the preservation of the earth in its orbit? It is not by reasoning from an acorn to an oak, from an egg to a bird, or from any change in the state of matter on the surface of the earth, that this can be accounted for. Its cause is not to be found in matter, nor in any thing we call nature. The atheist who affects to reason, and the fanatic who rejects reason, plunge themselves alike into inextricable difficulties. The one perverts the sublime and enlightening study of natural philosophy into a deformity of absurdities by not reasoning to the end. The other loses himself in the obscurity of metaphysical theories, and dishonours the Creator, by treating the study of his works with contempt. The one is a half-rational of whom there is some hope, the other a visionary to whom we must be charitable.

When at first thought we think of a Creator, our ideas appear to us undefined and confused; but if we reason philosophically, those ideas can be easily arranged and simplified. 'It is a Being whose power is equal to his will.' Observe the nature of the will of man. It is of an infinite quality. We cannot conceive the possibility of limits to the will. Observe, on the other hand, how exceedingly limited is his power of acting compared with the nature of his will. Suppose the power equal to the will, and man would be a God. He would will himself eternal, and be so. He could will a creation, and could make it. In this progressive reasoning, we see in the nature of the will of man half of that which we conceive in thinking of God; add the other half, and we have the whole idea of a being who could make the universe, and sustain it by perpetual motion; because he could create that motion.

We know nothing of the capacity of the will of animals, but we know a great deal of the difference of their powers. For example, how numerous are the degrees, and how immense is the difference of power, from a mite to a man. Since then every thing we see below us shows a progression of power, where is the difficulty in supposing that there is, 'at the summit of all things,' a Being in whom an infinity of power unites with the infinity of the will. When this simple idea presents itself to our mind, we have the idea of a perfect Being, that man calls God.

Display More

Post by “Joshua” of March 26, 2023 at 11:35 AM

Show Notes:

Thoreau, on Lucretius and Prometheus;

"[I was] struck only with the lines referring to Prometheus (sic)—whose *vivida vis animi...extra/processit longe flammantia moenia mundi.*"

"Gravity" [2013] Fire Extinguisher Scene

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

Virgil, *Georgics*, Book II, verse 490

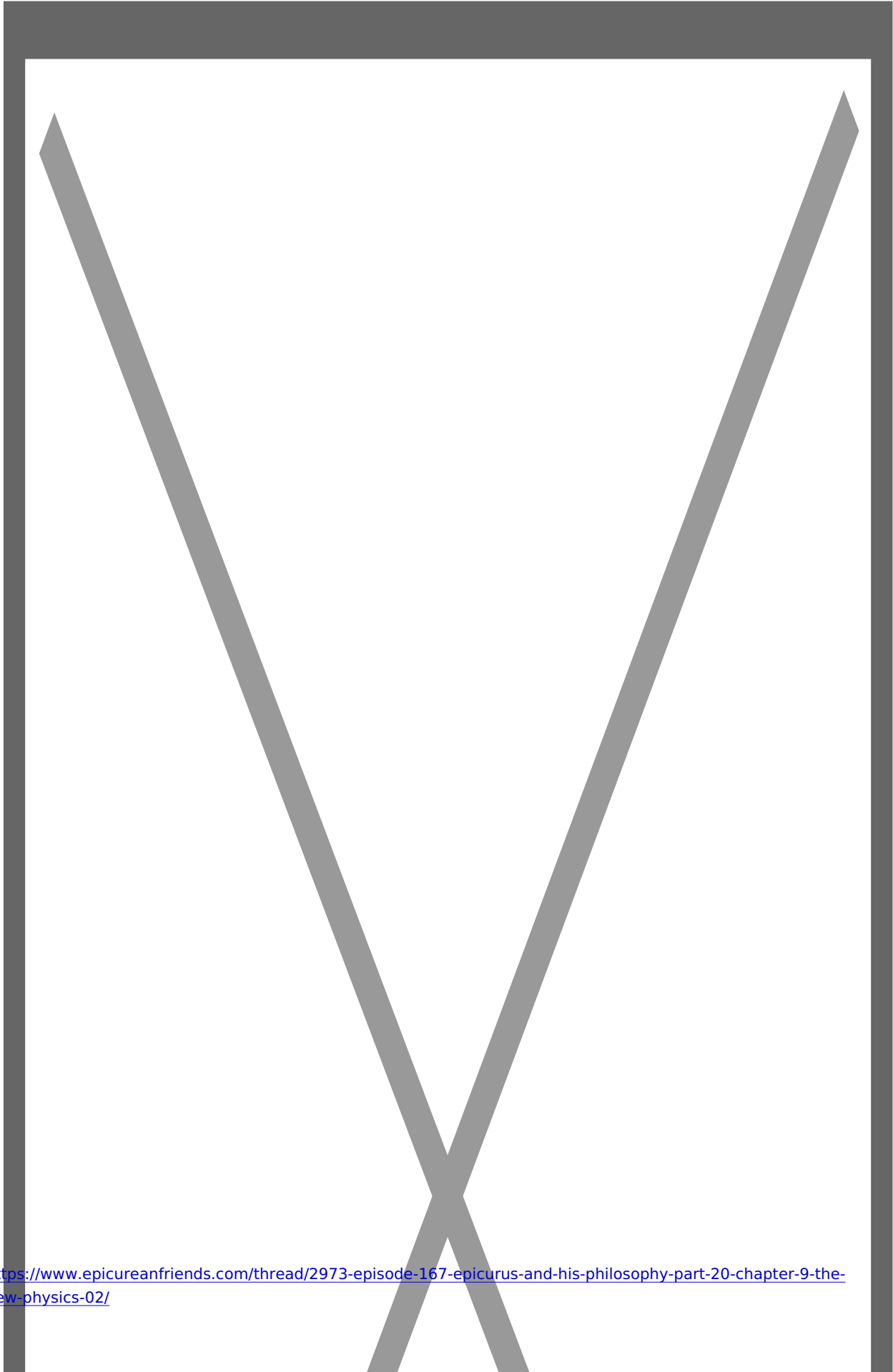
"Me indeed first and before all things may the sweet Muses, whose priest I am and whose great love hath smitten me, take to themselves and show me the pathways of the sky, the stars, and the diverse eclipses of the sun and the moon's travails; whence is the earthquake; by what force the seas swell high over their burst barriers and sink back into themselves again; why winter suns so hasten to dip in Ocean, or what hindrance keeps back the lingering nights. But if I may not so attain to this side of nature for the clog of chilly blood about my heart, may the country and the streams that water the valleys content me, and lost to fame let me love stream and woodland. Ah, where the plains spread by Spercheus, and Laconian girls revel on Taygetus! ah for one to lay me in Haemus' cool dells and cover me in immeasurable shade of boughs! Happy he who hath availed to know the causes of things, and hath laid all fears and immitigable Fate and the roar of hungry Acheron under his feet."

-Trans. J.W. Mackail

[Felix, qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas - Wikipedia](#)

Two philosophers on motion;

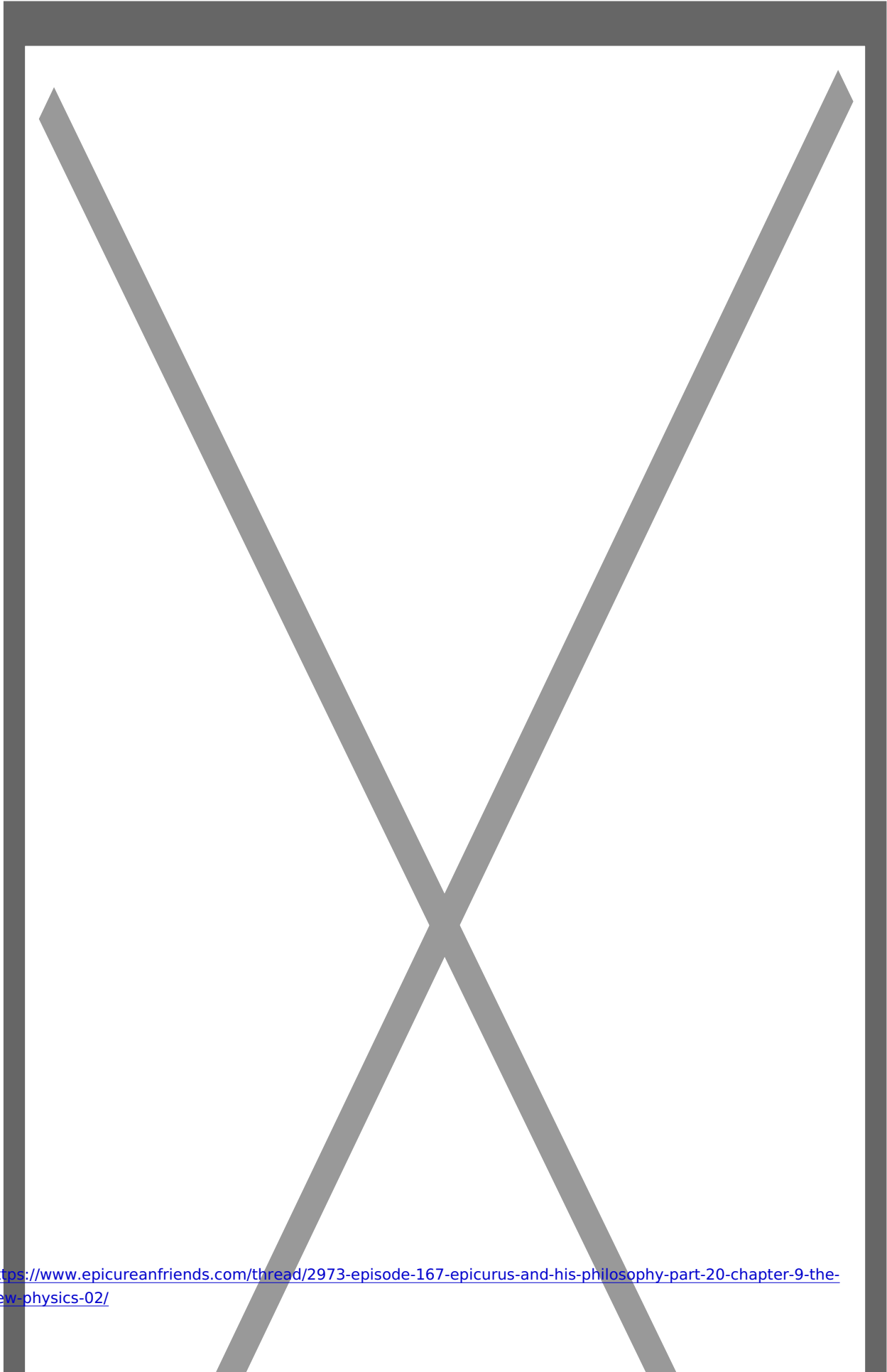
Image not found or type unknown



<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2973-episode-167-epicurus-and-his-philosophy-part-20-chapter-9-the-new-physics-02/>

[Zeno of Elea - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org)
en.wikipedia.org

Image not found or type unknown



<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2973-episode-167-epicurus-and-his-philosophy-part-20-chapter-9-the-new-physics-02/>

Post by “Cassius” of March 28, 2023 at 6:58 AM

I am in the process of getting this week's podcast ready for release and therefore came again upon the issue of Thomas Paine's argument that motion can be used as a proof of the existence of a supernatural god setting everything in motion - as discussed in Paine's article referenced two posts above.

1 - Does anyone know if this is an argument from Aristotle or another Greek source?

2 - It would be good to trace this down and be very clear for future reference. Does a deist like Paine conclude that motion is a proof of god because he thinks that motion is not a property of atoms and has to come from some where else, or is the issue an epistemological point that it is improper to speculate as to a condition that we never see exist from what does exist? Both? Neither? Or is the difference in reasoning between Paine and Epicurus something else entirely?

Not exactly a pressing issue that needs immediate resolution but something that would be useful to articulate.

Joshua brought up Richard Dawkins' "The Blind Watchmaker" and that might address that point, but I have not read it.

Post by “Don” of March 28, 2023 at 7:30 AM

[Aristotle: Motion and its Place in Nature | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)

Not sure how much it helps, but it's a start.

Post by “Cassius” of March 28, 2023 at 7:42 AM

Thanks Don! Even a quick look at that article shows what a detailed issue is involved, and surely Epicurus had a position that either adopted, rejected, or modified Aristotle's view.

Looks like there is commentary by Sedley here:

<https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/epicureanism/v-1/sections/motion>

I cannot recall reading any direction comparisons of Epicurus to others on this but I would fully expect it to lead to some important practical distinctions about the nature of things if/when we eventually have time to pursue it.

At the very least I would like to have a thumbnail sketch of how Deists like Thomas Paine - who otherwise was so aggressive in his viewpoints against supernatural influence, seems to have had a problem with this issue.

Post by “Cassius” of March 28, 2023 at 7:56 AM

That Sedley article I just linked looks like a very good basic text on Epicurus:

<https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/epicureanism/v-1>

However in pointing to it I see that Sedley includes a stark version of the conclusion that I think is most damaging to all who don't dig deeper - he carries the modern kinetic/katastematic interpretation trend to its logical conclusion - that "THE PRIMARY AIM SHOULD BE THE MINIMIZATION OF PAIN."

He writes that statement even though he started the same paragraph by writing "IN ETHICS, PLEASURE IS THE ONE GOOD AND OUR INNATELY SOUGHT GOAL, TO WHICH ALL OTHER VALUES ARE SUBORDINATED."

In ethics, pleasure is the one good and our innately sought goal, to which all other values are subordinated. Pain is the only bad, and there is no intermediate state. Bodily pleasure becomes more secure if we adopt a simple lifestyle which satisfies only our natural and necessary desires, with the support of like-minded friends. Bodily pain, when inevitable, can be outweighed by mental pleasure, which exceeds it because it can range over past, present and future enjoyments. The highest pleasure, whether of soul or of body, is a satisfied state, 'static pleasure'. The short-term ('kinetic') pleasures of stimulation can vary this state, but cannot make it more pleasant. In striving to accumulate such pleasures, you run the risk of becoming dependent on them and thus needlessly vulnerable to fortune. The primary aim should instead be the minimization of pain. This is achieved for the body through a simple lifestyle, and for the soul through the study of physics, which offers the most prized 'static' pleasure, 'freedom from disturbance' (*ataraxia*), by eliminating the two main sources of human anguish, the fears of god and of death. It teaches us that cosmic phenomena do not convey divine threats, and that death is mere disintegration of the soul, with hell an illusion. Being dead will be no worse than not having yet been born. Physics also teaches us how to evade determinism, which would turn moral agents into mindless fatalists: the indeterministic 'swerve' doctrine (see above), along with the logical doctrine that future-tensed propositions may be neither true nor false, leaves the will free.

This is very unfortunate terminology. The first underlined sentence is explicitly stated in Epicurus and is beyond doubt Epicurus' ultimate viewpoint. The second statement is not explicitly stated in Epicurus, and that formulation is an inference drawn largely from Cicero and the kinetic-katestematic controversy that we've discussed extensively elsewhere (for new readers see Boris [Nikolsky](#)'s "Epicurus On Pleasure" which derives from Gosling and Taylor.

On this I think Emily Austin's viewpoint in her footnote in Chapter 4 of Living for Pleasure is very helpful:

8. This is a non-specialist text, so I have chosen not to wade into the dispute about katestematic and kinetic pleasures in the body of the text. A specialist will recognize that I am adopting a view roughly in line with [Gosling and Taylor \(1982\)](#) and [Arenson \(2019\)](#). On my reading, katestematic pleasures are sensory pleasures that issue from confidence in one's ability to satisfy one's necessary desires and an awareness of one's healthy psychological functioning; choice-worthy kinetic pleasures are the various pleasures consistent with maintaining healthy functioning, and those pleasures vary, but do not increase healthy psychological functioning.

Both cite [Gosling & Taylor](#) who have probably the most extensive analysis.

19.0.4. The kind of view we wish to oppose holds that it was an important feature of Epicureanism to insist on dividing pleasures into two sorts, sensory ones on the one hand, and katastematic ones, of which lack of disturbance of mind (*ataraxia*) and lack of pain (*aponia*) are the important examples, on the other. The distinction was important to Epicurus because it was the latter which he wished to put forward as the good in life, and he needed the contrast in order to defend himself against the charge that he was advocating a life of debauchery. He can be seen doing this in the *Letter to Menoeceus* (DL X.131-2) where he says that when we call pleasure the goal we do not mean the pleasures of profligates, but to be without pain of body or distress of mind. The pleasures of profligates are obviously the sensory pleasures, and Epicurus is making it clear that he is putting forward something else as our goal. There are four objections which such views have to meet (see 19.0.6-9).

19.0.6. As we have pointed out, all these views assume that the distinction between kinetic and katastematic pleasures was one on which Epicurus put a particular emphasis, and that they were different kinds of pleasure, the good in life consisting in some of the latter. It is this feature of all such views which creates the problems. These are as follows:

19.1.2. The passages quoted by Cicero in *Tusculan Disputations* (cf. 19.0.6) suggest a different picture of *aponia* and *ataraxia* whereby *aponia* is a condition of having sensory pleasures but with no accompanying pain, and *ataraxia* is a state of confidence that one may acquire such sensory pleasures with complete absence of pain. This confidence is itself a positive state. However unadulterated by

Post by "Don" of March 28, 2023 at 8:37 AM

I'm fascinated by how rapidly the physics (motion) turns into an ethics issue (pleasure). A good demonstration of how they're inextricably linked.

Post by "Cassius" of March 28, 2023 at 8:59 AM

Yes and I want to start another thread on "imagery" for this question of Sedley's statement in that article: "The primary goal should [instead] be the minimization of pain."

I have an idea I want to ask @Nate (because i know he is good with memes to help with 😊)

Thread here:

Post

Imagery On The Interplay Between "Pursue Pleasure" and 'Avoid Pain"

Due to a recent message of a statement by David Sedley as to "The primary goal should be the absence of pain" I am wondering if we can come up with some imagery that would help crystallize this issue. Since for me as a boomer all things resolve to scenes from Star Trek the Original Series, one of the first images that comes to mind is the constant tension between Captain Kirk demanding "more power" from the engines while Engineer Scott would say "it's going to blow" unless you let off.

That...



Cassius

March 28, 2023 at 9:09 AM

Post by "Cassius" of March 28, 2023 at 10:07 PM

Episode 167 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. This week we complete Chapter 9 of the DeWitt Book with a discussion of issues involving motion.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/53373392>