

Does the philosophy change you?

Post by “EricR” of June 13, 2023 at 7:56 AM

I was talking with [Cassius](#) about some of my readings in religion. I have a fascination with religious philosophies, in particular the "philosophical proofs" of the existence of God. There are several and when I've read them I've found them compelling. (Aristotle's prime mover for example). I know some here will think that is silly.

The difficulty I had is that even if I accept the arguments and decide "yes, God exists", my experience of being is unchanged. I am still just me living life and motivated to make it as pleasant as possible.

So I thought I recalled a quote from Epicurus that addressed this. Something about one's experience of life is not being improved by a philosophy, rendering it useless.

Thoughts? I don't want to debate Aristotle, religion, God, etc. That was merely the context for my question. Does the philosophy change you? Or perhaps it is better posed as "does the philosophy change your experience of being"?

Post by “Don” of June 13, 2023 at 8:22 AM

[Quote from EricR](#)

"does the philosophy change your experience of being"?

If by "experience of being" you mean "how one experiences the world", the answer has to be "yes." One's "experience of being" is inextricably linked to what one pays attention to. By focusing on - seeking out - pleasure in both little and big ways, one's experience of the world is changed.

Post by “EricR” of June 13, 2023 at 8:41 AM

Interesting. I cannot say for sure that I have the same experience.

So did you experience the world differently prior to reading Epicurean ideas?

Post by “Don” of June 13, 2023 at 8:57 AM

[Quote from EricR](#)

So did you experience the world differently prior to reading Epicurean ideas?

Not really having thought about (it just happened gradually), I would say my decision making process has definitely changed.

Post by “Cassius” of June 13, 2023 at 9:07 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

I would say my decision making process has definitely changed.

And I can see all sorts of other aspects that could change as well. Once you are really confident that you don't have to face eternal punishment in hell for violating the dominant orthodoxies, I can see that changing a person pretty profoundly.

Especially the implications of a view like this:

[125] For there is nothing terrible in life for the man who has truly comprehended that there is nothing terrible in not living.

Post by “Eikadistes” of June 13, 2023 at 10:44 AM

[Quote from EricR](#)

Does the philosophy change you?

Epicurean philosophy changes us the same way a pair of glasses changes someone with near-sightedness.

Post by “Little Rocker” of June 13, 2023 at 10:47 AM

[Quote from EricR](#)

So I thought I recalled a quote from Epicurus that addressed this. Something about one's experience of life is not being improved by a philosophy, rendering it useless.

Were you perhaps thinking of this: 'Vain is the word of a philosopher by which no human suffering is cured. For just as medicine is of no use if it fails to banish the diseases of the body, so philosophy is of no use if it fails to banish the sufferings of the mind' (Usener fr. 222)

I was admittedly somewhat surprised to discover that I was in fact changed by studying Epicurus as a way of living rather than an academic exercise. Sometimes it was just that I finally discovered a justification for views I already had pre-reflectively (e.g., that greed leads to unhappiness). Sometimes it was that I actually altered how I interacted with others (privileging activities that would provide me with memories over unmemorable activities, at least when I had a choice). And I made peace with the fact that I thought life should be pleasant, which was actually a difficult transition because of my upbringing. Those are only a few examples of changes in my outlook and behavior, but they are perhaps the most notable ones.

Post by “Joshua” of June 13, 2023 at 10:49 AM

It would be fair to say that I have an ascetic streak--for part of my twenties I was a car-free vegetarian who commuted by bicycle and drank more tea than anything else, after much reading in Thoreau, Edward Abbey, Frank Herbert and Buddhism. Some of this I found to be impractical in a small Midwestern city. The vegetarianism I found to be a strain on interpersonal relationships. It made dining with others very troublesome.

The thing is I couldn't let philosophy in general go even if I wanted to. I think for some people the questions arise unbidden. When Salman Rushdie went into protection after the fatwa, Susan Sontag told him "Salman! It's like being in love! I think of you night and day: all the time!" It's like that with philosophy.

Death, life beyond the grave, ethics, morality, the nature of human life; even without Epicurus I should spend much time turning these things over in my mind.

Post by "Don" of June 13, 2023 at 10:52 AM

[Quote from Little Rocker](#)

Usener fr. 221)

Since we're getting down the thread here, here's a link to the can of worms that got opened on that fragment 😊 :

Thread

[Porphyry - Letter to Marcella - "Vain Is the Word of the Philosopher..."](#)

I was talking to @EricR this morning and trying to remember the source of this quote. In tracking it down it seems to come from Porphyry's letter to Marcella -- but do we really know this is attributable to Epicurus? Usener seems to think so, but why? Anyone recall?

U221

Porphyry, Letter to Marcella, 31, [p. 209, 23 Nauck]: Vain is the word of a philosopher which does not heal any suffering of man. For just as there is no profit in medicine if it does not expel the diseases of the body,...

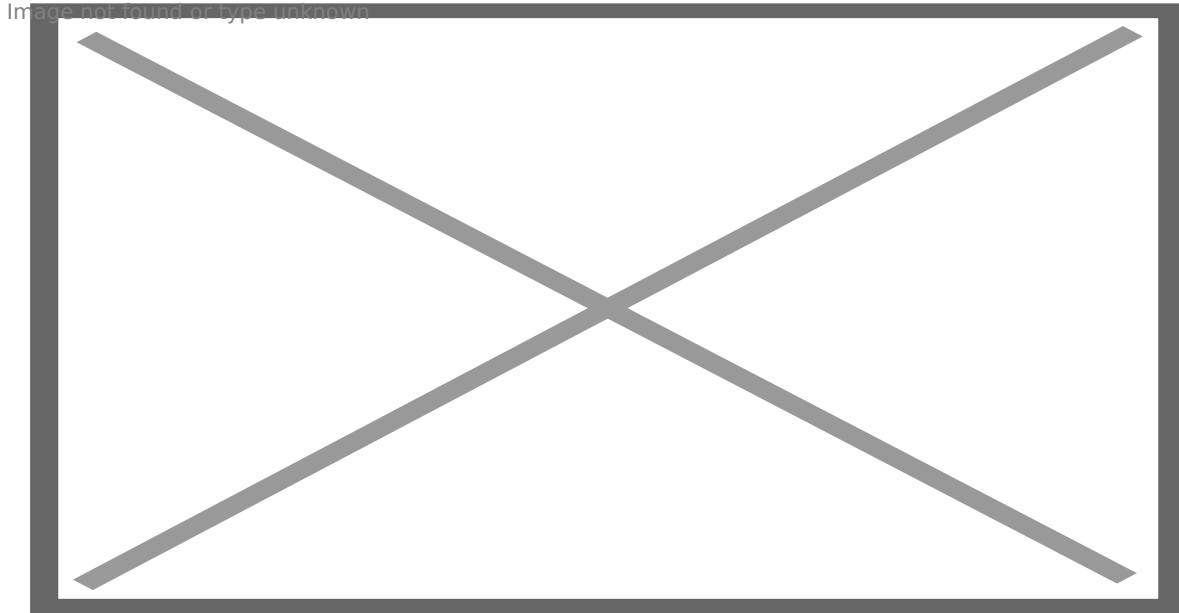


Cassius

June 12, 2023 at 11:34 AM

Post by "Joshua" of June 13, 2023 at 2:24 PM

I almost forgot to mention, @EricR , that we occasionally have chats with Dr. Kevin Guilfooy who co-edited "The Cambridge Companion to Peter Abelard", so if medieval logic interests you that would be a good book to lay your hands on. Kevin is a great guy and could probably be convinced to answer any questions you might have on that subject.



[The Cambridge Companion to Abelard \(Cambridge Companions to Philosophy\)](#)

Although best known for his views about universals and his dramatic love affair with Heloise, Peter Abelard (1079-1142) also made important contributions in...
www.amazon.com

Post by “Godfrey” of June 13, 2023 at 3:35 PM

Letting go of the supernatural may have caused the biggest change in me. I now spend my time learning how best to enjoy this life, rather than searching for something that (in all likelihood) doesn't exist.

Post by “Pacatus” of June 13, 2023 at 3:40 PM

I was raised in a milieu of Christian/Stoical/Kantian “virtue moralism” that I liken to a Pavlovian programming that leaves an array of reactive triggers in your subconscious – that can grab you decades later (at least for me). All of that was in continual struggle with my inherent tendency toward hedonism (as opposed, here, to asceticism); and an unchecked, rebellious hedonism led to borderline addictive tendencies.

Unfortunately, all of the philosophical/spiritual avenues that I explored and studied seemed arrayed on the side of that latent moralistic programming. And so, life remained a struggle most days, well beyond my midlife years – even with help from friends and a wise therapist. (I am nothing if not stubborn! 😡😭)

Epicurus has finally given me some ease in all that – with a rational therapy that goes beyond mere intellectual philosophy (in the modern academic sense) and offers the practical means for a healthier hedonism (without the old guilt). 1/

I still struggle: those subconscious triggers still rear their hooded heads. But the old reactions are short-lived. Life is easier, serenity is more readily available on a daily basis.

+++++

1/: I am reminded, in my random brain, of some lines by Rumi:

“As always, we wake anxious and afraid.

“Don’t go into the library!

“Take down your lute and play ...”

Post by “Eoghan Gardiner” of June 13, 2023 at 5:00 PM

Yeah I think so, if it doesn't I think Epicurus would say you aren't practicing philosophy.

Post by “Pacatus” of June 13, 2023 at 5:28 PM

[Eoghan Gardiner](#)

Sounds right.

Post by “Little Rocker” of June 13, 2023 at 6:45 PM

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

I was raised in a milieu of Christian/Stoical/Kantian “virtue moralism” that I liken to a Pavlovian programming that leaves an array of reactive triggers in your subconscious - that can grab you decades later (at least for me).

Yeah, in my experience it never goes away....it just gets muffled.

Post by “Eoghan Gardiner” of June 14, 2023 at 3:58 AM

[Quote from Little Rocker](#)

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

I was raised in a milieu of Christian/Stoical/Kantian “virtue moralism” that I liken to a Pavlovian programming that leaves an array of reactive triggers in your subconscious - that can grab you decades later (at least for me).

Yeah, in my experience it never goes away....it just gets muffled.

Yep same for me, at times it becomes overwhelming.

Post by “Cassius” of June 14, 2023 at 6:19 AM

Seems appropriate on the topic that it's a constant struggle -

Lucretius 6 / 43 (Munro)

[I have willed at the same time] to explain all the other things which mortals observe to go on upon earth and in heaven, when often they are in anxious suspense of mind, and which abase their souls with fear of the gods and weigh and press them down to earth, because ignorance of

the causes constrains them to submit things to the empire of the gods and to make over to them the kingdom. For they who have been rightly taught that the gods lead a life without care, if nevertheless they wonder on what plan all things can be carried on, above all in regard to those things which are seen overhead in the ethereal borders, are borne back again into their old religious scruples and take unto themselves hard taskmasters, whom they poor wretches believe to be almighty, not knowing what can, what cannot be, in short on what principle each thing has its powers defined, its deep set boundary mark; and therefore they are led all the farther astray by blind reason.

[68] Now unless you drive from your mind with loathing all these things, and banish far from you all belief in things degrading to the gods and inconsistent with their peace, then often will the holy deities of the gods, having their majesty lessened by you, do you hurt; not that the supreme power of the gods can be so outraged that in their wrath they shall resolve to exact sharp vengeance, but because you will fancy to yourself that they, though they enjoy quiet and calm peace, do roll great billows of wrath; nor will you approach the sanctuaries of the gods with a calm breast, nor will you be able with tranquil peace of mind to take in those idols which are carried from their holy body into the minds of men as heralds of their divine form. And what kind of life follows after this, may be conceived.

Post by “Cassius” of June 14, 2023 at 9:10 AM

You know this topic - the feeling of getting overwhelmed and falling back into "the norm" is a problem that deserves lots of attention.

Seems pretty clear that at the very least Epicurus was advising:

- "getting back to nature" or "studying nature" as a way to build confidence,

[PD12](#). A man cannot dispel his fear about the most important matters if he does not know what is the nature of the universe, but suspects the truth of some mythical story. So that, without natural science, it is not possible to attain our pleasures unalloyed.

But also:

- surrounding yourself with like-minded friends who can help talk through and in other ways assist in bad times.

Lots of references to that:

[PD27](#). Of all the things which wisdom acquires to produce the blessedness of the complete life, far the greatest is the possession of friendship.

[PD28](#). The same knowledge that makes one confident that nothing dreadful is eternal or long-lasting also recognizes, in the face of these limited evils, the security afforded by friendship.

Seems as true today as ever that while we can do a lot "on our own" in terms of studying nature, in the end living the best life possible is a "team sport" that requires constant reinforcement both in ourselves and through friends.

Hopefully we can help a little with both here with this forum.

Post by "Cassius" of June 14, 2023 at 9:49 AM

Don't we have a thread somewhere about what an Epicurean might do when they feel overwhelmed or depressed?

If we don't then we are about to, because we need an accessible list of practical advice.

Post by "Cassius" of June 14, 2023 at 9:50 AM

OK yes we basically have a full subforum devoted to this, but might be good to add another specific thread:

[Dealing With Anxiety And Depression](#)

Here is a new specific thread which provides a keyword for the "overwhelmed" feeling, which probably isn't strictly the same as "anxiety" or "depression." This is the kind of thing we really need an "article" on :

Thread

[**How Does An Epicurean Feeling Overwhelmed Or Depressed Overcome That Feeling?**](#)

[EDIT FROM CASSIUS: I am copying this post into a new thread to address the topic now listed as the thread title: "How Does An Epicurean Feeling Overwhelmed Or Depressed Overcome That Feeling?" The first three posts are from [another thread entitled "Does the Philosophy](#)

[Change You?"](#) but these posts set up the topic very nicely. We're not talking here about clinical depression or generalized anxiety but the normal ups and downs of everyday life, when the obstacles (real and not imagined) seem...



Pacatus

June 13, 2023 at 3:40 PM

So let's continue "Does the Philosophy Change You?" - which is a very good question - here in this existing thread. If anyone wants to pursue the "how to overcome feeling overwhelmed" aspect please post it [at this link](#).

Post by "Eoghan Gardiner" of June 14, 2023 at 11:58 AM

My problem is I really can't escape Catholic guilt. I wish I could.

Post by "Cassius" of June 14, 2023 at 12:06 PM

[Quote from Eoghan Gardiner](#)

I really can't escape Catholic guilt. I wish I could.

I presume I know what you mean but I am not Catholic so maybe there is more to it that would be worth describing (at least in general)?

Post by "Eoghan Gardiner" of June 14, 2023 at 12:37 PM

Catholic guilt prevades the lives of many catholics and ex catholics, when I enjoy food I feel guilty at times, when I laugh with friends I feel guilty...it's very deep for being brought up in this way. It makes it so every pleasure is marked with guilt. Speaking to hundreds of other ex catholics over the years it seems to be a common thing.

For example I am playing video games, I feel guilty I feel as if I am doing wrong. Other Christians seem to get it around sexually matters but Catholics and Orthodox seem to get it around every pleasure every joy.

Post by “Cassius” of June 14, 2023 at 12:50 PM

That's a little deeper than I understood. I am familiar with "we are worms" and "undeserving of salvation" and so forth but not to the extent that **every** pleasure in **every** situation is wrong. I am familiar that Stoicism might be read in that way, but not really Catholicism. Maybe with Joshua's help we might want a full Catholicism thread.

Post by “Don” of June 14, 2023 at 12:58 PM

 "Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum." I've never been more glad that I wasn't raised Catholic than after reading the post above. That's very unfortunate.

Post by “Little Rocker” of June 14, 2023 at 1:47 PM

I was raised Southern Baptist, deep in the belly of the whale, so I know (almost) exactly what you're talking about, Eoghan. It's like being raised bilingual--the second language is always in your head, even if you never speak it. The only truly regrettable result of breaking away from religion for me has been that it alienates me somewhat from my family and almost everyone I grew up with.

Post by “Cassius” of June 14, 2023 at 1:59 PM

[Quote from Little Rocker](#)

only truly regrettable result of breaking away from religion for me has been that it alienates me somewhat from my family and almost everyone I grew up with.

.... Other than that, Mrs. Lincoln, how was the play? 😊

It seems to me that in most all cases it takes a special kind of person to be able to start this process, and even then it takes constant work thereafter.

But to me, it's worth it.

EDIT - Is has been pointed out to me that my "Other than that Mrs. Lincoln" joke might be misunderstood. See below post [37](#).

Post by “Joshua” of June 14, 2023 at 2:20 PM

Yeah, fellow recovering Catholic altar boy here. 17 years in Catholic schools, baptized, confessed, and, against my better judgment, confirmed.

Learned young to lie early and often. When I got my first job at 16 I would skip Sunday mass for "work"; "work" in my private vernacular being to leave the house in my work uniform and go browse the books at Barnes and Noble. Imagine my surprise reading the Alexandrian novelist André Aciman years later: *"People who read are hidiers. They hide who they are. People who hide don't always like who they are."*

One of my prouder moments in secondary school was the paper we were asked to write on Natural Family Planning--or in very public vernacular, Vatican Roulette. I tore that whole business up one side and down the other. I didn't know at the time that I was really embarking on a long campaign which Christopher Hitchens was already defining in the aftermath of 9/11:

Quote

Here we are then, I was thinking, in a war to the finish between everything I love and everything I hate. Fine. We will win and they will lose. A pity that we let them pick the time and place of the challenge, but we can and we will make up for that.

It could just as truthfully be argued that the conflict in question was not so different to the one articulated by Lucian of Samosata all those centuries ago. It was then and still is "war to the knife" between those on the one side who look for their reward in another life, and who more than merely scorn at the pleasure and beauty and wonder of this world, and those of us on the other who would do all in our power to make this one life truly worth living.

So reflecting on my early Catholicism is, for the second time today, like finding an old friend in Thoreau: "*The greater part of what my neighbors call good I believe in my soul to be bad, and if I repent of anything, it is very likely to be my good behavior. What demon possessed me that I behaved so well?*"

Post by "Eoghan Gardiner" of June 14, 2023 at 2:26 PM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

One of my prouder moments in secondary school was the paper we were asked to write on Natural Family Planning--or in very public vernacular, Vatican Roulette.

Natural family planning is so ridiculous they absolutely hoops they have to jump through to not make it the same as just using contraception is absolutely gas.

Catholicism falls apart when you come to study the bible academically, you can make all the arguments for the existence of God you want but even if they are logically in no way does it point toward the Bible, Quran or anything else.

I used to be friends with Dominicans and they basically just told me "don't worry about scholarship of the bible it's rubbish" for an order devoted to philosophy that didn't seem like a great answer.

Post by "Pacatus" of June 14, 2023 at 5:35 PM

I grew up (and through my formative years) a certain kind of black-book Lutheran for whom the standard Sunday recited confession was "*I confess that I am **by nature** sinful and unclean*" -- week after week after week, year after year. (I don't think that harsh a language is still used, even in the most conservative Lutheran churches.) Again, despite rational rebellion, there can still be that Pavlovian residue, buried in the subconscious.

Post by “Pacatus” of June 14, 2023 at 5:44 PM

[Quote from Little Rocker](#)

the second language is always in your head, even if you never speak it

An excellent and apt description!

Post by “Little Rocker” of June 14, 2023 at 9:34 PM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

Learned young to lie early and often. When I got my first job at 16 I would skip Sunday mass for "work"; "work" in my private vernacular being to leave the house in my work uniform and go browse the books at Barnes and Noble.

I also had a strange Sunday book ritual! I could never skip service, but I had a fellow student from my big public high school whose parents owned the only remaining independent bookstore in town. So they told me I could have the employee discount, and I went there every Sunday afternoon to pick out what I would read that week, usually two novels, with the occasional poetry or philosophy thrown in for good measure. I eventually worked there for a few summers in college. Also, I did lie, but only about whether I had been to Sunday afternoon choir practice...until the choir director ratted me out for missing!

Post by “Root304” of June 15, 2023 at 12:03 AM

It definitely was a big shift for me from deep mental affliction due to chasing "the divine", to living pleasantly in a relatively short period of time with the philosophy. I feel like the philosophy was meant for all, but particularly for someone like who I was about 2 years ago to about 2014: bedeviled by the "Gods" and constantly fearing death. So, I am bit of a zealot, a reveler, a "born again" type about Epicureanism. 😊

Post by “Titus” of June 16, 2023 at 12:45 AM

[Quote from EricR](#)

Does the philosophy change you? Or perhaps it is better posed as "does the philosophy change your experience of being"?

Sometimes I ask myself the same question and realize most people won't ever walk in the same trails as I do. It's quite impressive, because I consider the Epicurean worldview as substantial to the recognition of happiness. It's not about the single elements, as there are normal people out there who know how to live a happy life, too. It's rather the unique approach of developing a comprehensive philosophy, starting with particles and ending up proclaiming self-esteem and the reign of pleasure.

I had become quite a fundamentalist, focusing on Epicurean philosophy only and its implications all day long. I've tried to "normalize" in the last months, but it seems I feel better in the "Epicurusphere" as I don't understand much of what's going on outside of my bubble anymore. It does not feel real, not focussed and obsolete.

I also like the religious flavour, adhering true philosophy and recognizing Epicurus as my saviour. 😊

Post by “Martin” of June 16, 2023 at 4:35 AM

It seems there are worlds between religious education in America/Ireland and Germany.

In Germany, religious education is a mandatory part of education in state schools, includes church service on one school day morning per week, and is usually done separately for Catholics and Protestants, whereby Protestants are usually lumped together in one curriculum irrespective of their variants. More recently, religious education for Muslims, too, has been added in public schools. Parents can opt their kids out of the mandatory religious education, and from age 14 onward, kids can opt out on their own. However, that opting out was rare during my time at school.

This background would suggest that indoctrination is particularly severe in Germany but actually it is not, at least not in Cologne, which is predominantly Catholic, and nearby urban areas. Culture in Cologne is traditionally oriented toward pleasure. Carnival season lasts about 5 months, and many activists prepare for the next season during the remaining part of the

year. Popular pubs are full throughout the year. Pleasure is in people's mind all the time.

A fear-mongering religion would be ridiculous in Cologne. Therefore, religious education was made interesting and partly even fun. As a consequence, I was confident to go to heaven as a faithful kid with good grades in Catholic education and did not fear Hell. Under the influence of my protestant father, who detested the Catholic church, I stopped attending Mass on Sundays and distanced myself from the church and the bogus concept of sins early but not yet from belief in the Abrahamic god and did not even know of the possibility of atheism until religious education discussed atheist publications in my 11th year at school. Against the intention of the curriculum, I found the arguments of the teacher against Marx and Freud not convincing and turned agnostic with 3 years of struggle in the transition. I stayed with Catholic ethics as a default because I did not find a new set of explicit ethics for several decades but ditched any part of Catholic ethics which did not make sense to me or appeared to be politically conservative mind control. Therefore, getting rid of Catholic programming of my subconscious was easy.

It was much more difficult to get rid of idealism. Whereas I am rather calm by nature, deviations from the ideal/optimum could trigger fits of anger both at work and in private. After 20 years of struggle, I got rid of that, too.

Recognizing Epicurus' philosophy as similar to my philosophy of life in 2016 and studying where it goes beyond what I had figured out on my own before has rooted out the last remains of that idealism of my past.

So far, my biggest change from exposure to Epicurus has been increased confidence in my choices.

Post by “Titus” of June 16, 2023 at 6:26 AM

[Quote from Martin](#)

In Germany, religious education is a mandatory part of education in state schools, includes church service on one school day morning per week, and is usually done separately for Catholics and Protestants, whereby Protestants are usually lumped together in one curriculum irrespective of their variants.

I cannot remember any obligatory church services. This has to be either a regional feature or an issue of the past or both.

[Quote from Martin](#)

A fear-mongering religion would be ridiculous in Cologne.

In the meantime, both the Catholic and the Unified Protestant Church in Germany have deleted Hell and Punishment from their curriculum. Their only interest is to keep the money flowing and their business empire growing. The only persistent blasphemy is to opt out the church-tax system.

Post by “Cassius” of June 16, 2023 at 7:44 AM

It has been pointed out to me that my "other than that Mrs. Lincoln how was the play" joke might be misunderstood. I used the smile icon, but I better be more clear:

And I do indeed see in looking it up places like [here](#) that it is now being given a different meaning than what I understood. This is absolutely NOT the meaning of the phrase as i have grown up understanding it:

"A sarcastic phrase meant to downplay the complaint or misfortune of another person, similar to playing the world's tiniest violin with one's fingers."

As I grew up understanding it, the phrase was meant to be a joke which emphasizes that something huge (usually bad) has been mentioned, and that everything else (such as "how was the play") pales in comparison to that big event. So it's actually an inverted expression of agreement in how bad the event referenced really was.

For example, the use here in reference to a particularly bad day on Wall Street with few redeeming good things happening: <https://www.pensford.com/industry-news/...lay-mrs-lincoln>

Or here, where it is said jokingly that "on top of that..." nuclear war would be a climate problem: <https://www.mikesmithenterprisesblog.com/2022/03/other-...rs-lincoln.html>

Or this, which references the phrase as a "droll understatement" - <https://www.nickharvilllibraries.com/blog/-other-th...lay-mrs-lincoln>

So in this case, "other than that Mrs. Lincoln how was the play?" was not a sarcastic reference to what was stated in the previous post, but an agreement that the issue of alienating friends and family can be so important that it would be tempting to say that any offsetting benefits would be minimal.

I hope no one misconstrued the reference! I did not intend to write so much about this but I am surprised to find the "sick" joke references on the internet which seem to change the meaning completely.

Post by “Kalosyni” of June 16, 2023 at 8:28 AM

[Quote from EricR](#)

Does the philosophy change you? Or perhaps it is better posed as "does the philosophy change your experience of being"?

I realize that since studying Epicureanism, I am thinking more of myself as a "human/animal" -- with the emphasis on "animal" and so now I am more integrated with this Earth and not something "above" it. (Perhaps Epicurus wouldn't have taken on that attitude? Since an Epicurean goal is to live as blissfully as the gods). So this sort of the meaning I give to my desire to sit near a sunny window or that inner pull toward sunshine (just one of many pleasurable things) which are the natural desires of an animal. So then the task at hand is to take good care of the human animal that I am, to accept that task without begrudging it, and to make wise decisions.

Post by “Eoghan Gardiner” of June 16, 2023 at 8:37 AM

A key thing for me and maybe this isn't an Epicurean idea but I think it really is.

With philosophy I don't have to add meaning to things that happen, as if it's sort of part of some design. When something bad or good happens I am not being punished or rewarded it's something that happens in which I am experiencing pleasure or pain that is it. It's freeing, it allows to deal with the problem at hand or to experience the pleasure freely without a need to thank anyone.

Post by “Kalosyni” of June 16, 2023 at 9:01 AM

[Quote from Eoghan Gardiner](#)

My problem is I really can't escape Catholic guilt. I wish I could.

I was raised Protestant, and wrestled with some guilt. Guilt in some situations can be good, such as if you say or do something by mistake to harm a friend, neighbor, or community member, then your conscience kicks in to help you think of how you can restore your inter-connection and the relationships.

But the unnecessary guilt you were brought up with is a by-product of an ethical system which takes there to be hard and firm rules of conduct across the board, without any way to judge things according to unique situations. This kind of strict ethical thinking is what brought about the [Prohibition](#) in the US. It is a simplified way of determining what one should and shouldn't do, but is not the most wise way of functioning in the world because some entity (or religious authority) is deciding for everyone, rather than letting each person decide for themselves. And this would fall into [Kohlberg's level of Conventional Moral Reasoning](#).

Here are some ideas of how to deal with guilt...Perhaps the practice of noticing the guilt but then replacing it with positive thoughts, such as talking to it and saying that you are free to choose what is good for you. And you may benefit from contemplating a personalized list of what you consider "natural and necessary" for the health of the body, and "natural and necessary for happiness" (on this list of necessary for happiness remembering that you won't die if you can't have everything, but that it is perfectly natural to desire it) and third category of "natural but potentially harmful" (this would be things like sugar and alcohol so you want to close pay attention to the outcomes in this category) and a fourth category "unnatural and unnecessary" (grandiose desires for money and status). --Notice here that I have redefined the categories (and made 4 of them). And then remember to ask yourself: "What will happen to me if I get this or do this?, and what will happen to me if I don't get this or don't do this?"

Post by “Kalosyni” of June 16, 2023 at 9:26 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

And then remember to ask yourself: "What will happen to me if I get this or do this?, and what will happen to me if I don't get this or don't do this?"

Just wanted to add... when you ask this of yourself, also consider the wider circle of people around you, remembering that what you do will bring consequences for others as well, and any harm done to them will evoke some kind of reaction, breakdown of friendship, or retribution.

(Ultimately the best way of functioning would be "post-conventional moral reasoning").

Post by “Don” of June 16, 2023 at 9:43 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

And then remember to ask yourself: "What will happen to me if I get this or do this?, and what will happen to me if I don't get this or don't do this?"

Just wanted to add... when you ask this of yourself, also consider the wider circle of people around you, remembering that what you do will bring consequences for others as well, and any harm done to them will evoke some kind of reaction, breakdown of friendship, or retribution. (Ultimately the best way of functioning would be "post-conventional moral reasoning").

Good points, Kalosyni. I'd offer some emphases to your statement: "what you do will bring consequences for others as well, and any harm done to them will evoke some kind of reaction" *towards you*, "breakdown of" *your* "friendship, or retribution" *towards you!* We do not exist in a vacuum. One of the things that flows from having responsibility for our choices and rejections is that we need to weigh the consequences to ourselves. I'm not saying that others' concerns are more important than our feelings. I'm saying that our feelings are inextricably linked to our interactions with others. Our well-being is caught up in social interactions of all kinds. We need to be cognizant of how we can provide ourselves with the best social interactions we can have to provide ourselves with the most pleasurable life. If we lie, cheat, steal, belittle or even just disregard others, our lives will be less secure and thus most likely less pleasurable. Epicurus's observation is of great importance: "a pleasurable life does not exist without the traits of wisdom, morality, and justice; nor do the traits of wisdom, morality, and justice without pleasure: because the virtues grow together with a pleasurable life and the pleasurable life is inseparable from these."

Post by “Don” of June 16, 2023 at 10:17 AM

[Quote from Eoghan Gardiner](#)

to experience the pleasure freely without a need to thank anyone.

Agreed... with the following addendum 😊 Your post got me to thinking.

When you say "without a need to thank *anyone*," I'm assuming (correct me if I'm misinterpreting) you're referring to a god or a capital-G God. "Someone" who has "bestowed" their "blessings" upon you. Scare quotes used intentionally here. Fully and completely agree with that sentiment.

However...

Epicurus's writings and associated texts contain multiple references to the importance of gratitude in the Epicurean life, including:

- "The life of folly is empty of gratitude and full of anxiety – it is focused wholly on the future." (U491, quoted by Seneca)
- He will be grateful to anyone when he is corrected. (Diogenes Laertius' characteristics of the sage)
- "the old can be young by means of gratitude for the pleasures which have happened" (Letter to Menoikeus)
- VS17: 17. It is not the young man who is most happy, but the old man who has lived beautifully; for despite being at his very peak the young man stumbles around as if he were of many minds, whereas the old man has settled into old age as if in a harbor, secure in his gratitude (χάριτι) for the good things he was once unsure of.
- VS55: Misfortune must be cured through gratitude (χάριτι) for what has been lost and the knowledge that it is impossible to change what has happened.
- VS69: The ingratitude (ἀχάριστον) of the soul makes a creature greedy for endless variation in its way of life.
- VS75: This saying is utterly ungrateful (ἀχάριστος) for the good things one has achieved: Provide for the end of a long life (τέλος ὄρα μακροῦ βίου.). (Saint-Andre note: The force of ὄρα here might be "provide for" (as I have translated it), "beware", or even just "look to"; the overall sense is that preparing for a supposed afterlife shows a lack of appreciation for the good things of life on earth.)
- VS35: Don't ruin the things you have by wanting what you don't have, but realize that they too are things you once did wish for. (Note: Doesn't specifically use gratitude but is implied)

So, gratitude appears to be an important component of the Epicurean life, of an Epicurean perspective on the world. For me, this includes gratitude directed toward people (not gods) or just gratitude for the joy of living, gratitude for the fact that I'm around to experience both [the little pleasures](#) and the big pleasures available to me. As silly as it may sound, I say "Thank you" when the alarm goes off in my car to tell me I've left the keys in the ignition. I'm not

thanking the universe; I am literally thanking the engineer that came up with the idea of including this in my car. That's what I'm thinking when I say that. I am sure to thank people for doing nice things for me and not letting them pass by. I'm not a god. I don't see gratitude as a weakness 😊 I can also feel gratitude for the sun shining on my face when I'm walking through the woods or seeing the sun streaming through the leaves. Not to some Deity for His Creation 🙄 but gratitude for the *fact* of my existence and my ability to be here and now and to experience that pleasing sensation.

I don't mean to belabor this point, but I have found this attitude helpful and felt the need to share it.

Post by “Eoghan Gardiner” of June 16, 2023 at 10:27 AM

That's a good point, reminds me of the joke when the doctor saves some ones child the parents say "thank God" instead of thanking the doctor who did 12 hour surgery. Thanks to everyone on this forum 😊

Post by “Pacatus” of June 16, 2023 at 12:48 PM

To intrude a couple of mixed metaphors: For me, the Garden (and this place) is not so much like going to or joining a church (or the Stoa, or the like) - as it is like going to the grocery store for a variety of food and drink that are both tasty (pleasurable) and healthful. Or our local co-op with its emphasis on organic, local and natural products. (“No, I don’t think I’ll have an avocado with dinner tonight - maybe tomorrow. But I will take a bottle of this wine.” 🤔 😊)

Or, what I find in Epicurus is - to quote a phrase from Kalosyni that I’ve never forgotten - “tools, not rules.” Finally letting go of that (ingrained) struggle to find (and clutch hard in a mental fist, so to speak) “the right rules” (rules as commandments -- commanded by whom?) just makes things a bit easier. “Easy does it.” (It does 😎)

Note: I am aware that “canon” can be translated as “rule” - but I take it more in the sense of a measuring (or weighing) tool, a set of guiding principles to make life easier and more enjoyable.

Post by “Don” of June 16, 2023 at 1:05 PM

I like your metaphors, [Pacatus](#) 😊

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

Note: I am aware that “canon” can be translated as “rule” – but I take it more in the sense of a measuring (or weighing) tool, a set of guiding principles to make life easier and more enjoyable.

I think your spot on with seeing the canon like a tool. A κανών (kanon) was originally a measuring tool, like a yardstick (or meter-stick), plumb line, or the like.

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