

Episode 191 - Cicero's On Ends - Book One - Part 02

Post by "Cassius" of September 3, 2023 at 9:36 PM

Welcome to Episode 191 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.

This week we continue our discussion of Books One and Two of Cicero's On Ends, which are largely devoted to Epicurean Philosophy. "On Ends" contains important criticisms of Epicurus that have set the tone for standard analysis of his philosophy for the last 2000 years. Going through this book gives us the opportunity to review those attacks, take them apart, and respond to them as an ancient Epicurean might have done, and much more fully than Cicero allowed Torquatus, his Epicurean spokesman, to do.

This week we continue in Book One, and we will cover from VIII to the end of the chapter. Follow along with us here: [Cicero's On Ends - Complete Reid Edition](#)

We are using the Reid edition, so check any typos or other questions against the original PDF which can be found [here](#).

As we proceed we will keep track of Cicero's arguments and outline them here:

[Cicero's Objections to Epicurean Philosophy](#)

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/56809168>

Post by "Cassius" of September 10, 2023 at 8:57 AM

As we begin today's episode we can review the objections raised by Cicero in the opening. They get much more elaborate after Torquatus speaks, but for the time being this is what Cicero has set up as objections for Torquatus to discuss:

1. As To Physics:
 1. Epicurus Borrowed from Democritus while at the same time reviling him;

2. I:VI:20 As to the swerve and downward movement of atoms (which leads to Democritus' determinism);
 3. I:VI:20 As to Epicurus' rejection of infinite divisibility;
 4. I:VI:20 As to Democritus' view of the size of the sun (which leads to Democritus' skepticism) [Note: Cicero notes that the issue of images by which we see but also think comes from Democritus];
2. As To Canonics / Epistemology / Logic:
 1. Epicurus does away with the process of division;
 2. Epicurus says nothing about subdivision and partition;
 3. Epicurus gives no method for constructing an argument;
 4. Epicurus does not show how to unriddle fallacies or clarify ambiguities;
 5. Epicurus places his criteria of objective truth in the senses and thinks that it destroys the senses to admit for a moment that they might err in any way;
 3. As to Ethics:
 1. The pursuit of pleasure as the goal belongs to Aristippus and was better and more frankly advocated by the Cyreniacs
 2. The Epicurean system is of such a character that no system is more unworthy of the human race, as "Nature has created and shaped us for higher aims."
 3. The Torquatii did not look for bodily enjoyment or any pleasure when the ancestor wrenched the necklet from his foe, or punished his son.
 4. Cicero alleges that Epicureans do not value mental pleasure. ["What pleasure do you, Torquatus, or what does our friend Triarius here derive from literature, from records and the investigation of historical facts, from conning the poets, from learning by heart so laboriously so many lines? And do not say to me "Why, these very actions bring me pleasure, as theirs did to the Torquati." Never indeed did Epicurus or Metrodorus or any one possessed of any wisdom or any knowledge of the tenets of your school ever maintain such a position by such arguments. And when the question is asked, as it often is, why Epicureans are so numerous, I answer that there are no doubt other motives, but the motive which especially fascinates the crowd is this; they believe their chief to declare that all upright and honorable actions are in themselves productive of delight, or rather pleasure."]
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Post by "Cassius" of September 12, 2023 at 5:43 PM

We are still several days from release of this episode but in early editing I see a comment I need to add:

On the issue of whether philosophy is "necessary" I talked about Frances Wright's character Hedeia and how she seems to stand for the proposition that someone can possibly get along quite well without focusing a lot of time on the study of philosophy. I should have hedged a little on that, because now as I think about it, Hedeia is the only character in the book who just about gets herself drowned, and maybe that in itself is an example that she might have profited from more study of "natural science."

My comment here will make more sense when the episode is released.

Post by "Cassius" of September 15, 2023 at 5:10 AM

Episode 191 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available!

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/56809168>

Post by "Kalosyni" of September 15, 2023 at 8:12 PM

A question toward the very end came up: "What is philosophy" in which Joshua and I gave "two different sides of the same coin" and so I just want to post further on that because there is both modern and ancient views - how we as modern people define "philosophy" vs how Epicurus defined philosophy.

Perhaps with my background of the study of art and psychology I am very much at a disadvantage compared to others here on the forum who have a background of the study of history, or law, when it comes to philosophy and grasping what it is understood to be (or defined).

It does seem that it would be good for us to be on the same page with how we understand Epicurus...and the question of what was philosophy to Epicurus?

Post by "Cassius" of September 15, 2023 at 8:20 PM

Kalosyni's question starts at about 46:20 in the podcast.

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 15, 2023 at 8:21 PM

In addition to what was said, perhaps this question: Is philosophy the love of knowledge or is it the love of wisdom?

And can we say that the goal in ancient times was to discover the best way to live a good life?

(And in comparison, that there are other goals in modern philosophy).

Post by “Don” of September 15, 2023 at 11:14 PM

Great episode. I really like the readings of the text interspersed with the discussion. That helps to keep things on track and keeps the text close to the commentary. Nicely done.

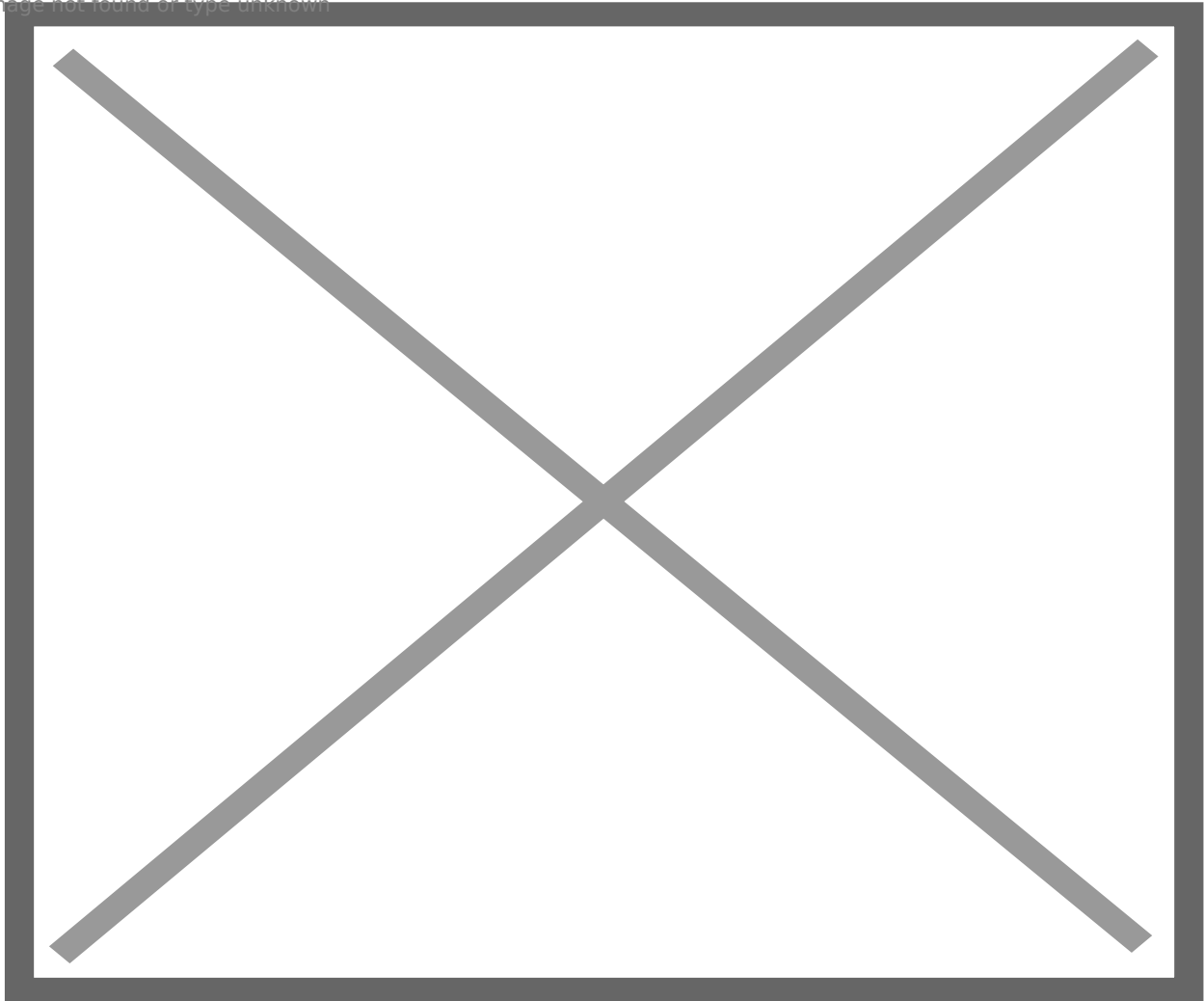
Some thoughts and additional resources:

For those who have the fortune to have NOT seen the bumper sticker that [Joshua](#) was talking about in the episode:



The discussion of death has prompted me to share some resources on the "death positive" movement - started in the 1970s - that tries to bring conversations about death and dying to wider audience:

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[Death Positive Movement | The Order of the Good Death](#)

Building a meaningful, eco-friendly, and equitable end of life.

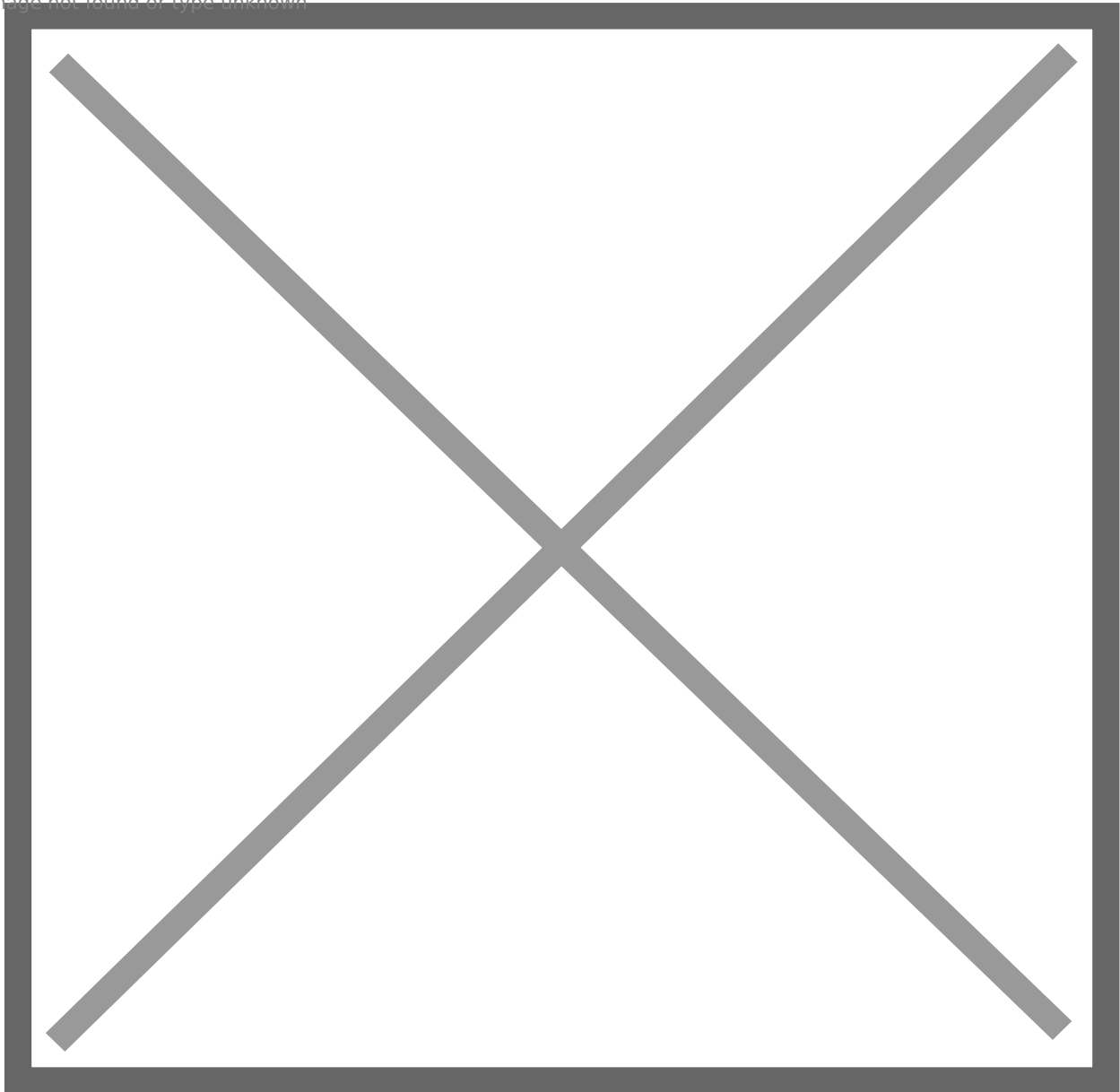
www.orderofthegooddeath.com

(also has a page of resources)

<https://caitlindoughty.com/>

(one of the well-known authors, speakers, and YouTube personalities of the movement)

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[A Lively Party Game to Share Stories and Beliefs About Death](#)

The Death Deck is a new party game that lets you tap into stories and ideas you've never heard your friends and family share before about life and death!

thedeathdeck.com

(a way to engage conversations about the topic)

Great conversation at the end about the necessity of philosophy!

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Is philosophy the love of knowledge or is it the love of wisdom?

This is a great question. Technically and etymologically, philosophy is literally "the love of wisdom" > philia + sophia

φιλία philia "affectionate regard, friendship"

σοφία sophia

- skill or cleverness in carpentry, music, or other crafts
- skill related to everyday life: sound judgment, prudence
- knowledge of a higher kind: learning, wisdom

So, technically, philosophy is having an affectionate regard, a friendship if you will, with wisdom in the sense of having sound judgement, and putting that 'wisdom' into practical use in being skilled in living.

I think I agree, in part, with both [Joshua](#) and [Kalosyni](#) . I do think people can be happy, or at least feel happy, without "studying philosophy." And I can see Joshua's hesitancy in trying to tell people they're not *really* happy, they just think they are. They *really* need XYZ to be *really* happy; otherwise, they're fooling themselves. That does seem condescending. I know better than you, so to speak.

However...

I think a lot of people don't even think about if they're happy or not if you would ask them the question "Are you happy?" "Sure, I'm happy." If you start asking them questions (IF they are amenable to questions being asked!), they might find that they have subconscious biases, fears, anxieties, etc., that are curtailing their potential happiness. I think there could be degrees of being conscious of one's happiness.

That's what the study of "a philosophy" (not just "philosophy") can provide: A framework within which to study one's preconceptions, to think about big questions, to find ways of questioning or to find some answers.

I think people can become fondly acquainted with practical wisdom on their own and be happy... up to a point. And maybe that point works for them. I don't think we can second-guess people if they say they are feeling happy or content... But I also don't think we have to take people's verbal assurance at face value. Sometimes we have to ask, "Are you trying to convince me or yourself that you're happy?"

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

can we say that the goal in ancient times was to discover the best way to live a good life?

(And in comparison, that there are other goals in modern philosophy).

It seems to be that philosophical schools in ancient Greece worked a little like churches do nowadays. Schools had definite paths to follow, they "fought" with rival schools for "converts," you could "convert" from being a Stoic to being an Epicurean, and so on. Each thought they taught the best way to live and actively promulgated their doctrines ...believing that they had the best way to live!

Modern philosophy as an academic discipline is far removed from this mode, although more and more academics and practitioners are trying to get back to that old Greek way of thinking about philosophical paths... present company included!

Post by “Godfrey” of September 16, 2023 at 2:02 AM

As an aside regarding bumper stickers.... This one always gives me a smile:



Post by “Cassius” of September 16, 2023 at 6:35 AM

In reference to my Hedeia comment, from Chapter 12 of A Few Days In Athens:

[Quote from Hedeia from A Few Days In Athens Chapter 12](#)

“Judging from me as a specimen, you mean. And trust me now, father, I am the best. Do I not practice what you preach? What you show the way to, do I not possess? Look at my light foot, look in my laughing eye, read my gay heart, and tell — if pleasure be not mine. Confess, then, that I take a shorter cut to the goal than your wiser scholars, aye than your wisest self. You study, you lecture, you argue, you exhort. And what is it all for? as if you could not be good without so much learning, and happy without so much talking. Here am I — I think I am very good, and I am quite sure I am very happy; yet I never wrote a treatise in my life, and can hardly listen to one without a yawn.”

And as for Frances Wright not having Epicurus or the other leaders criticize Hedeia forcefully:

“You would make a strange world, were you the queen of it,” said Hermachus, laughing.

“Just as strange, and no stranger, than it is at present. For why? I should take it as I found it, and leave it as I found it. ‘Tis your philosophers, who would rub and twist, and plague and doctor it, and fret your souls out, to bring all its heterogeneous parts, fools, wits, knaves, simpletons, grave, gay, light, heavy, long-faced, and short-faced, black, white, brown, straight and crooked, tall, short, thin and fat, to fit together, and patiently reflect each other, like the acorns of an oak, or the modest wives and helpless daughters of the good citizens of Athens; ‘tis you, I say, who would make a strange world, were you kings of it — you who would shorten and lengthen, clip, pull, and carve men’s minds to fit your systems, as the tyrant did men’s bodies to fit his bed.”

“I grant there’s some truth, my girl, in thy nonsense,” said the master.

“And I grant that there is not a philosopher in Athens, who would have granted as much, save thyself. You will find my young hero,” turning to Theon, that my father philosophizes more sense, that is, less absurdity, than any man since the seven sages; nay! even than the seven sages philosophized themselves. He only lacks to be a perfectly wise man --”

“To burn,” said the master, “his books of philosophy, and to sing a tune to thy lyre.”

To keep comments together I will repeat that while Frances Wright does not (to my observation) criticize Hedeia's position more directly, Hedeia is the only character in the book who almost gets herself killed and has to be rescued by the others. I think that's probably a significant aspect of the role given to her in the book.

Post by “Don” of September 16, 2023 at 7:50 AM

Not having read Wright, that quote above is very helpful! I'm obviously biased, but the character seems to have a point, especially in relation to Epicurus's philosophy.

Epicurus's whole point was to get rid of the indoctrination imposed by society and culture and reveal and practice the faculties provided by nature, use pleasure and pain as guides to living. Rejection of that indoctrination could conceivably occur naturally.

I've liked Ricky Gervais' take on science vs religion on Stephen Colbert (fast forward video to 3:40)

<https://youtu.be/P5ZOwNK6n9U?feature=shared>

Again, I may be biased, but I could see something like Epicurus's philosophical path be recreated after everything was destroyed because in many ways he's relying on biology, psychology, physics, cosmology, etc (at least at the understanding he could have in 3rd c BCE Greece) to build the path he offered. I could see an alien Epicurus coming up with a similar path light years away, let's call them Surucipe. All biological organisms will have to experience pleasure and pain to exist. That's the first building block of the philosophy. Some details of Surucipeanism would differ from Epicureanism but they could still posit atoms, see the value in pleasure (what Surucipe calls positive affect), etc. I sincerely doubt anything resembling Christianity, Judaism, Islam, would exist in Surucipe's world, maybe some form of Buddhism with its concentration on consciousness and awareness (not the Tibetan variety but a basic early form). But this is the kind of thought experiment I can get behind 😊

Post by “Cassius” of September 16, 2023 at 8:20 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

I sincerely doubt anything resembling Christianity, Judaism, Islam, would exist in Surucipe's world, maybe some form of Buddhism with its concentration on consciousness and awareness (not the Tibetan variety but a basic early form).

Of course this invites the question, "Then why do those exist in our world?" 😊

Post by “Don” of September 16, 2023 at 8:32 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Of course this invites the question, "Then why does it exist in our world?" 😊

The vicissitudes and randomness of cultural evolution.

Surucipe's world would no doubt have some weird ways of thinking that would make us scratch our heads... But don't scratch using your tail because according to Nomromism the tail is an outward sign of purity and must be tied in a knot and tucked in your hat... Or some other bs like that.

Post by “waterholic” of September 16, 2023 at 9:07 AM

Great episode again, thank you all!

Sharing here some of the thoughts after finishing the episode, not yet sure if i am there yet.

As [Cassius](#) suggested, generally there are two camps: those who would prefer more evidence for pleasure as a guiding principle, and those who are fine with just accepting it as observation.

For some reason, this episode gave me another thought: we often compare pleasure and virtue (broadly - stoic or christian) as alternative "ends", with Epicurus suggesting that virtue is only one of many tools towards the end goal.

But I now think that virtue and pleasure are on entirely different planes. At heart Epicurus is not a moralist or a theologian. He is as close to today's scientists as one could have been in those days. He builds a convincing (my bias of course) line of thought:

1. Physics: "virtue" does not exist outside the natural world. If so, what's the point and can we know at all?
2. Canonics: it is possible to know by observing the nature and deducing from observation (nature as a guide). Broadly, there is no point, just the universe as an accidental development.
3. Ethics: observation shows that pleasure is the "natural switch" to induce us to do or skip doing things. Whether one likes it or not, pleasure is hhe mechanism. This is a biological argument. Beyond this, as very complex creatures we may use this knowledge to build a life altogether more enjoyable. Or we can live that life without that knowledge.
4. Philosophy comes handy, when we are naturally disadvantaged in attempting to live such a life due to platonic/stoic/religious ideas that take hold of the society (which is why it's never too early or too late to learn philosophy!)

Still unstructured thoughts, but the discussion helps to "peel thr onion".

Post by “waterholic” of September 16, 2023 at 9:33 AM

Quote from [Cassius](#)

Of course this invites the question, "Then why do those exist in our world?" 😊

Cooperation is the main weapon humans possess in terms of evolution and natural selection. Anything that makes such a cooperation easier to attain is "encouraged" by natural selection. Consider two similar societies: one with and one without a religion. The one with religion (if successfully indoctrinated) would find it easier to cooperate and outcompete.

Reminds me the Sisiphus fragment (this is 5th century BC, I may have quoted it before):

<https://people.wku.edu/jan.garrett/302/critias.htm> (not the best translation)

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 16, 2023 at 9:41 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

It does seem that it would be good for us to be on the same page with how we understand Epicurus...and the question of what was philosophy to Epicurus?

Can we take a guess as to the philosophy of Epicurus, and in his ancient school at the Garden, about what percentage of time would a student spend on "book learning" (in that time scroll reading) of *natural physics/science* and what percentage of time on *understanding the role of pleasure and developing prudence*? And what percentage of time was not spent on study but on actual enjoyment of life (and also brings up the question of work and how that would fit in to the schedule. Perhaps as a student you "paid" to attend by copying scrolls which were then sold to bring in money for the school, just guessing on that possibility).

But my point is that I now think that a much larger portion of the time was spent on natural physics/science.

Post by “Cassius” of September 16, 2023 at 10:01 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

But my point is that I now think that a much larger portion of the time was spent on natural physics/science

I would say you are right and what you are largely referring to is what is covered in the letter to Herodotus - which includes a proper "logical" framework for deducing big picture conclusions from the science. My point there being that we have much more raw data today and yet most people are less advanced in processing the implications of it than we're the Epicureans. Without the analysis framework the data is worthless or even harmful, as both Epicurus and Lucretius state explicitly.

I will post a couple of quotes to support that statement:

Lucretius:

[Book 1 Bailey 146] This terror then, this darkness of the mind, must needs be scattered not by the rays of the sun and the gleaming shafts of day, but by the outer view and the inner law of nature; whose first rule shall take its start for us from this, that nothing is ever begotten of nothing by divine will.

[Book 2, Bailey, 40] For even as children tremble and fear everything in blinding darkness, so we sometimes dread in the light things that are no whit more to be feared than what children shudder at in the dark, and imagine will come to pass. This terror then, this darkness of the mind, must needs be scattered not by the rays of the sun and the gleaming shafts of day, but by the outer view and the inner law of nature.

[Book 3, Bailey, 74] For even as children tremble and fear everything in blinding darkness, so we sometimes dread in the light things that are no whit more to be feared than what children shudder at in the dark, and imagine will come to pass. This terror then, this darkness of the mind, must needs be scattered, not by the rays of the sun and the gleaming shafts of day, but by the outer view and the inner law of nature.

[Book 6, Bailey 30] And so with his discourse of truthful words he purged the heart and set a limit to its desire and fear, and set forth what is the highest good, towards which we all strive, and pointed out the path, whereby along a narrow track we may strain on towards it in a straight course; he showed what there is of ill in the affairs of mortals everywhere, coming to being and flying abroad in diverse forms, be it by the chance or the force of nature, because nature had so brought it to pass; he showed from what gates it is meet to sally out against each ill, and he proved that 'tis in vain for the most part that the race of men set tossing in their hearts the gloomy billows of care. For even as children tremble and fear everything in blinding darkness, so we sometimes dread in the light things that are no whit more to be feared than what children shudder at in the dark and imagine will come to pass. This terror then, this darkness of the mind, must needs be scattered not by the rays and the gleaming shafts of day, but by the outer view and the inner law of nature. Wherefore I will hasten the more to weave

the thread of my task in my discourse.

Epicurus [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.

There are several others and we need to post this list somewhere. I know I am missing one in Epicurus (Pythocles I think) and one in Lucretius about those who learn a little about the stars having it worse for themselves if they don't also know the answers --- I will keep looking but if anyone posts them first I will thank you! 😊

Addendum: This one is close but not the one I am thinking about:

Pythocles 88 - Now all goes on without disturbance as far as regards each of those things which may be explained in several ways so as to harmonize with what we perceive, when one admits, as we are bound to do, probable theories about them. But when one accepts one theory and rejects another, which harmonizes as well with the phenomenon, it is obvious that he altogether leaves the path of scientific inquiry and has recourse to myth.

Also close but not it:

Pythocles 97 - And do not let the divine nature be introduced at any point into these considerations, but let it be preserved free from burdensome duties and in entire blessedness. For if this principle is not observed, the whole discussion of causes in celestial phenomena is in vain, as it has already been for certain persons who have not clung to the method of possible explanations, but have fallen back on the useless course of thinking that things could only happen in one way, and of rejecting all other ways in harmony with what is possible, being driven thus to what is inconceivable and being unable to compare earthly phenomena, which we must accept as indications.

I suspect I was thinking of these from Herodotus (primarily 79) - now I just need to find the same statement in Lucretius:

[78] Furthermore, we must believe that to discover accurately the cause of the most essential facts is the function of the science of nature, and that blessedness for us in the knowledge of celestial phenomena lies in this and in the understanding of the nature of the existences seen in these celestial phenomena, and of all else that is akin to the exact knowledge requisite for our happiness: in knowing too that what occurs in several ways or is capable of being otherwise has no place here but that nothing which suggests doubt or alarm can be included at all in that which is naturally immortal and blessed. Now this we can ascertain by our mind is absolutely the case.

[79] But what falls within the investigation of risings and settings and turnings and eclipses, and all that is akin to this, is no longer of any value for the happiness which knowledge brings,

but persons who have perceived all this, but yet do not know what are the natures of these things and what are the essential causes, are still in fear, just as if they did not know these things at all: indeed, their fear may be even greater, since the wonder which arises out of the observation of these things cannot discover any solution or realize the regulation of the essentials.

OK here's the extra Lucretius:

[Book 5:55 Bailey] For those who have learnt aright that the gods lead a life free from care, yet if from time to time they wonder by what means all things can be carried on, above all among those things which are descried above our heads in the coasts of heaven, are borne back again into the old beliefs of religion, and adopt stern overlords, whom in their misery they believe have all power, knowing not what can be and what cannot, yea and in what way each thing has its power limited, and its deep-set boundary-stone.

Post by “Cassius” of September 16, 2023 at 10:30 AM

I want to take that list in post 17 and make sure it's findable in the future, so please let me know if there are similar quotes to be added. There are definitely some quotes from Menoecus that could be added, especially from the opening about the health of the soul, but they are more on the order of "if you want to be happy study philosophy" rather than an explicit statement of the harm that comes if you don't.

But please suggest any that you think would be good for the list to be entitled something like "Epicurean Reasons To Study Philosophy."

or

"Epicureans Reasons Why You Are Unlikely To Live A Happy Life By Freelancing On Your Own"



Post by “Godfrey” of September 16, 2023 at 3:09 PM

[Don](#) I just have to ask if there's any particular meaning to the name Surupice 🤔

Post by “Don” of September 16, 2023 at 3:18 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

[Don](#) I just have to ask if there's any particular meaning to the name Surupice 🤔

Read it backwards 😊 LOL!! I misspelled it...

Epicurus!!

Surucipe!!

Post by “Don” of September 17, 2023 at 4:10 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

in Lucretius honey is put onto the cup of wormwood (which would be to emphasize a pleasant way of speaking).

It seems to me that Lucretius is using the honey/wormwood as a metaphor for administering medicine to a sick patient. Frank criticism is often compared to medicine as well. This is in the commentary to Philodemus' work:

Not only is frank speech "akin to friendship," it is the "language of friendship" and the "most potent medicine in friendship," to be employed in mutual moral reform among friends.

Philodemus uses a pleasant method of delivery (poetry) to administer what some see as bitter medicine (no afterlife, no gods looking over us, etc.). Once administered, however, the philosophy does the person good, in fact cures them of fear and anxiety etc. Frank criticism is another tool to administer medicine.

Post by “Don” of September 17, 2023 at 4:13 PM

Oh, and as far as studying in the Garden, it's interesting to note that *On Nature*, either all the volumes or specific volumes, was actually a lecture series of Epicurus. There was a lot of attendance at talks by the teachers.