

The Description of Epicurean Philosophy On Wikipedia

Post by “Cassius” of October 4, 2023 at 4:03 PM

Kalosyni recently posted a thread to comment on a description of Epicurean Philosophy on Reddit, and it seems like it might be a good idea to have a similar thread as to the description of Epicurean philosophy on Wikipedia. This is a topic that has been discussed more than one, including here:



[Parsing The Wikipedia Introduction To Epicurus As Of February 6, 2020](#)

Below is the Wikipedia introduction to Epicurus as of 02/06/20. I will highlight in red, and add a footnote to each statement which I contend is in serious need of correction or amplification.

[...]

[1] Calling Epicurus a "sage" adds nothing, but injects confusion, suggesting that this term denotes some status that is important the reader should know about in this context, which is not correct.

[2] Eating simple means and discussing a wide variety of philosophical subject is what they were known...



Cassius

June 6, 2020 at 9:22 AM

As of this date (early October, 2023) here is the section on Ethics:

[pasted-from-clipboard.png](#)

This post isn't adding anything new to the subject, just making it easier to find. Here are some current comments:

1. I question the addition of adding "morally" to pleasure being good and evil, as it sounds like a concession to Platonic idealism that there is an absolute morality. Pleasure is desirable and pain is undesirable because Nature gave us feelings that work that way, not because there is an intrinsic standard of "morality."
2. I strongly disapprove of implying that "he idiosyncratically defined pleasure as the absence of suffering" without the full explanation that pleasure is EVERY activity in life that is not painful. The formulation is easily and justifiably twisted into asceticism / buddhism / etc.
3. I strongly disapprove of stating baldly that "ataraxia" is what "all humans should seek to attain." This requires much more explanation.
4. While I think it has its uses I strongly disapprove of elevating the Tetrapharmakos as a primary "summary of the key points of Epicurean ethics." "What is terrible is easy to endure" was never stated by Epicurus and is borderline offensive. (And I question whether I should hedge with "borderline.")
5. I expect that the wording that Epicurus "strongly disapproved of raw excessive sensuality" will be misinterpreted as implying that he strongly disapproved of all sensuality.

6. The way this is written I think that implying that a "single piece of cheese can be equally pleasing as an entire feast" will also be misinterpreted as overly-minimalist asceticism.

Most of these statements can be reworked and explained in a satisfactory way, just like Epicurus uses "gods" and "virtue" in acceptable ways. But the big problem is this:

When you pull concepts out of context and drop them in the laps of people whose mentality has been conditioned by religion and orthodox "humanism" to operate in a context totally opposed to Epicurus' viewpoints, you end up with a total misrepresentation.

That's exactly the technique Cicero is using in "On Ends" to disparage Epicurean philosophy. He knows that his readers don't understand Epicurus' sweeping definition of pleasure, and so he ignores Epicurus' definition and acts as if Epicurus is an alien from another planet.

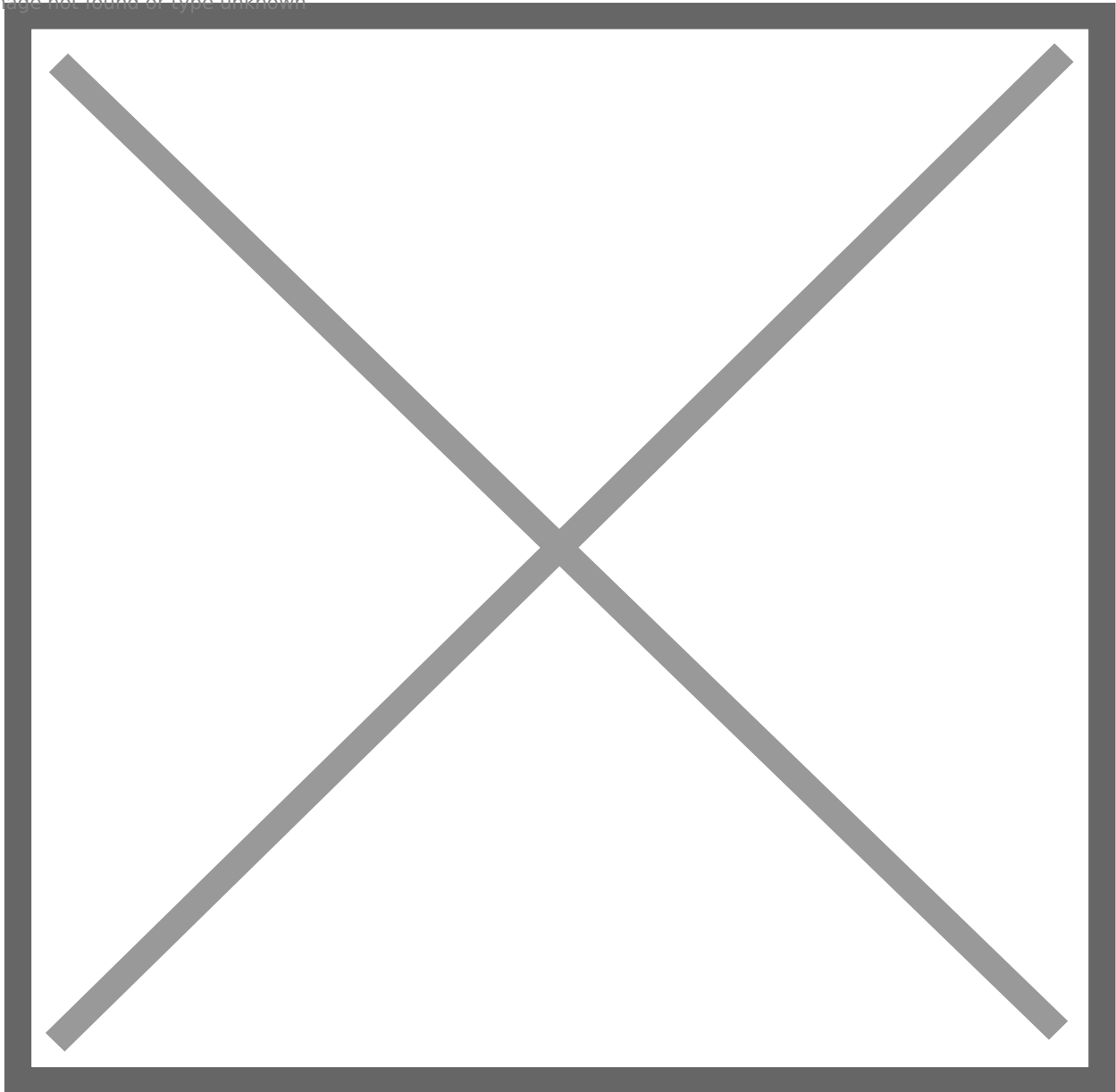
Like Cicero, the people writing this wikipedia article very likely know that "pleasure is the absence of pain" will be interpreted by at least 90% of their readers as some kind of Buddhist / Stoic asceticism, aloofness, and detachment. To leave it unsaid that Epicurus was advocating the *opposite* of asceticism and aloofness and detachment is not doing justice either to Epicurus or to the reader.

Unless you close the door firmly on the kind of misrepresentation that Cicero is advocating you never make any progress with the people who are studying Epicurus in good faith. You leave them convinced that there IS no explanation and that all viewpoints are equally valid, as seems to be the goal of the Talmudic approach.

In fairness to Cicero, however, or just ironically, we wouldn't have the very explicit explanation that Torquatus does provide us on these issues if Cicero had not included them in his argument against them. Cicero may have scored points for his side in 50BC, but in preserving the core explanation of Epicurus' view of pleasure he preserved critical material that we otherwise wouldn't have. So I am glad we have Cicero, but we now have the ability to move forward with restating the core material with more clarity.

Post by "Lowri834" of November 27, 2023 at 5:50 PM

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[Ancient: Epicurus' Cure for Unhappiness \(video\) | Khan Academy](#)

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I found this introduction to Epicurean Philosophy on Khan Academy and didn't find a reference to it on the forum. Not perfect, for instance his description of Epicurus seems a little ascetic but overall seemed like something short and easy to point interested friends to.

Post by "Cassius" of November 27, 2023 at 7:37 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3384-the-description-of-epicurean-philosophy-on-wikipedia/>

Thanks for posting!

Just time for two comments for now:

- He put a lot of effort into that video. Too bad he didn't find a picture of Epicurus to use, and instead used that bald sketch that has no resemblance to Epicurus whatsoever 😊

- I do think his timeline illustration comparing the time after death to the time before birth was well done. That little segment is well worth imitation.!

Post by “Novem” of January 31, 2024 at 11:54 PM

In the sub-section of the Criterion of Truth, under the Epistemology section, there is talk of a fourth criterion of truth as the "presentational applications of the mind," which is claimed to be an addition of later Epicureans. What are some great first-hand sources or academic second-hand discussions on this fourth criterion? An extension of prolepsis?

Post by “Godfrey” of February 1, 2024 at 1:16 AM

One source that comes to mind is Epicurean Philosophy: An introduction from the "Garden of Athens" edited by Christos Yapijakis. This is a compilation of a decade of recent essays from a present day group in Athens; a couple of the essays talk about a fourth criterion.

The ancient sources escape me at the moment....

Post by “Cassius” of February 1, 2024 at 6:32 AM

I know that there is some material out there which focuses on "casting of the mind" and so forth. Most of what I have seen is combined with discussion of prolepsis. Godfrey is right that Christos Yapijakis has discussed it and I believe DeWitt covers this in his book.

Part of the discussion begins on page 136 or so in relation to empiricism and the discussion of 'phantasia' but I think there is another section that I am not finding at the moment.

Post by “TauPhi” of February 1, 2024 at 8:16 AM

mind perceptions - *phantastikai epibolai tes dianoias*

first-hand sources:

- Letter to Herodotus [51]
- Principal Doctrine [24]

Post by “Bryan” of February 1, 2024 at 11:16 AM

I think that "the pictorial views of the mind" (*phantastikai epibolai tes dianoias*) is just a description of the the "visual stereotypes" (*prolepseis*), and thus they are used interchangeably.

Post by “Joshua” of February 1, 2024 at 12:27 PM

I believe there was discussion of *epibolai* in one of the Glidden papers, but I'm at work right now so cannot easily check.

Post by “Cassius” of February 1, 2024 at 2:33 PM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

I think that "the pictorial views of the mind" (*phantastikai epibolai tes dianoias*) is just a description of the the "visual stereotypes" (*prolepseis*), and thus they are used interchangeably.

I agree with the direction of this and given that it appears from Diogenes Laertius that it was not Epicurus himself who elevated the status of this to the level of a criteria, i approach the

subject with caution.

Post by “Bryan” of February 1, 2024 at 3:03 PM

I think the only aspect where there was some confusion was in the "list making" or "numbering." Epicurus was casual about "all the senses," others do not like this and wish to number them.

Epicurus to Herodotus [38b] (*Hicks*) *Next, we must by all means stick to our sensations, that is, simply to the present impressions whether of the mind or of any criterion whatever, and similarly to our actual feelings, in order that we may have the means of determining that which needs confirmation and that which is obscure.*