

Novem's Outline of Epicurean Philosophy

Post by “Novem” of June 11, 2024 at 2:53 AM

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1. The Nature of the Universe – Metaphysics and Physics
 1. The universe consists of natural, physical, material bodies and empty space; bodies-in-motion and void.
 2. Nothing comes from nothing or goes to nothing; something comes from something or goes to something else; matter cannot be destroyed nor created and is eternal.
 3. The universe is large and vast, far beyond our current comprehension, and is effectively infinite, and very well may be infinite, full of a variety of different bodies and material conglomerations.
 4. These bodies-in-motion are governed by natural, physical laws. They also have permanent and emergent properties. Permanent properties endure no matter if a body is independent of another body or is conjoined with another; emergent properties are dependent on the conjoining of two or more bodies.
 5. Supernaturalism cannot exist in this universe nor exist outside of it. Supernatural gods and powers cannot exist, and if there are natural “gods” of our universe, they do not interfere in, or are moved by, mortal affairs.
 6. The first principles of practical philosophy are dependent on the scientific study of the natural world.
2. The Nature of Knowledge – Epistemology or Canonics
 1. Our intellect, consisting of the critical/volitional aspect and the intuitive/automatic aspect, depends on three methods of acquiring and judging information of the external world: sensations, anticipations, and feelings.
 2. These three methods are not totally separable from each other. There is a reliance on deductive and inductive reasoning.
 3. Sensations – the Five Senses
 1. We constantly glean sense-data from the external world around us. They consist of touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing.
 2. Sense-data is honestly reported to our intellect, but its quality may be judged and subject to revision.
 3. Each sense provides its own type of information to the intellect.
 4. Each sense may have quality issues, for example, one needing to wear glasses to see faraway objects better.
 4. Anticipations – Instincts and Predispositions
 1. We have innate, natural predispositions that are part of being a sentient, conscious being.

2. This includes our inherited, evolutionary instincts like primal fears and joys, language capabilities, and our sense of fairness. These we are born with, and they are refined and developed as we go through social life.
3. This also includes empirical predispositions or models of objects or situations that we have triggered and solidified by experience. We summon these in our mind when the outside world triggers the memory of the object or situation.
4. Essentially, we have a faculty of pattern recognition that constantly makes predictions and associations of concrete and abstract objects and concepts.
5. Feelings - Emotions, Passions, Fears, and Desires.
 1. The feeling of pleasure is our information on positive conscious experiences.
 2. The feeling of pain is our information on negative conscious experiences.
 3. Pleasure is informing our intellect what things are good things to pursue and pain is informing our intellect what things should be avoided. We may outwardly express pleasure and pain through emotions and passions, such as through joy, delight, anger, and sadness.
 4. There are the mental pleasures (anticipatory/recollective and realized pleasures) and mental pains (anticipatory/recollective and realized pains).
 5. There are bodily pleasures and pains, depending on the somatic responses of the body to certain stimuli.
 6. Desires are wanted states of affairs that have pleasure in their anticipation/recollection and in their realization. Fears are unwanted states of affairs that are painful in their anticipation/recollection and in their realization.
6. Reason is dependent on the senses, anticipations, and feelings.
3. The Nature of Living - Ethics
 1. Psychological/Methodological Hedonism
 1. Given that pleasure consists of the positive conscious experiences, and pain consists of the negative conscious experiences, and we have constant information flows of both throughout our life, we analyze what pleasures to pursue and what pains to avoid.
 2. This calculus includes forgoing certain pleasures that may lead to greater pain in the short or long terms. This also includes enduring certain pains to avoid greater pains or achieve greater pleasures.
 3. We individually calculate and assess pleasures and pains to maximize our personal pleasure and minimize our personal pains. We can make reasonable assumptions and generalizations about others' pleasures and pains, but we must have epistemic humility when making these assessments.
 4. Life is feeling pleasure and pain while death is not feeling pleasure and pains. We should not fear death because we will not be feeling pain or missing out on pleasure.
 2. Desires-in-Living
 1. There are three types of desires we have in life:

1. Natural and necessary (the natural) desires – basic material and economic security and friendship.
 2. Natural but unnecessary (the extravagant) desires – the nice enhancements in life that we find in life by accident or by occasion.
 3. Unnatural and unnecessary (the corrosive) desires – the certain aims of life that are very taxing on oneself and can very easily make one a slave to them, like ambition, power, greed, and fame. While some may achieve great ambitions, power, wealth, and fame without giving into these corrosive desires, it is a very difficult balancing act.
3. Instrumentalist Virtue Ethics
1. Virtues are generalized habits and behaviors that lead to pleasure via embracing the natural desires and avoiding the corrosive desires. Vices are generalized habits and behaviors that lead to pain via overlooking the natural desires and embracing the corrosive desires. Acting in line with virtues will lead us to a pleasurable life. Acting viciously will lead us to a life of pain.
 2. There are several virtues, but the primary ones in Epicurean/Classical Greco-Roman philosophy are:
 1. Prudence – act with prior planning and consideration.
 2. Justice – act fairly with others and follow common social norms and rules.
 3. Courage – act confidently in the face of adversity and respond without fear or intimidation.
 4. Moderation – act without extremes of one way or another and consider all sides of a given issue.
 3. While vices are not explicitly mentioned in many places in Epicurean philosophy (and I like having the opposite cases presented), they include:
 1. Recklessness and folly – acting without prior planning and consideration.
 2. Injustice – acting unfairly with others and breaking common social rules and norms.
 3. Cowardice – acting without confidence and allowing oneself to respond with fear and intimidation.
 4. Extremism – acting one way to its maximum without consideration of the other sides of a given issue.
4. Politics and Justice
1. The concept of justice, like war and peace, is a relational property among humans (who are bodies with the permanent properties of humanness).
 2. The basis of Justice arose from the desire for friendship among humans, and the principle of mutual non-harm became the main governing principle of the first human group relationships. The development of language helped evolve human groupings towards civilizations, which became more complex compared to the mutual non-harm principle.

3. Even though Justice is a relational property, it is still very real. The concept of justice in a society may change over time but contains enduring elements. The concept of justice in a society is disseminated via socialization, people interacting with each other.
 4. Justice is a preconception/prolepsis, a canon/norm/measurement of knowledge. We use it to judge whether the proposed act contributes to the mutual non-harm to everyone involved in the social pact. Injustice is when the proposed act does not contribute to that mutual non-harm in the social pact.
 5. Time, geography, and historical context cause the social facts to change, which impacts how the preconception of Justice will identify what is Just and what is Unjust, past and present.
 6. Laws and sanctions arose from the need to address the issues caused by the complexity of evolved human civilizations, where human relations moved from the basic mutual non-harm principle. Laws and sanctions help maintain the security of the whole and the preconception of Justice of society at the time.
 7. The purest security one can find for oneself in complex social and political life is friendship, charity, and satisfying the natural and necessary desires. This contributes to the security of the whole.
 8. Pursuit of political and public careers should be carefully assessed by one's hedonic calculus to see if it is worth it for themselves and their friends. Sometimes it is better to live unnoticed.
5. The Nature of the Gods and the Divine - Theology
1. Theistic or theological innatism/nativism
 1. All humans have a predisposition (prolepsis) of awe, wonder, sacredness, blessedness, and divinity of our world and the greater universe, and this includes feeling "something out there," or being part of something greater than our individual selves. So, it is possible that there are other beings in the universe like mortal selves, and that there might be higher beings in the universe, that can avoid or minimize the mortality we see in human life.
 2. This predisposition is innate and apparently shared by others in the world; we see many parallels of awe, wonder, sacredness, blessedness, and divinity in cultures around the world. We also have shared and similar archetypes of blessed, higher beings.
 3. These higher beings live blessed lives, far beyond the regular toil and pain that mortals live, and can even live far longer than mortals, perhaps even live forever.
 2. Materialistic or naturalistic polydeism
 1. These higher beings live in our natural universe and are subject to its laws.

2. We could call these beings as “superhuman,” as they could possess characteristics that are beyond current human capabilities and traits, but not so much beyond humans that they are beyond nature. We could also call them "gods" for convenience and that they could do things far beyond what ordinary humans could do.
 3. They could achieve very long lifespans, or even deathlessness in their material bodies. They must maintain this somehow, just like ordinary humans take care of themselves, mentally and bodily, to live better and longer lives.
 4. Given the infinity of the universe, and the variety of material bodies that can emerge, we see a variety and gradation of these higher beings.
 5. Given this preoccupation with self-preservation, these higher beings are likely to avoid places in the universe where they could lose that self-preservation. They also did not create the universe, nor will destroy it.
 6. They also live very well to the point of experiencing great tranquility and pleasure in their minds, and they would likely seek out and live with like-minded higher beings, which could also help with their self-preservation.
 7. These blessed, higher beings are exemplars of living happy, virtuous lives, something that lesser beings can strive to imitate and approach a level towards this divine blessedness.
 8. Even our predisposition towards divinity and wonder helps us strive to live better lives, no matter if we will ever encounter these higher beings.
3. Spiritual/religious naturalism
1. This natural universe is the only one we live in, and so to live better lives, we must better understand it and respect its limits, as we are also part of the natural universe.
 2. Understanding this natural universe helps us draw lessons from it to inform our personal lives--Epicurean philosophy is a "natural philosophy" or a "physiology" (to be somewhat closer to the Classical Greek understanding).
 3. Philosophy must be practical and beneficial to the human experience and mentality, just like medicine, diet, and exercise are to the human body. Healthy minds and bodies via a healthy philosophy lead to a healthy life. The human body and mind are finite and tied together; many things in the human condition are about psychosomatic health.
 4. Our friends and family are natural communities of fellowship that guide and shape our personal lives. We form friendships with our parents and strangers to enhance our personal security, which includes material comforts but also a sense of belonging.

5. We also analyze our higher, sacred values with our personal hedonic calculus, so we sacrifice things (or make them sacred in the pursuit of higher values), like our present pleasure by enduring a present pain, because we believe we will get a future pleasure of achieving that higher value.
6. Other things claiming sacredness, like revealed supernatural religions, can lead to greater pains later down the road if pursued as they value things that can harm many others, and us, for no real benefit. We must judge certain established religious practices and beliefs with our hedonic calculus. Typically, supernatural religion does frequently lead to a lot of harm by inspiring others with vindictive deities that must be pleased or otherwise incur their wrath.

Post by “Cassius” of June 11, 2024 at 7:56 AM

Very thorough - thank you!

Post by “Novem” of June 16, 2024 at 12:09 AM

I added a subsection outline on Epicurean political theory based on what I am gleaning and skimming from the Theory and Practice book.

Post by “Novem” of September 1, 2024 at 12:33 PM

Added a section on Epicurean theology and spirituality.