

A Request To New Participants

Post by "Cassius" of May 15, 2018 at 1:12 PM

As participation in the forum expands over time, it will be very helpful if new participants will let us know about their level of background and opinions in the areas of Epicurean physics and Epicurean canonic/epistemology. Many people come here initially due to their interest in Epicurean ethics, but as we discuss and debate ideas about ethics, we are essentially just debating "words" without a means to resolve them unless we have a shared foundation from which to build and understand each other.

Epicurean ethical positions rest on underlying positions about the nature of the universe and the nature of knowledge. Our opinions about ethics will largely rest about on our prior opinions about those. Therefore as you begin to post, and as you introduce yourself, please drop back and let us know your positions on Epicurean physics and Epicurean canonic/epistemology. In the broadest of terms the areas of that will determine your conclusions about Epicurean philosophy in general are your views on the nature of the universe (the existence of supernatural gods, pre-birth or post-death existence of souls, existence of "ideals" elsewhere in the universe, or "essences" in this one), on the nature of knowledge (whether knowledge is possible, the role of reason in knowledge, and the relative status and role the senses, anticipations, and feelings). All of these will have a direct influence on one's opinions about ethical issues.

Of course you may be an absolute beginner in Epicurean studies and you may not yet have fully-formed opinions in these areas. Our purpose here is to learn about and apply Epicurean philosophy in our own lives, so don't be concerned that certain positions are required here before you participate. Just let us know in general about your perspective on these issues, and that will allow us to help fine-tune our discussions to make the experience here more helpful to everyone.

Thanks for joining us.

(And thanks to [Daniel Van Orman](#) for the idea to make this post, which will help us all as we go forward.)

For those who come here and read this first part, I am as of 11/19 encouraging new people to tell us about their reading history by reference to a list of standard sources, which I will encourage people to read in the "Welcome" post:

----- Core Reading -----

- 1 The Biography of Epicurus By Diogenes Laertius (Chapter 10). This includes all Epicurus' letters and the Authorized Doctrines. Supplement with the Vatican list of Sayings.
- 2 "Epicurus And His Philosophy" - Norman DeWitt
- 3 "On The Nature of Things"- Lucretius
- 4 Cicero's "On Ends" - Torquatus Section
- 5 Cicero's "On The Nature of the Gods" - Velleius Section
- 6 The Inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda - Martin Ferguson Smith translation
- 7 "A Few Days In Athens" - Frances Wright
- 8 Lucian Core Texts on Epicurus: (1) Alexander the Oracle-Monger, (2) Hermetimus (3) Others?
- 9 Plato's [Philebus](#)
- 10 Philodemus "On Methods of Inference" (De Lacy version, including his appendix on relationship of Epicurean canon to Aristotle and other Greeks)
- 11 "The Greeks on Pleasure" -Gosling & Taylor Sections on Epicurus, especially on katastematic and kinetic pleasure.
- 12 Chance and Natural Law in Epicurean Philosophy - AA Long -

----- Other Books On Epicurus You Have Read -----

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Post by “Condorcet” of November 7, 2018 at 10:10 PM

So good to learn about this forum.

My path to Epicurus started with reading Stephen Greenblatt's, *The Swerve, How the World Became Modern*, then I found an old (Modern Library?) edition of *De Rerum Nature* and have since settled on Walter Englert's translation which brings me to my point.

My relief and happiness at finding a philosophy that closely matches my perception and conclusions about the real world lead me to proselytize - I believe Epicureanism is good for everybody.

What complicates proselytizing for me are the commonly used translations of matters Epicurean. I have no judgment about the translations because I don't know anything about Ancient Greek. I do judge that at least two translations of Canonics, generally accepted as the best, still render awkward, stilted syntax.

I appreciate the desire to be as true to the man as possible and I believe Epicurus shared his ideas as clearly and succinctly as possible. He had to keep his students attention and be nimble when engaging them.

I know I can be considered presumptuous as hell but I did some armchair analytics and tried my hand at revising a couple of Canonics, always hoping to hew to the meaning. I hope others will try their own versions because it requires one to really consider meaning.

Doctrine 2. [Death is nothing to us](#), because that which is dead has no sensations, and that which cannot be sensed is nothing to us.

--That which is dead has no sensation, and that which cannot be sensed is nothing to us so [death is nothing to us](#).--

Doctrine 5. It is not possible to live pleasantly without living wisely, honorably, and justly. Nor can one live wisely, honorably, and justly without living pleasantly. But those who for any reason do not live wisely, honorably, and justly cannot possibly live pleasantly.

--Living pleasantly is not possible without living wisely, honorably, and justly. Nor can we live wisely, honorably, and justly without living pleasantly. Those who for any reason do not live wisely, honorably, and justly cannot possibly live pleasantly.--

...and so forth.

Post by “Cassius” of November 8, 2018 at 4:48 AM

Welcome Condorcet! I fully agree with everything you wrote. And especially I agree with how helpful it is to rewrite Epicurean passages in your own words as way to better understand the meaning. I have done a lot of that myself and I know that helps parse the meaning as well as any other technique. There's nothing magic about the translations we have and in many cases they use docreyionsy choices that may have rung true 100 years ago but are needlessly stilted now.

Given your first post I hope you will feel free to help start new threads and make comments on old ones -- that is the very best way you can help get the forum moving and spur new activity.

As opposed to social media, threads here are findable in the future, and every new comment and discussion helps build a database from which many others can profit.

We look forward to talking with you!

Post by “Condorcet” of November 14, 2018 at 7:48 PM

Thank you Cassius! I can respond to the May 15 post, "please drop back and let us know your positions on Epicurean physics and Epicurean canonic/epistemology."

-I know there has been some criticism of Epicurean physics and I concluded the critics might benefit from a more thorough understanding of how Epicurus advanced contemporary physics. How, unlike other commentators, Epicurus' conclusions are based on fundamental scientific reasoning and the limits of unaided perception.

"In the broadest of terms the areas of that will determine your conclusions about Epicurean philosophy in general are your views on the nature of the universe (the existence of supernatural gods, pre-birth or post-death existence of souls, existence of "ideals" elsewhere in the universe, or "essences" in this one),

-Here I agree with Epicurus. His idea as I recall is that people are welcome to believe what they want but when dealing with unobservable phenomenon it is vital that we don't become so enamored of our ideas that we overlook what we are perceiving in Nature.

"on the nature of knowledge (whether knowledge is possible"

-I believe knowledge is possible, there are facts derived by experience and experiment.

"the role of reason in knowledge, and the relative status and role the senses, anticipations"

-For this I had to turn to Epicurus and His Philosophy which I am just now beginning to read. My sense is that "anticipations" is the Epicurean word that explains how we seem to know things almost without reasoning. After studying Stephen Pinker's The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature I believe "anticipation" refers to what we understand as "genetic predisposition." Maybe "anticipation" is also a way of explaining what we experience as "heuristics."

Post by "Cassius" of November 14, 2018 at 9:27 PM

Interesting comments Condorcet, and I especially appreciate your cite to the Stephen Pinker book, about which I had not heard. The issue of anticipations is very difficult to be sure about, but I have always thought that the blank slate theory, which I gather is associated largely with Aristotle, is incomplete at best.

As you read DeWitt's book I will be interested in any comments you might have, and especially when you come to his discussion on anticipations it would be interesting to know how that compares with Pinker.

Thanks for posting!

Post by "Elli" of November 18, 2018 at 2:43 PM

Of what I undertood by the greek epicureans the instincts as faculties that are programmed in us by Nature, and as our specie is evolved to survive are : the feelings of pain and pleasure along with the senses. From the day we are born the anticipations or preconceptions are connected with the concepts of the words on things, and more complex concepts - always based on materialistic reality e.g justice, as well as they all are measured by the senses and the feelings in accordance with the experience of the reality. And in the duration we are learning our words of our language, the mind is making an image of every thing we have learned. So, we keep in our minds as a memory the concepts of all the words of the things, and issues, to be in our mind as pre-conceptions. All these are accordance with the reality and our experiences (always measured by the senses and feelings), and in the duration we are speaking the mind picks all these up. The problem that comes out is when the preconceptions are based on true or false. The preconceptions will be false if they contradicted by the phenomena of the reality, and they had not be measured by the senses and the feelings. And they will be true if are proved by the phenomena of the reality measured by the senses and the feelings.

IMO on the issue of preconceptions goes the talent too e.g. if someone can play a piano or be able to learn many languages. This goes to the neurones (cells) of the mind, that are genetically formed in such a way (synapses) by heritage of the genes. But even the man that has any talent has to practice his talent to be more talented. Epicurus had had the talent to observe the Nature carefully, but also had had all the written works from his ancestors as philosophers. In the duration of his life and with the help of his friends, he managed to clean them up from confusion, Myths and all these things that were, and still are against the reality of the phenomena, and our goal of pleasure. His way of thinking is called "manifold way" that is based on probabilities of the phenomena searching out the causes that caused them. His

"swerve" of the atoms is based on his observation that in Nature there is not only a cause with a result, as Democritus and others claimed, but in Nature there are many causes and many results, since the three factors that are created all the things are and the need, and chance and the swerve (as our free will). For the Canon and the analogy we can read many things in the book by Philodemus "on signs".

Post by "Matt" of November 19, 2018 at 4:40 PM

I should probably introduce myself here as there are many who probably do not know me outside of Facebook.

I have studied all sorts of idealist philosophy, everything from Neoplatonism to Eastern Vedanta but was dissatisfied with these abstract philosophies as I see them as more therapeutic rather than actually defining truth. I eventually found Epicurus and became enamoured with his natural, materialist philosophy. I have always been a theist, so learning that the Epicureans also had a theological system proved to be a great interest for me. For a couple years I adopted the philosophy as my own and sought to adapt it to my life. During this time I became friends with many of the core FB Garden and I continue to keep the lines of fellowship open.

I eventually studied Epicurean theology more deeply and found that I could not accept it. So I abandoned the idea of being an Epicurean because this was a cornerstone issue for me.

Over the course of the last year I had been convicted to turn back to the faith of my youth and see it not from purely a metaphysical or philosophical approach, but rather an entirely practical one that involved giving up intellectual inquiry and adopting certain principles and a open frame of mind that now after years of missing what was being presented, it fundamentally makes sense to me.

So at this time I do not consider myself an Epicurean, but rather a Christian and Neoplatonist philosopher. I am someone who has had a growing relationship with the Epicurean community and thus far they have not shunned me, but rather continue to embrace me as a friend. It makes for a very interesting relationship.

But as this relates to Epicurean philosophy...I see friendship, fellowship, and community being hallmarks of the Epicurean garden. So in that, I seek out commonalities between it and other world systems. Though the two worlds are in fact irreconcilable it never precludes us from being able to have a dialogue.

Other than relaying what I know of the core doctrines of Epicurean philosophy I only have at this time inputs regarding the theology and how it relates to other systems.

Thanks for having me!

Matt

Post by “Cassius” of November 19, 2018 at 6:27 PM

Thank you very much Matt! You have added a lot to our discussions already and I hope you will be with us for a long time to come!

Post by “Cassius” of November 19, 2018 at 7:07 PM

In fact Matt I would be up for a thread on "How Cats Illustrate Epicurean principles" - with photos - any time you are ready.