

Godfrey's Epicurean Outline

Post by "Godfrey" of December 10, 2018 at 8:40 PM

First, kudos to Cassius for creating this forum and thanks to all who have been posting. It's really great to have a place to learn, discuss and/or get feedback!

I'm seriously lost in the rabbit hole of the anticipations and the gods. My current thoughts on these are in the outline and I'm posting the entire outline to get some feedback on my general grasp of the philosophy.

Unless there are suggestions otherwise (help!), from here I'm planning to read the DeWitt chapters VII, VIII and XIII for his take on the anticipations and the gods, then Barwiss for more on the anticipations. These topics are pretty mind bending and maybe a bit incomplete in the sources, but I think that coming to an understanding of them will be valuable to an overall understanding. Plus they seem to be inter-related in that understanding one may help to understand the other and vice versa. Anyway, here goes:

KNOWLEDGE/CANON

- The five senses are our primary source of information.
- Anticipations/preconceptions are an instinctual, intuitive source of information which exists in advance of experience.
- Pleasure and pain, both mental and physical, are our guides to action.
- Reason and intuition are secondary to and necessary for evaluating and understanding information from the senses, the anticipations and the feelings.

NATURE/PHYSICS

- We live in an infinite universe consisting exclusively of matter and void.
- Nothing is created from nothing and nothing is reduced to nothing. Therefore the universe has always been and will always be.
- Science needs to be studied only to the degree that it brings relief from fear.
- It is impossible to verify the existence of the gods through the senses, therefore knowledge of their existence or non-existence is based solely on the information of the preconceptions and the feelings and, after that, reason.

ETHICS/ACTION

- The ultimate good is life itself.
- Pleasure is the goal of life. This is because it is the end goal of all other goals.
- Pleasure is defined as: freedom from mental and physical disturbance.
- Prudence, honor and justice are prerequisites for pleasure.
- Contemplation and analysis of desires is an integral part of Epicurean practice.
- Natural and necessary desires are those that lead to pain when not fulfilled (food, clothing, shelter, safety). Training oneself to fulfill only these desires leads to the simplest life of pleasure.
- Each individual must analyze their additional desires as to whether they lead to pleasure over pain. These further desires will not increase pleasure but vary it.
- In some instances it is valuable to endure pain in order to achieve a resultant pleasure.
- The fulfillment of some desires leads to more desire. These desires are unnatural and should be avoided.
- "Direct every preference and aversion toward securing health of body and tranquility of mind, as this is the sum and end of a blessed life."
- The Three Goods are friendship, autonomy, and the analyzed life.
- Autonomy is achieved by living frugally, only desiring what is natural and what can be maintained by a source of income which provides an excess of pleasure over pain.
- The analyzed life is a life of pleasure, evaluated and lived by constant attention to the three degrees of desire and according to the Canon.
- The Four Remedies are: don't fear the gods; don't fear death; pleasure is easy to procure; pain is easy to endure.
- Justice is an agreement among beings and is not absolute.

Thanks!

Post by "Cassius" of December 10, 2018 at 9:16 PM

Godfrey thank you for the time it took to post this! I will have more detailed comments but I see that you are interested in the anticipations aspect, and I have just tonight been exchanging some comments with [Elayne](#), so this is a good place to post and preserve them. I have tried to edit this to make it less choppy, but here is sort of where we started, talking about anticipations and "justice."

We know (1) what Epicurus said explicitly in [PD30-40](#) about justice and he referred to agreements, and we know (2) also the general background that there is a faculty of anticipations that operates to generate "preconceptions." I think also that we should analogize that anticipations work like the faculty of sight and all the others, for example in that the eyes report what they perceive, producing data that our ****minds**** then process and organize into higher-level information. (With the important point there being that opinion error occurs in the mind, and that the faculties are just reporting, not assembling conclusions. Remember that Epicurus referred to false conclusions from anticipations about the gods.)

We have to find a way to combine (1) and (2).

My first stab at organizing this would be to suggest that the leash law is an example of a high-level arrangement to which the people in that locality more or less "agree" to by the fact that they remain in the society and aren't in open revolt, even though they may not like or follow the leash law. To the extent that the neighbor has violated the leash law, that probably constitutes an "injustice" which would be analyzed as a species of the abstraction we call "justice."

But just like sight processes all kind of perceptions all the time, I would say that to consider anticipations as a faculty means that they are operating all the time as well. If anticipations are an "organizational faculty," (I'm using scare quotes, not quoting anybody) then organizing things that happen into relationships allows us to recognize that once we have met someone, shaken hands, exchanged gifts, etc, we are in the process of generating a relationship that leads to certain expectations. Then, if those expectations are violated, the anticipatory faculty would probably lead you to organize that violation into something that more or less approaches something you would eventually call injustice. Then as part of the process of organizing these potentially violation events into something that is recognizable (not necessarily fully formed concepts), the faculty of pleasure / pain has something to evaluate and process into a feeling of "painful."

I think the main point would be that if you didn't have a faculty of anticipations that predisposed you to begin to assemble handshakes and smiles and interactions into progressively more complex relationships, it would never occur to you to begin to categorized these events into a relationship which would eventually call for a label of "just" or "unjust" or "pleasurable" or "painful." So I agree with you that these things can happen at an "intuitive" level and that the reactions of pain and pleasure can occur even before the event is organized

into the fully-formed concept of "my neighbor violated the leash law."

In contrast, no matter how many times you pet the spider, the spider will never grasp that you are trying to be its friend and that you want a relationship of justice or injustice. (Possibly we may even need to go further down the line to be absolutely sure of that, but I've never been particularly fond of spiders so I doubt that they have much conceptual organizing power 😊)

All this is just my opinion of course, as an attempt to organize the possibilities.

Then further I encourage Elayne to study this further and said:

Just please please please be prepared for the blowback, and remember that the DeWitt position on this (which I am channeling) is held in low esteem in the academic community. Of course maybe "low esteem" isn't accurate -- how about "banished from memory as if he never existed"? 😊 Whenever I say something like this don't think I am hedging, it's just that I am one of those people who believes that all of this is useless if we can't document our position, and if blur over the fact that disputes exist. I am fully persuaded that DeWitt is correct and the "anticipations are conceptions" majority is wrong, but at this point with the set of texts that are remaining it's certainly "possible" to argue both sides. I think it's clear why DeWitt argues as he does, and it's easy to see where it leads if we consider anticipations to equal conceptions - but there are many scholars who disagree.

On the other hand anyone who takes on the assignment of supporting Epicurus in giving the central role to "pleasure" will probably find the argument about anticipations to be a tea party in comparison.

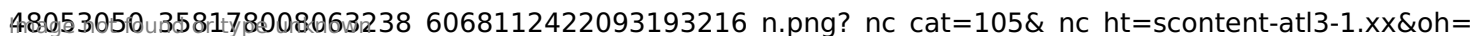
And --

David Sedley is a well-known Epicurean scholar and he wrote an article called "Epicurus' Theological Innatism" in which he explores the Epicurean argument for the existence of gods and how that relates to anticipations. We can get that article for you if you'd like it but like most academic articles it really just explores the issues without coming to many conclusions. I recall that there was a subsequent article after that, commenting on Sedley's views of anticipations, and I'll look that up and post a reference. I have it now, it is a 2016 article by Voula Tsouna entitled "Epicurean Preconceptions."

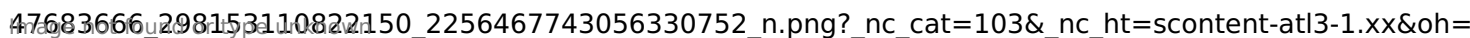
Godfrey I post all that to encourage you to continue to read DeWitt's explanation as the best introduction, but to prepare you for the controversy about this that you will read in other sources. If you read only the academic sources, you will think DeWitt never existed, and his arguments don't even merit mentioning.

Let me stop there for the moment and comment on the articles:

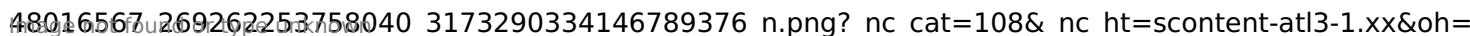
It has been a while since I read the Tsouna article and I recall being dissatisfied with it, but I do think I recall that it dealt somewhat fairly with the argument I am describing as Dewitt's I think I am correct in saying "of course, she never mentions that DeWitt exists...." yep, I thought I remembered this -- her position is "preconceptions are concepts" --

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While I am not sure that Tsouna summarizes him correctly, she does address the "innatist" argument by addressing Sedley:

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Here she states what is I think pretty close to the DeWitt position:

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but then she goes off into the necessity for visual input, which is the point of contention, really, so in the end she digs in to the "preconceptions are concepts formed after exposure to evidence" position. But here I'll leave you -- it is a fascinating argument i think!

I'll just leave you with the thought that I think "predisposition" is the key word here, and that in fact it is a true "predisposition" then that predisposition is something that exists BEFORE exposure to any sensory examples, which I analogize to "when I was born I was born made up in such a way that I would eventually find vanilla ice cream pleasing before I ever tasted ice cream" or "when I was born I was born predisposed to see light between certain wavelengths before I ever opened my eyes" or whatever.

Post by “Cassius” of December 10, 2018 at 9:24 PM

Another comment on this bullet point:

- Science needs to be studied only to the degree that it brings relief from fear.

Yes I think that is a good summary of several textual references, but of course I personally would think that this statement must have had a context. Some people like to highlight the "ONLY" and use this to argue that Epicurus was disdainful of knowledge in general, but I think he had a consistent position that everything should bring happiness, and that he meant mental AND physical. Surely we need knowledge of medicine and other natural devices to make life easier and more comfortable, and I can't believe he would have written off those uses. So I tend to think that this is a reference to "theoretical knowledge" and wasn't intended as a slam at the practical sciences which do so much to make life more pleasant and happy.

Post by “Cassius” of December 10, 2018 at 9:30 PM

"- It is impossible to verify the existence of the gods through the senses, therefore knowledge of their existence or non-existence is based solely on the information of the preconceptions and the feelings and, after that, reason."

On this one, this is part of the big debate on gods on which there are many opinions. The majority academics argue that Epicurus' opinion that "gods" exist was based ONLY on perceptions through the senses, the opposite of what you wrote there. Of course DeWitt argues that the primary knowledge of gods come through preconceptions and presumably reasoning based on isonomia and "no single thing of a kind."

And another way to look at this is that Epicurus tended not to frame things in terms of "it is impossible to verify....." i think I am correct in saying that he starts with evidence, and builds on what is there, but he doesn't generally emphasize the impossibility of getting evidence later. What you're saying is no doubt generally correct, and would apply to things like "impossible to fly to the heavens to check them out. Or maybe it would be more accurate too to say "it's impossible (at least for now) to verify the existence of the gods through the FIVE senses."

Part of my hesitancy here too is there is a lot of discussion of "images" and perhaps the brain being able to receive non-visible images. Again, rather than trying to jump to my own

conclusion, I'm trying to start like deWitt with thinking about the texts and what is actually said, rather than what's wrong or right. But this is just a minor point in your outline....

Post by “Cassius” of December 10, 2018 at 9:33 PM

These three of course are both central and controversial:

- The ultimate good is life itself.
- Pleasure is the goal of life. This is because it is the end goal of all other goals.
- Pleasure is defined as: freedom from mental and physical disturbance.

Especially "Pleasure is defined as freedom from disturbance." That's perhaps true from some respects (in terms of quantity, I think, is likely) but probably not true in other respects (is it really fair to say that pleasure EQUALS IN EVERY RESPECT freedom from disturbance?)

That's the big issue of the nature of pleasure which is debated so much and is really worthwhile to explore. If you've not seen my page here, you'll find I've collected some references on that issue: <https://newepicurean.com/foundations-2/...pleasure-model/>

Post by “Cassius” of December 10, 2018 at 9:34 PM

OOPS I should have asked you this: If you are a philosophy student in college somewhere, please let me know, because I don't want you to flunk out because you're reading DeWitt and all the teachers think he's full of bunk! 😊

Post by “Godfrey” of December 11, 2018 at 1:14 AM

Thanks for the thoughtful and detailed response.

First off, I'm not a philosophy student (or a philosopher) so there's nothing to be worried about there!

There's a lot to think about here so I'll just touch on a few points now. I'm intrigued by the idea of the anticipations being a continuously operating faculty and a predisposition. If I'm understanding it correctly, that seems to relate well to the rest of the Canon. I agree with you that concepts don't make much sense, especially with regard to Epicurus's statement about false conclusions from anticipations about the gods.

Thanks for the David Sedley reference; I found that paper and downloaded it for after I finish the DeWitt chapters. It sounds like just what I'm looking for so hopefully that will be productive!

You make good points about what I wrote about science and the impossibility of verifying the existence of the gods through the senses, I hadn't thought of those and do need to dig in to the original texts before I refine my outline. I'm trying to absorb the philosophy for my own use, but wandering too far from the original does defeat the purpose of studying it to some extent. I'm looking forward to reading your page on pleasure as well.

As I dig in to these ideas more will it be best to start new threads elsewhere or to continue here?

Post by “Cassius” of December 11, 2018 at 3:01 AM

Godfrey as to whether to continue here or post new threads, of course that's up to you, but here's what I suggest: If you're talking mainly about improving the outline itself as a high-level summary, I would continue here. However in many cases you're going to likely want to go deeper into a particular subject, and in many cases those subjects already have a forum of their own, so it would be ideal to start new threads there. But don't worry too much about starting them in the wrong place, because it's easy to move threads to new locations after they get going.

The big benefit of this forum software as opposed to other methods is that enhances the ability to organize topics and find things easily later, but nothing's perfect. We'll always have the search box to help find things too. But if you haven't scrolled through the [forum list](#), it would be good to spend a moment doing that just so you'll be aware of what is out there already,

Post by “Hiram” of December 11, 2018 at 3:02 PM

Quote from [Godfrey](#)

- Science needs to be studied only to the degree that it brings relief from fear.

On this point, PD 10-13 seem to say this but it does not mean or imply that any additional acquisition of scientific knowledge is BAD or useless. Science may have other advantages, or may be enjoyed for its own sake. We are not anti-science, which is how some people may interpret this out of ignorance or ill-will--on the contrary, the study of nature is an important source of pleasure to us.

Post by “Godfrey” of December 11, 2018 at 7:15 PM

Excellent point! I'll try to clarify this in my next pass at the outline. I am absolutely pro-science and didn't consider the anti-science viewpoint which is so prevalent today when I wrote this. What I was trying to do was to streamline my outline. I take science as a given and therefore was focusing on trying to understand other points of the philosophy as I composed the outline. The part of the Physics that is most challenging to me is the gods, so I'm now reading up on that and on the Anticipations in the Canon. These two seem to me to be interrelated in some fashion that I don't yet understand.

One of the benefits of writing and posting an outline is that I'm beginning to appreciate more of the nuance and controversy involved in what seems at first to be a very straightforward philosophy. Many thanks for your feedback Hiram!

Post by “Cassius” of December 11, 2018 at 7:29 PM

Godfrey I think you will eventually find that while anticipations are a fascinating subject, they are not quite so central to understanding the core issues as might appear at first. As I think DeWitt points out, Lucretius goes through his whole poem without much, if any, direct discussion of anticipations. it's possible it's there and we don't really recognize it, but it's pretty clear that he does not devote a great deal of emphasis to it, with the implication that (like "the gods") it was considered either an advanced subject, or something pretty obvious (maybe all animals have "instincts"?) so there was not much need to dwell on it in fundamental texts.

I think you said you were reading DeWitt, right? If you finish that, and then maybe tackle Lucretius before long, I think you will see that there's a pattern of analysis where you start with

fundamentals and then make sure everything after that is consistent with the fundamentals.

So in terms of gods, whatever you end up conceiving them to be, they are clearly NOT supernatural or omniscient or all-powerful or anything like that, because nothing exists eternally except matter and void, and everything is made up of that, so if you apply that rigorously you never entertain supernatural concepts at all.

Likewise with anticipations, whatever they are, they are natural faculties that operate similarly to the sense and the feelings of pleasure and pain, so there's clearly some aspect that we're born with, and some aspects that we train and develop over time.

The reason I keep focusing on DeWitt is that if you take the time to read that, you'll get a good view of the overall forest, and then you'll be able to dig deeper into individual trees without losing sight of the big picture.

In years past I kept trying to read various academic books on details which never gave the full picture, and I was never able to put everything into some sort of order until I found DeWitt's presentation.

And at this point even though I have lots of questions about the details of what they thought about gods and anticipations, I really don't worry about it as much as I used to, because I am confident that whatever they thought was a logical extension of the fundamentals that are fairly easy to grasp.

Post by “Godfrey” of December 12, 2018 at 12:27 AM

This evening I've been reading DeWitt's chapter on Sensations, Anticipations and Feelings and it brings way more clarity than anything else that I've read. So much so that I'm not feeling as obsessed by the Anticipations anymore. 👍

Post by “Cassius” of December 12, 2018 at 6:17 AM

That comment raises in my mind that it would be good to write an article comparing the books that are available as a general introduction to Epicurus. I'll have to do some work even to pull a list together because I'm not sure that there are even many who try to do the kind of general summary for non-academic readers that DeWitt has done.

Post by “Godfrey” of December 22, 2018 at 2:50 PM

Here's the current work-in-progress version of my personal outline. In an effort to bring EP more directly into my daily life, I've added (hopefully not heretically) a "practice" category. I've made revisions in the other categories for clarity and to reduce some redundancies that I had.

CANON

- The five senses are our primary source of information.
- Anticipations/innate ideas are an instinctual, intuitive source of information which exists in advance of experience.
- Pleasure and pain, both mental and physical, are how we evaluate information and are our guides to action.
- Reason and intuition are secondary to and necessary for evaluating and understanding information from the senses, the anticipations and the feelings.

PHYSICS

- We live in an infinite universe consisting exclusively of matter and void: everything is subject to natural law. Therefore there is by definition no supernatural realm. Nothing exists outside of the universe which could have created the universe.
- Nothing is created from nothing and nothing is reduced to nothing. Therefore the universe has always been and will always be.
- All compounds are impermanent, but the elementary particles composing them are indestructible and over time recombine to form other compounds.
- The soul is corporeal and begins and ends with the body.
- Science is necessary to dispel superstition and fear and to understand the limits of pains and desires.
- The gods are a topic that I need to give more thought to....

ETHICS

- Because there is no supernatural realm and no afterlife, the greatest good is life itself.
- Pleasure is the goal and guide of life. It is set by nature: pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain leads to maintaining life. Pleasure is the end goal of all other goals.
- Pleasure is a state of gratification. Since mind and soul are corporeal, pleasure includes health of mind and body and freedom from mental and physical disturbance.
- Prudence, honor and justice are prerequisites for pleasure.
- Each individual must contemplate and analyze their desires as to whether they lead to pleasure over pain. For each particular desire ask "what will be the result for me if the object of this desire is fulfilled and what if it is not fulfilled?"
- Natural and necessary desires are those that lead to pain when not fulfilled (food, clothing, shelter, safety). Training oneself to fulfill only these desires leads to the simplest life of pleasure.
- Some desires are natural but not necessary. These further desires will not increase pleasure but embellish it.
- The fulfillment of some desires leads to more desire. These desires are unnatural and should be avoided.
- In some instances it is valuable to endure pain in order to achieve a resultant greater pleasure.
- Autonomy is achieved by living frugally, only desiring what is natural and what can be maintained by a source of income which provides an excess of pleasure over pain.
- Friendship adds to the variety of pleasure through sharing. Among these many pleasures are security and love of philosophy.
- Justice is an agreement among beings and is not absolute.

PRACTICE

- Throughout each day, periodically pause and notice a pleasant sensation: sight, sound, smell, touch, taste.
- Exercise daily for the pleasure of movement and for the benefit of good health.
- Rest daily (in addition to sleep) for the pleasure of relaxation and for the benefit of good health.

- Compose a daily haiku or haibun for the pleasure of reflecting on philosophy and on events of the day.
- Review decisions with respect to the categories of desire and the results if fulfilled or not fulfilled.
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Post by “Cassius” of December 22, 2018 at 5:15 PM

Let's continue the conversation (which you began too with a wall comment) as to practice. To me, I think as I said over there that while everyone is human and therefore certain things apply, such as that we need like-minded friends, we also have to remember that everyone is different. To me that means that everyone is going to have a different set of pleasures that they enjoy pursuing, and that their circumstances allow them to pursue at an appropriate cost of effort/pain.

I think all of the things you've listed are very good to do, but it occurs to me that the list is pretty mental, and we don't know anything about the types of things that you do in everyday life that bring you pleasure. From a very high-level point of view it is probably fair to say that within our personal circumstances we generally just want to spend more time doing things we find enjoyable and less time doing things we find painful, remembering of course that we sometimes choose pain / avoid pleasure as you know.

This section from the letter of Cosma Raimondi seems appropriate to help focus on both the mental but also how we act to spend our physical time:

"If we were indeed composed solely of a mind, I should be inclined to call Regulus 'happy' and entertain the Stoic view that we should find happiness in virtue alone. But since we are composed of a mind *and* a body, why do they leave out of this account of human happiness something that is part of mankind and properly pertains to it? Why do they consider only the mind and neglect the body, when the body houses the mind and is the other half of what man is? If you are seeking the totality something made up of various parts, and yet some part is missing, I cannot think it perfect and complete. We use the term 'human', I take it, to refer to a being with both a mind and a body. And in the same way that the body is not to be thought healthy when some part of it is sick, so man himself cannot be thought happy if he is suffering in some part of himself. As for their assigning happiness to the mind alone on the grounds that

it is in some sense the master and ruler of man's body, it is quite absurd to disregard the body when the mind itself often depends on the state and condition the body and indeed can do nothing without it. Should we not deride someone we saw sitting on a throne and calling himself a king when he had no courtiers or servants? Should we think someone a fine prince whose servants were slovenly and misshapen? Yet those who would separate the mind from the body in defining human happiness and think that someone whose body is being savaged and tortured may still be happy are just as ludicrous.

I find it surprising that these clever Stoics did not remember when investigating the subject that they themselves were men. Their conclusions came not from what human nature demanded but from what they could contrive in argument. Some of them, in my view, placed so much reliance on their ingenuity and facility in debate that they did not concern themselves with what was actually relevant to the enquiry. They were carried away instead by their enthusiasm for intellectual display, and tended to write what was merely novel and surprising — things we might aspire to but not ones we should spend any effort in attaining. Then there were some rather cantankerous individuals who thought that we should only aim for what they themselves could imitate or lay claim to. Nature had produced some boorish and inhuman philosophers whose senses had been dulled or cut off altogether, ones who took no pleasure in anything; and these people laid down that the rest of mankind should avoid what their own natural severity and austerity shrank from. Others subsequently entered the debate, men of great and various intellectual abilities, who all delivered a view on what constituted the supreme good according to their own individual disposition. But in the middle of all this error and confusion, Epicurus finally appeared to correct and amend the mistakes of the older philosophers and put forward his own true and certain teaching on happiness."

<https://newepicurean.com/suggested-reading/cosma-raimondi/>

Post by "Cassius" of December 22, 2018 at 6:22 PM

Godfrey before I forget to mention this in this thread, I personally get a lot of enjoyment out of coordinating this forum and working with others on studying Epicurus. Of course it's obvious that I hope that you and others will have fun on this forum in the same way, too, but I am also planning a new initiative for the new year that I will begin outlining shortly (in addition to the streaming/radio). In general I think that keeping in touch with others who are interested in the same subjects is critical to keeping an active mind and being happy, so I want to pursue those ideas as best possible. Our discussions on the forums are somewhat haphazard - maybe "asynchronous" is the word. We probably need to have a regular schedule of interactions for people who have the time to do that, so hopefully we can make progress in that area in 2019.

Post by "Godfrey" of December 22, 2018 at 8:08 PM

As you can tell, I'm making up the "practice" list as I go so I appreciate the input. What I'm trying to do is to focus the EP ethics into a more specific, personal list of practices - a personal approach to living the philosophy; cultivating an attitude. Maybe this turns into a place to put my goals into an EP context. But you're right that it can't one list for everybody.

Looking at it the list is rather mental but I think it needs to be to some degree as a bridge between the ethics and just living pleurably and avoiding pain.

I'm having some trouble making the leap from the ideas to living the ideas, so a list feels right for me personally and that's why I've included it here. I'm curious if other people have this issue as well and have come up with any good strategies?

"Throughout each day, periodically pause and notice a pleasant sensation: sight, sound, smell, touch, taste" seems like it hits a sweet spot in some way. I'm finding as I work with it that it helps me to check in often and it also makes me think about how I might plan certain activities in the future that focus on specific sensory pleasures. This might be illustrative of a bridge between ethics and very general pleasure/pain....

Post by "Cassius" of December 22, 2018 at 8:11 PM

Godfrey to what degree are you interested in the "physics" / "study of nature" side of things?

This might seem unrelated but do you live in a city, or near the country? Do you have pets?

Post by "Godfrey" of December 22, 2018 at 8:24 PM

I am interested in those, as a matter of fact I'm planning to re-read Epicurus' letters for my next foray and eventually read Lucretius. It's quite interesting how EP relates to modern physics, although I'm not a scientist and beyond a certain point modern physics just blows my mind.

I live in a big city, near the beach. On a good night we can see 10-20 stars. 😞 We have a dog.

Post by "Cassius" of December 22, 2018 at 8:40 PM

Ok interesting. I was wondering because I am trying to get a fix on whether there might be a pattern over time on some of those issues. Some people really have no interest in the "physics" whatsoever. Now I myself am not at all a fan of the astro and quantum theories such as "string theory" and the like, but I do think that a certain amount of study of the "Workings of nature" in a general sense is helpful.

As for the latter question, i have moved toward splitting my time between city and countryside, and moving more toward the country as I grow older. So it's interesting to me that Diogenes Laertius specifically recorded that Epicurus said the wise man "will be fond of the country."

Also I apologize if you've stated this already in detail but what was it that spurred your interest in Epicurus?

All these are areas to look for clues on how things can be made better, I think.

Post by "Godfrey" of December 23, 2018 at 2:34 PM

As to what spurred my interest in Epicurus: that question is adding some clarity to my thinking.

Background: for several years I sat with a neighborhood Zen group. Although I enjoyed it, I didn't see myself as a Buddhist and eventually began looking for a suitable western practice. Stoicism came to my attention and I studied that for awhile, but I couldn't agree with the contemporary focus on ethics at the expense of physics and logic. I discovered Epicurus while reading Cicero's *On The Nature Of The Gods*: Epicurus' ideas struck a chord, particularly his physics. The fact that it is a unified philosophy which is still pertinent in the 21st century is very appealing.

I realize now that what I've been trying to do with a "practice" category is a series of brief *action* statements. For instance, in retrospect I could reduce my personal Zen practice to "daily meditation and mindfulness". These were *actions* which kept my daily activities in a Zen framework, to which could be added study of the eightfold path, precepts, etc as desired or necessary for greater insight. These are also key to any Zen practice so they aren't just a [to-do list](#) of personal Zen-ness.

To apply that to my personal EP outline: delete the Practice category. To the end of Ethics add these action statements (kind of a personal pharmakon?):

- Spend frequent time with like-minded friends
 - Maximize pleasure
 - Review desires
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Post by “Cassius” of December 23, 2018 at 3:24 PM

That's very interesting and I have two followups:

(1) so is there something about you that spurred your interest in Zen?

(2) If in your "practice" category you are looking in part for "what can I do every day to keep connected with Epicurean thinking and see myself as part of a community of like-minded people" then that is exactly one of the main questions before the house that we need to be working on in this forum.

And Godfrey, pat yourself on the back every time you think about the fact that you are not wasting as much time on Facebook as some of us are 😊 Here I am really going to work to keep the community discussions productive, and the ban hammer is going to fall more quickly here on people who are just so negative or pessimistic that they black pill the whole site.

And that's something that we will always deal with going forward. Epicurus is identified in common understanding as an "anesthesia" philosopher much like the Stoics, and so we are always going to draw a certain number of people who are so hurt (in many ways) that they just cannot see beyond the immediate need to escape pain. And while I want to do was much as we can for them, there is a natural limit to what can be done.

That's the reason for my posting [that Nietzsche quote today](#).

Post by “Godfrey” of December 23, 2018 at 5:00 PM

(1) My initial involvement with Zen was quite random: I was looking to learn meditation in a group setting so I could better navigate a stressful period of my life, and there happened to be a Zen group around the corner from my house. I'm a bit of a minimalist so the minimalist aspect of Zen appealed to me once I got involved.

(2) Exactly! 👍

Post by “Godfrey” of December 23, 2018 at 5:05 PM

I see what you mean with the Nietzsche post. "Natural limit" is a good way of putting it!

Post by “Hiram” of December 24, 2018 at 7:46 PM

I'd word it: - Prudence, honor and justice are prerequisites for A LIFE OF pleasure.

RE:

- Autonomy is achieved by living frugally, only desiring what is natural and what can be maintained by a source of income which provides an excess of pleasure over pain.

That is the most common way to live in autarchy, but there's no need to shun wealth or other goods, merely a need to understand the limits that nature sets for our desires. In other words, (there's a Vatican saying that says) there's also a limit to simple living where it doesn't lead to a life of pleasure.

On practice, my book includes a chapter on elaborating your personal hedonic regimen. I rely mainly on modern research and suggest exercise, laughter therapy (also known as laughter yoga), meditational practices that are known to increase levels of oxytocin and serotonin (feel good chemicals that the brain secretes), foods (cooking, eating, as well as entertaining friends)--particularly foods that act as mood boosters like yerba maté, kava, chocolate, durian, etc. Also connect with the tradition of the laughing philosophers and enjoy good comedies, I particularly like Ricky Gervais and George Carlin as laughing philosophers because they're funny AND insightful.

Post by “Godfrey” of December 25, 2018 at 5:21 PM

Hiram, "*Prudence, honor and justice are prerequisites for A LIFE OF pleasure*" nails it.

AS for autonomy/autarky, I agree with what you say. What I was trying to express is:

- To maintain autarky, enjoy all natural pleasures as long as you don't stress out over money. And do work that you love.

Or more formally:

- Autarky is achieved by avoiding unnatural desires and by living a life where acquisition and disposition of means lead to an excess of pleasure over pain.

To clarify a definition, is it correct that autarky refers specifically to economic self-sufficiency whereas autonomy is more general?

One thing that I'm finding quite interesting is that, after a lifetime of living the Protestant work ethic, it's an entirely different and surprisingly challenging mindset to focus on the goal of living pleurably. Among the items you list, I think that comedy and laughter can be particularly effective antidotes. In addition to focusing on like-minded friendships.

Your book was one of the first that I read (and enjoyed 👍) as I began to explore EP. I have to confess that I was reading and trying to absorb a lot at the time. Too much, actually. Now that I'm getting deeper into the philosophy and beginning to try to live it, it's definitely worth a second read.

Post by "Cassius" of December 25, 2018 at 7:06 PM

I am making this as a general "thinking out loud" comment and not to make any specific point, but when you write:

"enjoy all natural pleasures as long as you don't stress out over money..." and " Autarky is achieved by avoiding unnatural desires"

This reminds me again of what is said in "On Ends" that:

"One kind he classified as both natural and necessary, a second as natural without being necessary, and a third as neither natural nor necessary; the principle of classification being that the necessary desires are gratified with little trouble or expense; the natural desires also require but little, since nature's own riches, which suffice to content her, are both easily procured and limited in amount; but for the imaginary desires no bound or limit can be discovered."

This is of course Cicero talking hundreds of years later, but I continue to think that the emphasis should be on "the principle of classification being that the necessary desires are gratified with little trouble or expense; the natural desires also require but little....."

To me that makes perfect sense and is consistent with everything we know about the practical reasoning of Epicurus. But a problem I think occurs when we think that we can too easily know BEFOREHAND and "without context" what a "natural" or a "necessary" desire is. OK "necessary" would appear to be fairly reasonable, in that there are clear necessities of life like food and water and shelter. But even there, I see no bright line at where to stop. And what in the world does "unnatural" mean in terms of bright lines? We know that all pleasures are "good" because they are pleasing, but what is an "unnatural" pleasure?

To me, it seems the analysis must originally have focused on how easy or how hard a desire is to attain. Labeling something as "unnecessary" or "unnatural" outside of a particular context seems to me to be a perilous course tending toward formalistic rules which would violate the spirit of much of the rest of the philosophy. And in fact there is in my observation no reliable statement from Epicurus or Lucretius giving a list of what goes into what category. I understand there may be some notes in Diogenes Laertius or perhaps other places, but nothing that looks authoritative to me.

So my suspicion is that while the natural / necessary categorization may in fact originate with Epicurus, I don't see it working as an exception to the general rule of "What will happen to me if I make this choice or avoidance."

Godfrey all of this wasn't spurred just by your comment, this is a continuing subject that interests me and comes up frequently. It just seems to me that trying to classify things as unnatural or unnecessary is a lot less productive an exercise than some people want to make it appear.

Post by "Hiram" of December 26, 2018 at 9:36 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

To clarify a definition, is it correct that autarky refers specifically to economic self-sufficiency whereas autonomy is more general?

Autarchy IS (almost always translated as) self-sufficiency. Just as monarchy means rule of one, and oligarchy means rule of a few, autarchy is to rule oneself, personal sovereignty, which naturally implies self-sufficiency.

Post by “Godfrey” of December 26, 2018 at 2:02 PM

Cassius, when I'm reviewing a desire or considering a project I find it useful as a first step to think about whether the thing in question is something that could be considered an *"imaginary desire"* for which *"no bound or limit can be discovered."* After that I think about *"what will happen to me if I make this choice or avoidance."* So I like the distinction but only as it applies very subjectively and specifically. I also sometimes think of things in terms of being necessary for me in this instance, as well as a pleasurable embellishment for me in this particular instance. Then I consider the pain/pleasure cost/benefit of the embellishment.

An example is a pleasure/pain calculus for a home renovation/remodel. Some things need to be done, some things would be cool to do, and some things are just keeping up with the neighbors.

Post by “Cassius” of December 26, 2018 at 5:31 PM

That sounds like good reasoning to me Godfrey. Over time I'd like to devote some more time to thinking about "no bound or limit can be discovered." In regard to the total picture of pleasure as the guide, we DO have the limit as expressed in the full experience without any mixture of pain. I am sure that some desires are more easily categorized as without bound or limit than are others, but to some degree the general limit applies to all. Probably this is the kind of subject where discussing possibilities helps flesh out the real issues.