

Personal Finance from an Epicurean Viewpoint

Post by “Godfrey” of January 30, 2019 at 4:15 PM

This article showed up in my news feed this morning. It's written by a personal finance blogger who from time to time explores a particular school of philosophy and applies it to practical living and finances. Perhaps he over-emphasizes frugality, but he has a nice take on hedonic calculus (without using the term) and an interesting take on applying the overall philosophy.

<https://www.thesimpledollar.com/how-epicurean...financial-life/>

Post by “Cassius” of January 30, 2019 at 5:34 PM

(1) Thanks Godfrey! This is a subject that I'd like to correlate with the surviving material from Philodemus in his "Property Management" material.

(2) "Epicureanism nudges people toward the idea that the greatest happiness is found in pleasures that have a minimal cost associated with them." This is an excellent pithy sentence that I think distills the problem, and I think is not correct to all. First of all, is "happiness" something that has levels? Is one "happiness" greater than another "happiness," or is all "happiness" equal. Comparisons are usually reserved for "pleasures" in that some are more or less intense, or more or less long-lasting. I don't think Epicurus ever talks in terms of "the greatest happiness.

(3) But to go further, when Epicurus talks of greater or lesser pleasures, he rarely if ever gives a description of the feeling itself- he says that we know pleasure and pain by feeling, not by explaining or justifying. And in that sense (which I think DeWitt discusses under the topic of "fullness of pleasure" -- pleasure is pretty much pleasure, differing mainly in intensity or length. And Epicurus rarely if ever gives a list of "pleasures" and says that A is better than B is better than C. Epicurus measures the hedonic calculus in pleasure vs pain, and all types of mental and physical pains are included within them. So the entire picture comes down to the issue of not that some pleasures are better than others, but simply that some pleasures bring with them more or less cost in terms of pain.

(4) If we were rewriting that sentence more accurately according to Epicurus, it would be something like "Epicurus nudges people toward the idea that the best way to fill our experience

with pleasure is to choose pleasurable activities in light of the amount of pain that they bring with them." And in some cases it makes sense to sit on your sofa and drink water and eat bread, and in some cases it makes sense to build a house, make a generator, build a computer, and sign onto the internet to discuss philosophy with friends. There's nothing "simplest" or "minimal cost" to the latter choice, but if your anxieties come from fear of death or fear of gods or from a myriad of other problems, then your best result will come from the exertion involved in joining modern civilization, rather than live in a cave on bread and water.

And so there I've made my standard reservation. Having said that I certainly agree with, and try to practice many, of the observations he has made. And surely there are people who need those observations. But still.... why do I have this sense that so much is lost when we reduce Epicurus to "simplicity" 😊

Is this the Epicurean theme song? Appealing, but I don't think so --

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CLAnuG1340g>

Post by "Godfrey" of January 31, 2019 at 1:33 AM

Wow, that video is hysterical and a little scary! 😂😱

Cassius, I appreciate and agree with your comments. The article is definitely not a "deep dive" into EP, but it's a nice starting point for some practical applications of the philosophy. It would be really interesting to see a discussion of Property Management regarding this subject.

Which reminds me of a two-part piece Hiram wrote which I need to read. Here's the link to part 1:

<http://societyofepicurus.com/on-philodemus-...agement-part-i/>

Post by "Cassius" of January 31, 2019 at 9:06 AM

That video does have a little of an "Omen" or "Tubular Bells" quality doesn't it? 😊

Yes, as to Hiram's article, I need to spend more time with those fragments. Hiram tends to give his presentations without as many footnotes as I like to use, especially when texts are

fragmentary. When I check to see how fragmentary many of these are, I find it hazardous to put too much stock in what is left. It seems to me that in many cases we don't know if what is left is being characterized as the Epicurean position, or is in fact them citing the opposing view before refuting it. My best example of that is the Delacey work on "On Methods of Inference" which starts out with a long passage from a non-Epicurean source, and seems to flip back and forth. If you don't already have a view on what to expect the Epicurean position to be, then it is very hard to tell who is saying what. But if you start out with your own presumptions, then there's no check on your accuracy. At any rate it's still worth doing, but hazardous I think.

Post by "Matt" of February 1, 2019 at 5:44 AM

Children of the Corn Part IV.

Post by "Cassius" of February 1, 2019 at 7:45 AM

I'm a little surprised to hear you say that, LD. When I posted it I was really thinking only of the "simplicity" message, but it's true that there probably is an "Omen" feel to it. The whole Amish/Mennonite phenomena is kind of weird to me, but in a way I can't quite put my finger on.

Post by "Matt" of February 1, 2019 at 4:03 PM

Haha! Why were you surprised?

The message of simplicity is valid. But the delivery is overtly Bizarre.

Post by "Matt" of February 1, 2019 at 5:18 PM

Yeah the Amish, like some other communal groups like the Orthodox Jewish folks, dress in an archaic European fashion.

To the modern eye it just appears out of the ordinary and out of step with progress. Like we stepped back into the 19th century. It's all to preserve a cultural identity.

Also, we tend to associate that style with more "cultish" behavior like the various species of LDS Mormonites.

I too am guilty of having this POV, but make no concession that it appears normal nor will I change my opinion that this style will forever remind me of Isaac's cult from Children of the Corn. ?

Post by "Matt" of February 1, 2019 at 5:19 PM

<https://goo.gl/images/CvuivB>

Post by "Cassius" of February 2, 2019 at 10:08 AM

I have to confess I have never seen "Children of the Corn." Worth watching??

Post by "Matt" of February 2, 2019 at 10:16 AM

So yes and no. I like it, but I recognize it has some flaws and it has not aged well. Plus, Stephen King's books rarely translate well to the screen. This one is more of a cult classic. There are some pretty lame special FX at the very end. But the first part of the movie is somewhat entertaining.

Since they are remaking "Pet Semetary" maybe they will do a remake of this one.

Post by "Hiram" of February 4, 2019 at 3:35 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/708-personal-finance-from-an-epicurean-viewpoint/>

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Yes, as to Hiram's article, I need to spend more time with those fragments. Hiram tends to give his presentations without as many footnotes as I like to use, especially when texts are fragmentary. When I check to see how fragmentary many of these are, I find it hazardous to put too much stock in what is left. It seems to me that in many cases we don't know if what is left is being characterized as the Epicurean position, or is in fact them citing the opposing view before refuting it. ...

Just as important as the content of those scrolls--or perhaps MORE--is what would those conversations look like TODAY, and that should be the point of studying these scrolls.

For instance, there is no slavery today, so living off the labor of others is not doable today. Also, many of the professions discussed in the scroll no longer exist or have relevance: equestrian? miner? Very few people make a living like they did in antiquity. The only two ones that translate today are making money from teaching philosophy (if you're extremely lucky) and living off rental property income.

So the more important question today is what would be today's "natural measure of wealth" in OUR society, what are the noble professions or ways to earn a living today, etc. We don't have to study philosophy like an exercise in the study of a history of itself. We can do philosophy by making it relevant at every point ... and (considering the recent economic crisis of 2008 and the upcoming automation of labor) the teachings on autarchy are probably one of the most gratifying and important aspects of EP and one of the most neglected!

I'm personally gonna write a bit more on Epicurean economics this year, but I really think we should give up the fossilized approach to EP and get used to thinking for ourselves critically about the details of our economic doctrines, which are absolutely relevant and useful, and even necessary, today. They're not museum pieces.

"We should at once philosophize, laugh, and take care of our economics" - Epicurus

Post by "Cassius" of February 4, 2019 at 4:27 PM

"For instance, there is no slavery today, so living off the labor of others is not doable today." < Not doable as directly as slavery, but the way capitalism works (especially as to "interest") sometimes it's hard to tell the difference.

Post by "Hiram" of February 5, 2019 at 10:02 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

"For instance, there is no slavery today, so living off the labor of others is not doable today." < Not doable as directly as slavery, but the way capitalism works (especially as to "interest") sometimes it's hard to tell the difference.

True. And so we can say that avoidance of (excessive, unnecessary) debt is then an important component of autarchy today.