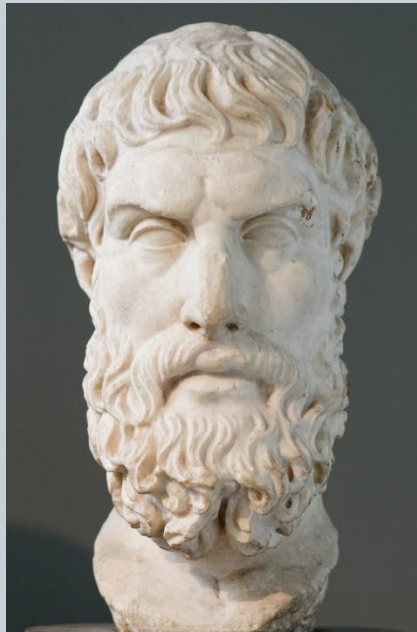


Epicureanism





- Epicureanism is often associated with the idea of maximizing pleasure.
- Pleasure is at the heart of Epicurean philosophy, but it isn't the pleasure that is commonly thought of by most people.
- Epicurean pleasure is measured, balanced, lacking in extremes.
- The Epicureans were very much aware that any extreme (even extreme pleasure) will lead to imbalance and a lack of pleasure.
- And a lack of pleasure is really a form of pain.
- But I'm getting ahead of myself...let's start at the beginning.



- Epicurus (341–270 BCE) was a Hellenistic Greek moral philosopher who identified the goal of life as happiness.
- The study of science was an essential but subsidiary component of his all-encompassing system, which attracted Greek and Roman practitioners for centuries.
- The main source for the biography of Epicurus is Diogenes Laertius' *Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers*.
- He was born on the Greek island of Samos to Athenian parents who later moved to Kolophon in Asia Minor.



- Was taught the atomic theory proposed by Democritus, purportedly by Nausiphanes.
- Around 306, he acquired in Athens a house with a garden (kepos) that gave its name to a community of friends, and then to the philosophical school in general.
- Diogenes Laertius also records Epicurus' will, which passes leadership of the Garden on to Hermarchos, and gives instructions for Epicurean communal gatherings.

Epicurean Dualism



- Let's begin by considering Epicurean metaphysics.
- Metaphysics = Study and concern with the nature of things that exist. The essential question in metaphysics – what is the nature of reality?
- For the Epicureans reality consisted of two things:
 - Matter
 - Void



- Matter is made up of atoms, which are tiny bodies that have only the unchanging qualities of **shape, size, and weight**.
- Atoms = concept inherited from the Atomists...Democritus & Leucippus
- Comes from the Greek “atomos” which means uncuttable.
- So for the Atomists matter is reducible to discrete, small particles or atomos.



- The Epicureans took up the Atomist view.
- The universe is dualistic – it is made up of an infinite supply of atoms and an infinite amount of void.
- Epicurus says this about the concept:
- *Moreover, the sum of things is unlimited both by reason of the multitude of the atoms and the extent of the void. For if the void were infinite and bodies finite, the bodies would not have stayed anywhere but would have been dispersed in their course through the infinite void, not having any supports or counterchecks to send them back on their upward rebound. Again, if the void were finite, the infinity of bodies would not have anywhere to be.*



- According to Epicurus atoms can join with each other to form larger objects...when atoms join together they still maintain the ability to “vibrate”.
- This vibration allow objects to change, while at the same time maintaining the basic shape.
- This may explain how the human body changes over time and yet is the same body.



- Another very important concept is the notion of “swerve”
- Atoms move in a determined/causal fashion...they are bound by causal principles.
- However, atoms at times randomly swerve out of their usual determined paths...
- The swerving motion of atoms is what accounts for human free will. If it wasn't for atomic “swerve” human beings would be completely determined and at the mercy of a never-ending chain of cause and effect.

Epicurean Epistemology



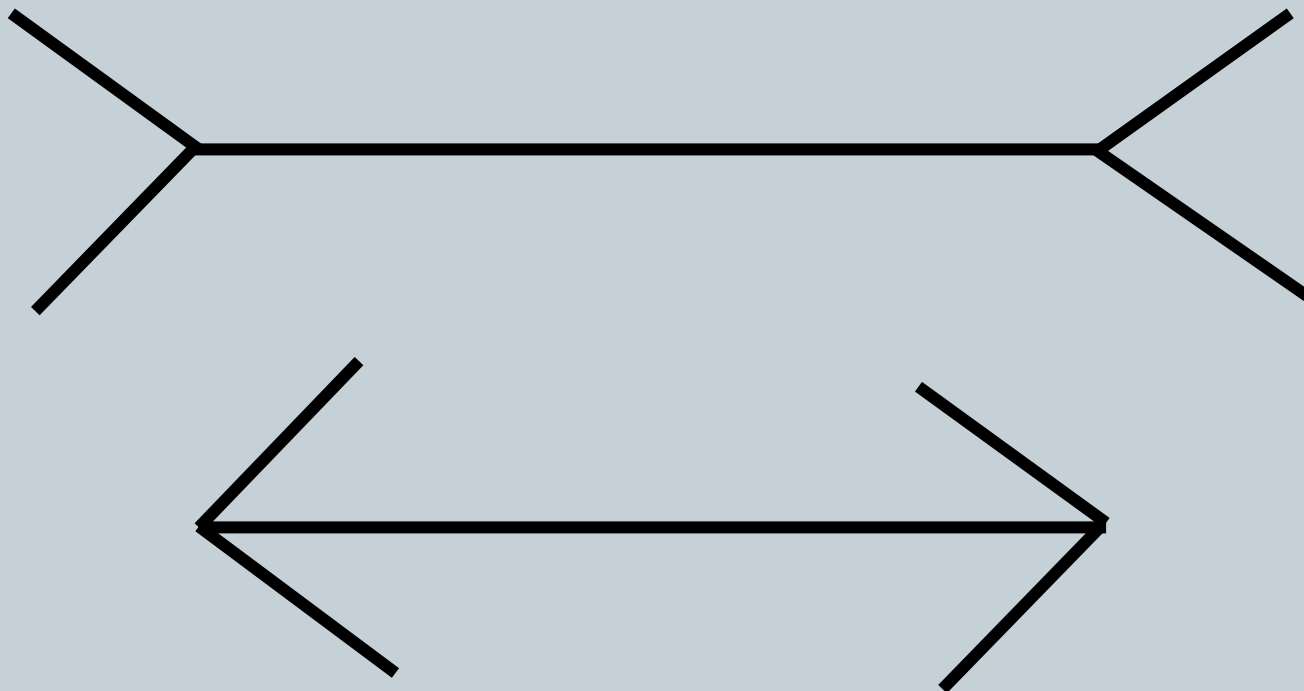
- So from all this, it's clear that Epicureanism is founded on materialistic principles.
- Epistemologically Epicureans are materialists -- Empiricists
- This means that “true knowledge” can only come from sense perception.
- The Epicureans were completely intent on removing any kind of Platonic transcendence as a means to knowledge.
- In other words, the Platonic forms are anathema to the Epicureans.



- Incorporeal Platonic forms lead to many problems – for example the problem of corporeal/incorporeal interaction.
- Also the problem of Chorismos (separation). How do the intelligible forms interact with the sensually perceptible world given that they are separated and completely different from one another?
- For the Epicureans only sense perception is true -- in fact, **all** sense perception is true!
- Problems arise from the way we judge sense perception. For example...



- Since Epicurans thought that sense perception could not deceive, they argued that all truth must start with perception...
- There are times when perception does seem to deceive...for example a straight oar looks bent in water...
- The Epicurans argue that the atoms of the water shifted the image of the oar and that in fact we do see it as bent. We are not being deceived by our perception...
- The problem lies in the fact that sometimes we err in assuming that the image correctly represents the oar – we neglect to see that the image of the oar (as it hits our eyes) has shifted.
- Here's another example that I often used with my students:







- In order to obtain what the Epicurans called “clear vision” (enargeia) of the perceived object one has to employ principles of “closer examination”.
- The notion of “enargeia” (**vividness, clarity, detail**) is closely related to the idea of evidence...being able to see that which is not seen (seeing the unseeable).
- I would suggest that this is very closely related to the modern scientific method.

Practical Philosophy



- Given the fact that all reality is material...including the soul...(the soul says Epicurus is a type of atom that is spread throughout the body of living things. Things without soul atoms are inanimate).
- And that all material objects come into existence (by way of atoms uniting) for a time, but eventually ceasing to be...
- And since the soul is made of atoms it cannot survive the death of the body.
- Therefore there is no punishment after death, nor does it make any sense to lament or regret death.



- The notion of death is nonsensical – it represents incorrect thinking that arises from language. Because language has a name for death it suggests that death and being dead is something that a person can experience and so deserves to be feared.
- But there is no death – just non-existence which is the destiny of all things, including ourselves.
- Because of this inescapable fact, say the Epicureans, we should make the best of the only life we have.
- So what is “the best” life?
- The best life is achieving the good...and the good is **being happy**.
- Happiness is achieved through pleasure.



- So we ought to live in such a way as to derive the greatest amount of pleasure possible through our lifetime.
- But the Epicurean notion of pleasure needs to be understood...
- It is a very different notion from the one commonly understood.
- Epicurean pleasure is very much tied to the Aristotelian concept of the “Golden Mean”.
- For Aristotle, the mean is a balance between two extremes – at one end is excess, at the other deficiency.
- Aristotle used the idea to **measure moral action**. So moral behavior is the mean between two extremes.
- The Epicureans use it to **measure a balanced and well-lived life**.

Epicurean Pleasures



- So the purpose of life (its Telos or end) is to maximize pleasure and avoid pain.
- Epicurus advocated living in such a way as to derive the greatest amount of pleasure possible during one's lifetime, yet doing so moderately in order to avoid the suffering incurred by overindulgence in such pleasure.
- He argued that since it is an innate part of human existence to avoid pain and seek pleasure we need to develop an understanding of what constitutes pleasure and what constitutes pain.



- It is not inconceivable that we may make errors in judgement and seek out the wrong things, believing mistakenly that they will lead to pleasure.
- Epicureanism divided pleasure into two broad categories:
 - Pleasures of the body
 - Pleasures of the mind



Pleasures of the Body

- Pleasures involving sensations of the body
- Act of eating a delicious food or of being in a state of comfort free from pain.
- Existing only in the present
- One can only experience pleasures of the body **in the moment**, meaning they only exist as a person is experiencing them.

Pleasures of the Mind

- Pleasures involving mental processes and states
- Feelings of joy, the lack of fear, pleasant memories
- Pleasures of the mind do not only exist in the present, but also in the past and future, since memory of a past pleasant experience or the expectation of some potentially pleasing future can both be pleasurable experiences.

Because mind pleasures can encompass **past, present, and future**, they are considered to be greater than those of the body.



- The greatest pleasure a person could reach was the complete removal of all pain, both physical and mental.
- In order to do this a person had to learn to control his/her desires, because desire itself was seen as painful.
- Epicureanism distinguishes three types of desire...



Natural & Necessary	Natural but Not Necessary	Not Natural & Not Necessary
<p>These desires are limited desires that are innately present in all humans.</p> <p>They are necessary for one of three reasons:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. necessary for happiness.2. necessary for freedom from bodily discomfort.3. necessary for life. <p>Clothing would belong to the first two categories.</p> <p>Food would belong to the third.</p>	<p>These desires are innate to humans, but they do not need to be fulfilled for their happiness or their survival.</p> <p>Wanting to eat delicious food when one is hungry is an example of a natural but not necessary desire.</p> <p>They fail to substantially increase a person's happiness, and at the same time require effort to obtain and are desired by people due to false beliefs that they are actually necessary.</p> <p>For this reason they should be avoided.</p>	<p>These desires are neither innate to humans nor required for happiness or health.</p> <p>They are also limitless and can never be fulfilled.</p> <p>Desires of wealth or fame would fall under this category, and such desires are to be avoided because they will ultimately only bring about discomfort.</p>



- If one follows only **natural and necessary** desires, then, according to Epicurus, one would be able to reach the highest form of happiness.
- Philodemus of Gadara's basic guideline:
 - Don't fear god,
 - Don't worry about death;
 - What is good is easy to get, and
 - What is terrible is easy to endure.

Interesting Epicurean Ideas



- Argument against the existence of God:
- *God either wants to eliminate bad things and cannot, or can but does not want to, or neither wishes to nor can, or both wants to and can. If he wants to and cannot, then he is weak – and this does not apply to God. If he can but does not want to, then he is spiteful – which is equally foreign to god's nature. If he neither wants to nor can, he is both weak and spiteful, and so not a god. If he wants to and can, which is the only thing fitting for a god, where then do bad things come from? Or why does he not eliminate them?*
- — Lactantius, De Ira Deorum



- Epicurus on sex:
- *I learn that your bodily inclination leans most keenly towards sexual intercourse. If you neither violate the laws nor disturb well established morals nor sadden someone close to you, nor strain your body, nor spend what is needed for necessities, use your own choice as you wish. It is sure difficult to imagine, however, that none of these would be a part of sex because sex never benefitted anyone.*
- — Epicurus



- On Friendship:
- *Of all the things which wisdom has contrived which contribute to a blessed life, none is more important, more fruitful, than friendship.*
- — quoted by Cicero



- Epicurus on Pleasure:
- *When we say ... that pleasure is the end and aim, we do not mean the pleasures of the prodigal (spending money/resources recklessly) or the pleasures of sensuality, as we are understood to do by some through ignorance, prejudice or wilful misrepresentation. By pleasure we mean **the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul**. It is not by an unbroken succession of drinking bouts and of revelry, not by sexual lust, nor the enjoyment of fish and other delicacies of a luxurious table, which produce a pleasant life; it is sober reasoning, searching out the grounds of every choice and avoidance, and banishing those beliefs through which the greatest tumults take possession of the soul.*
- — Epicurus



- *The life of pain and the life of pleasure both end in death, so which would you rather spend your limited time experiencing?*
- Ben Gazur (The Mantle)...*Why Epicurus Matters Today*

Quotes For Discussion



Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not; remember that what you now have was once among the things you only hoped for.



Death, therefore, the most awful of evils, is nothing to us, seeing that, when we are, death is not come, and, when death is come, we are not.



He who is not satisfied with a little, is satisfied with nothing .



Of all the means to insure happiness throughout the whole life, by far the most important is the acquisition of friends.



The wealth required by nature is limited and is easy to procure; but the wealth required by vain ideals extends to infinity.



Not what we have But what we enjoy, constitutes our
abundance.



He who says either that the time for philosophy has not yet come or that it has passed is like someone who says that the time for happiness has not yet come or that it has passed.



The art of living well and the art of dying well are one.



Empty is the argument of the philosopher which does not relieve any human suffering.