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EPICUREAN PHILOSOPHY AND ITS PARTS

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The Epicureans hold distinctive views that sometimes sound strikingly modern. In physics, for example, they say that only atoms and void exist *per se*, that objects of different weights fall through void at the same rate, and that vision is caused by atoms flowing from visible objects into the eye. They reject Platonic definition and Stoic deduction as useless and replace these logical systems with "canonic," in which they argue that perception and feeling are infallible and that we must form and assess all our beliefs by reference to those standards alone. In ethics, they defend hedonism, insist that virtue is valuable only for the sake of pleasure, and argue that justice is merely a useful system of social conventions.

Epicurus founded this system in the third century BCE and gathered around him like-minded friends, most notably Metrodorus and Hermarchus. Several complete works by Epicurus are preserved by Diogenes Laertius, a third-century CE historian of philosophy who may have had Epicurean leanings. A Vatican manuscript preserves many sayings, and some papyrus fragments also survive. Later Epicurean writings include *On the Nature of Things*, by the first-century BCE poet Lucretius; extended papyrus remains of Lucretius' near-contemporary Philodemus, preserved by the eruption of Vesuvius; and a stone inscription in present-day Turkey that Diogenes of Oenoanda commissioned in the third century CE. We also have summaries and quotations from non-Epicureans—often hostile ones such as Cicero (first century BCE Academic skeptic), Plutarch (first–second century CE Platonist), and Sextus Empiricus (third century CE Pyrrhonist skeptic). Epicureanism did change over time and produced some internal disagreements (e.g., Cicero *De Fin.* I.29–31, 65–70), but this to a relatively small degree. Initial accounts of Epicurean philosophy can thus draw freely on all members of the tradition, across many centuries.[1]

The Epicureans conceive of philosophy as utterly practical. I start by exploring this feature of the system. Next, I turn to the parts of philosophy (canonic, physics, and ethics), what they study, and their usefulness. It seems easy to see how ethics has practical value, but harder for the other parts, especially physics. Scholars have a standard view of why the Epicureans study physics: to remove fear of the gods and fear of death. However, this account produces puzzles. The puzzles can be resolved by noting two additional benefits of physics ignored by the standard account. First, physics replaces our unstable, troubling beliefs with stable, calm beliefs. Second, physics helps to grasp ethical kinds such as pleasure, pain, and desire, and places these within a causal scheme that aids in removing trouble and achieving tranquility. Appreciating these points gives a fuller picture of how the parts of Epicurean philosophy work together to benefit us.

Epicurean Philosophy

Epicurus calls philosophy "an activity which by arguments and discussions brings about the good life" (*M* XI.169). More particularly, philosophy is therapeutic; it brings about the good life by curing the soul and making it healthy (*Ep. Men.* 122).[2] Indeed, just as the *only* point of medicine is curing the body, so the *only* point of philosophy is curing the soul (Porphyry, *To Marcella* 31). Thus, true philosophy cannot be a detached pursuit, but must be put into practice—again, just like medicine (*SV* 54). Since having a healthy soul and living well are the most important aims for everyone, Epicurus exhorts us to philosophize constantly: at every stage of life (*Ep. Men*. 122), every day and night (*Ep. Men*. 135), and along with all other activities: "one must philosophize and at the same time laugh and take care of one's household and use the rest of our personal goods, and never stop proclaiming the utterances of true philosophy" (*SV* 41). This constant practice of philosophy requires social support in the form of communal friendship—in Epicurus' generation, the Garden outside Athens. In sum, Epicurean philosophy is a way of life, not a mere intellectual pastime.[3]

The value of philosophy is purely instrumental: philosophy *produces* a healthy soul, and thereby happiness (*M* XI.169; *Ep. Men*. 122). Some doubt this because of a single passage: "in other activities, the rewards come only when people have become, with great difficulty, complete [masters of the activity]; but in philosophy the pleasure accompanies the knowledge. For the enjoyment does not come after the learning but the learning and the enjoyment are simultaneous" (*SV* 27).[4] We often say that causes precede their effects. On that view, if philosophical learning is simultaneous with enjoyment, their relationship cannot be causal. But Diogenes of Oenoanda rejects this view of causes. He rebukes those who say that virtue constitutes happiness rather than producing it (fr. 32). To that end, he distinguishes antecedent from simultaneous causes: surgery causes simultaneous pain, but brings about future pleasure by curing us. So, surgery is an antecedent cause of pleasure. Eating, by contrast, is simultaneous with the pleasure of eating, and virtue is simultaneous with the pleasures of virtue (fr. 33). On the Epicurean view, then, philosophy produces a healthy soul, which in turn produces pleasure. But there is no delay between philosophical learning, improved psychological health, and pleasure. Thus, philosophy has purely instrumental value, even though philosophical learning causes pleasure simultaneously.[5]

Epicurus gives an especially bold statement of philosophy's practical value by saying that "prudence is a more valuable thing than philosophy" (*Ep. Men*. 132). To understand this claim, we must look at its context. Epicurus has just explained that pleasure is the good, and that living pleasantly comes not from drinking and debauchery but from "sober calculation." Prudence is the origin [*archê*] of calculation, and calculation performs two tasks: it finds reasons [*aitias*] for every choice and avoidance (i.e., every decision) and it removes troubling opinions. At this point Epicurus declares prudence [*phronêsis*] the greatest good, more valuable [*timiôteron*] than philosophy. He then offers another reason for this claim: prudence is the source of other virtues, and it teaches that living prudently, honorably, and justly is both necessary and sufficient for living pleasantly.

Epicurus thus describes the value of prudence twice: i) by calculating, it produces good decisions and drives out empty opinions; ii) it produces other virtues and clarifies both their value and its own. But these are two descriptions of the same tasks. Prudence is valuable because it helps us to make good decisions. The other virtues are valuable because they are conditions of the soul free from empty, troubling opinions. For example, courage requires freedom from the troubling beliefs that death is fearful and that one must always avoid immediate pain (*De Fin*. I.49).[6] Philosophy enters the picture here, since it produces a

healthy—i.e., virtuous—soul. In other words, prudence identifies virtue as a valuable aim, and philosophy provides the tools necessary to achieve that aim. Since prudence discovers the value of virtue and philosophy is a tool to achieving virtue, prudence has greater value.

This account seems right, but it leaves behind two puzzles. First, prudence teaches us about itself: that living prudently is both necessary and sufficient for living pleasantly. If prudence is needed to grasp the value of prudence, we cannot see the point of cultivating prudence until we are already prudent. This could explain why the sage maintains her prudence, but not how anyone ever becomes prudent. Second, and relatedly, prudence as described seems to come from philosophy. As we shall see, the ethical part of philosophy studies decisions. This study is useful only if it improves our decisions. But if prudence is excellence at decision-making, and philosophy makes us excellent at decision-making, then prudence derives from philosophy, rather than being the origin or principle [*archê*] that leads us to philosophy.[7]

Both problems can be solved if prudence comes in degrees. We make many good decisions without philosophy. For example, we store food for the winter without any need for sophisticated reasoning. Our experience of acting prudently reveals its connection to pleasure. Among the lessons of prudence, then, is that prudence is necessary for living pleasantly. Thus, just as prudence identifies the health of the soul as a desirable aim, and philosophy as the tool that produces the healthy soul by removing troubling opinions, so prudence identifies its own further development as a desirable aim, and philosophy as the tool that enables it to perfect itself, by studying choice and avoidance systematically.

The Parts of Epicurean Philosophy

The Epicurean claim that philosophy must be useful has real implications for what they count as philosophy. Again, they reject formal logic as useless, and they likewise reject mathematics. For just the same reason, they scorn traditional education (*paideia*—probably including rhetoric and literary theory). Their practical conception of philosophy has teeth, then; it provides a touchstone for rejecting both standard educational practices and other conceptions of philosophy such as Platonism and Stoicism.

Ultimately, the Epicureans accept three parts of philosophy: canonic, physics, and ethics. Diogenes Laertius describes these parts twice, probably drawing on two sources (DL X.30). Briefly, canonic concerns the system's procedures, or its fundamental standards and principles of inquiry. (For example, part of canonic concerns the infallibility of perception and how we should form and assess beliefs by reference to perception.) Ethics studies the end, decisions, and lives. Physics covers the entire theory of nature, including processes of generation and corruption. Epicurus wrote works that reflect each of these topics: a single work on canonic (the *Canon*), 37 books *On Nature*, and three separate works on the end, choices and avoidances, and lives (DL X.27–28).

A small complication arises here: the Epicureans often present canonic within their works on physics, leading some in antiquity to deny that they recognize it as a separate part. However, both sources that discuss the matter say that the Epicureans recognize three parts (*M* VII.14–15, 22; DL X.30). Further, Epicurus seems to distinguish three parts at the end of his *Letter to Pythocles*. He there urges Pythocles to study "the basic principles and the unlimited and things akin to those, and further … the criteria and the feelings, and that for the sake of which we reason these things out" (116). "The basic principles and the unlimited and things akin to these" are atoms and void and physics more generally. "The criteria" are a central topic of canonic. "The feelings" are ethical criteria, so this topic links canonic and ethics. "That for the sake of which we reason these things out" is the end, a central

topic in ethics. Notably, Epicurus urges Pythocles to "study these together," implying that in practice, study of the parts of philosophy is integrated.

We have seen that the Epicureans insist on a practical and therapeutic conception of philosophy, and that this conception of philosophy actually leads them to reject certain inquiries as useless. So, we should expect that each part of philosophy will be practically and therapeutically useful. This is confirmed by Philodemus, who says that all three parts contribute to choices and avoidances (*De Elect.* XIII):

> Above all, he [Epicurus] establishes the principles of philosophy, by which alone it is possible to act rightly. And it is clear that he also establishes the congenital ends, which yield the most conspicuous evidence and by which the calculations concerning choices and avoidances are performed. Besides, one must unfailingly draw the ethical arguments regarding both choices and avoidances entirely from the study of nature in order that they should be complete—if nothing else, the principle that nothing is produced without a cause and that … does not change.[8]

As we have seen, canonic studies principles, ethics studies ends, and physics studies nature. Philodemus lists these same three parts and tells us that each contributes to choices and avoidances. (Note too that this further confirms the tripartite division of philosophy.)

It is perhaps easiest to see how ethics contributes directly to the practical aims of philosophy. For it studies the end—what we are ultimately trying to achieve in life—and how our particular decisions and general ways of living help to realize or frustrate that end. Strikingly, though, Philodemus insists that all parts of philosophy contribute to decisions. But it is obscure how the study of nature guides our actions. Why must Epicureans study physics at all, rather than limiting their inquiries to matters of obvious practical concern?

Epicurus clearly does think physics is useful. Each surviving letter on physics opens by saying that it is useful for both beginners and advanced students (*Ep. Hdt.* 35–37; *Ep. Pyth.* 84–85), and each closes with the same claim (*Ep. Hdt.* 83; *Ep. Pyth.* 116–117). As he advocates constant philosophical activity, so too Epicurus recommends constant activity in physics (*Ep. Hdt.* 36, 37). Physics, he claims, makes us calm, blessed, tranquil, and untroubled (*Ep. Hdt.* 37, 78; *Ep. Pyth.* 84, 85, 87). Scholars often say that physics promotes this end in two ways: it helps to remove fear of the gods and fear of death. Call this the "two-aims" view.[9] I start by sketching these two aims and how physics helps to achieve them. As we shall see, it is doubtful that these are the only two reasons why the Epicureans study physics.

One of our main sources of trouble is fear of the gods. This fear involves thinking of the gods as feeling gratitude and anger and so as wanting to reward or punish those who please or pain them. It also involves thinking of them as active in the world—for example, as causing eclipses, lightning, and so on. Such events are readily seen as results of divine favor or disfavor; when an earthquake destroys a house, its owners may wonder how they angered the gods. Epicurean philosophy removes fear of the gods in two ways. First, it draws on our basic concept of the gods as blessed and immortal to argue that the gods feel no anger or gratitude, and more generally never have reason to act in the world. Second, much of Epicurean physics explains natural phenomena without reference to divine action. Thus, the study of physics contributes to removing superstitious fear of the gods.

Another major source of trouble is fear of death.[10] Epicureans aim to remove fear of death through two sorts of arguments as well. First, they argue that the soul is mortal and that death is the end for us. On its own, this addresses one sort of fear of death connected to fear of the gods: fear of post-mortem punishment. Second, since death is the end for us,

they argue that death is not fearful—whoever does not exist cannot be harmed. The former arguments seem physical, and the latter ethical. Other physical arguments also help to remove fear of death; for example, to believe firmly that we do not survive death, we must explain how we dream of the dead, though they do not exist (*DRN* IV.26–41, 722–748).

The Epicureans certainly study physics for those two reasons, but it is unlikely that they are the only two reasons. One problem for the two-aims view is the sheer amount of physics the Epicureans do. Epicurus wrote 37 books *On Nature*. Lucretius' poem is almost entirely on physics, with occasional allusions to or comments on other parts of philosophy. It is unclear how believing that objects of different weights fall through a void at the same speed—or, to take another example, that magnetism is explicable as a function of atomic collisions (*DRN* VI.906–1089)—helps to remove our fear of the gods or of death. Another problem for the two-aims view lies in Epicurus' intense devotion to the study of nature. He says not only that physics is useful; but even that "with this sort of activity more than any other I bring calm to my life" (*Ep. Hdt*. 37). Finally, the two-aims view makes it mysterious why the Epicureans want or need true theories. Removing fear of the gods and death only seems to require believing accounts of the world on which the gods are inactive and death destroys us. It is unclear why these accounts must also be accurate ones.[11]

At the same time, Epicurus does place some limits on physical inquiry. The *Letter to Pythocles* concerns special topics in physics—those in which multiple explanations for the phenomena are empirically adequate.[12] There are not multiple adequate accounts in ethics or many physical topics, such as the division of reality into body and void or the claim that the elements of body are atoms (86). Where there are multiple accounts, achieving calm does not require narrowing these down, and striving to identify a unique cause itself causes trouble (*Ep. Hdt*. 79–80, *Ep. Pyth*. 85–87). Likewise, ability to predict meteorological phenomena fails to make us happy, and having such an ability without knowledge of the heavenly bodies—especially that they are not gods—itself causes trouble (*Ep. Hdt*. 79). Even as we try to explain why the Epicureans study physics so much and with such fervor, we must also explain why they place these limits on the study of physics, but not others.[13]

Physics and Stable Belief

Epicurus offers a third aim for physics in the *Letter to Herodotus*. Late in that letter, he sketches topics discussed more fully in the *Letter to Pythocles*: meteorological phenomena, multiple explanations, and how such knowledge bears on blessedness (76–80). During this discussion, he says that we must avoid opinions inconsistent with the concept of the gods, or else "the inconsistency itself [*autê hê hupenantiotês*] will produce the greatest disturbance in our souls" (77). Of course, falsely thinking that the gods are irascible and interventionist may lead us to fear an earthquake at their hands (for example). However, the concern here is not with downstream effects of false beliefs about the gods, but with the immediate conflict between false beliefs and the basic concept of the gods as blessed and immortal. That conflict all by itself causes psychological disturbance; removing such conflict and disturbance is thus another crucial aim of physics.

This is confirmed immediately, when Epicurus lists four sources of trouble (81–82). The first two are i) assigning inconsistent attributes to the gods (blessedness but also desire and action), especially as this stems from believing that the heavenly bodies are gods, and ii) expectation of eternal terror, of the sort described in myths. One might read this as saying that false beliefs about the gods make us fear their anger and seek their gratitude i) during life and ii) in the afterlife. But in fact, Epicurus distinguishes i) trouble caused directly by a conflict among attitudes from ii) trouble caused downstream by the

false beliefs involved in that conflict.[14] Physics removes trouble of both sorts. It shows that the gods do not care about us and our actions, and so removes the resulting fear of what they may do to us, and the desire to seek their favor and avoid their anger. But physics also removes conflicts among our attitudes that trouble us directly, leaving us with firm opinions. Hence, Epicurus claims that physics aims at "peace of mind and firm conviction [*pistin bebaion*]" (*Ep. Pyth*. 85).

This point is also confirmed in Cicero, *On Ends*. Torquatus there lists five aims of physics, explores the first at length, and concludes with another list of the same five aims.[15] The fourth aim is ensuring that "we are not thrown into confusion by ignorance and by the chilling fear that often results from ignorance alone [*ipsa*]" (I.63). When Torquatus returns to the fourth aim, he says physics "provides peace of mind, by lifting the veil of ignorance from the secrets of the universe" (I.64). This could mean (for example) that someone who does not understand the causes of earthquakes fears them, not because they think the gods cause them, but because they cannot identify any cause at all.[16] On this reading, ignorance is mere lack of an explanation, and the trouble it causes is just fear of inexplicable external phenomena. Comparison with the *Letter to Herodotus* suggests a different view: ignorance is internal conflict, and this conflict causes trouble *directly*, as distinct from trouble due to the fears that can *result from* false beliefs.

This reading may seem to give inquiry and removal of ignorance final value, which would conflict with the claim that philosophy and its parts have purely instrumental value. However, it does not. Epicurus distinguishes troubles caused directly and immediately by a joint conflict among attitudes from troubles caused indirectly by the false beliefs involved in that conflict, in a way mediated by other attitudes and experiences. Admitting direct, immediate harms of ignorance does not entail that knowledge is good for its own sake. In both cases, ignorance harms us by causing pain—in the first case directly, and in the second case indirectly. Torquatus makes the same distinction for other vices (*De Fin*. I.44, 50, 58). Vice harms us directly—it causes immediate pain, simply by its presence in the soul. But vice also harms us indirectly—it causes pain in a way mediated by other experiences and attitudes, e.g., fear of punishment for unjust acts.[17] These are two ways that vice *causes* pain, so the direct harms of vice are not *constituted* by vice itself. Likewise, ignorance causes pain both directly and indirectly, but both sorts of pain are *results* of ignorance.

This reason for studying physics explains both why the Epicureans study so much physics and why they deem physical inquiry and contemplation so valuable. It also coheres with the claim that we should not pursue literary theory, for example. We need not form any opinions about literary theory, so any trouble that might arise from inconsistent beliefs about literature can be removed by not holding opinions. In contrast, we cannot suspend judgment about how the natural world works. Thus, removing inconsistent beliefs that cause trouble requires that we study nature. This account also explains why the Epicureans care about the truth. They say that the very concept of truth derives from the truth of the senses (*DRN* IV.476–479). In keeping with this concept of truth, beliefs are true just in case they are consistent with the totality of relevant observation—just in case they are empirically adequate (*M* VII.211–216). One can reject this account of truth, of course, but it does explain why the Epicureans want true theories. If inconsistencies in the soul cause trouble immediately, and if false theories are inconsistent with sense-perception, then true theories are strictly necessary to satisfy the aim of removing trouble and providing firm opinions.

Moreover, this account explains why Epicurean limits on the study of physics are not just consistent with, but even required by, their concern for truth. Among empirically-adequate theories of a given phenomenon, all count as true on the Epicurean criterion; so, one should accept all such theories as true (somewhere in the cosmos, and possibly here). Further, the

phenomena that admit of multiple empirically-adequate theories are precisely those that, without modern scientific instruments, cannot be given a more exact account. So, we should not be surprised to find the Epicureans thinking that the attempt to rule out some empirically-adequate accounts both manifests and causes psychological disturbance: no available evidence will actually narrow down the possibilities. Anyone who favors one empirically-adequate theory over another will be troubled, since they cannot stably and consistently favor that theory over others on the basis of evidence.

Importantly, the aim of stable belief is not completely isolated from the purposes of physics countenanced by the two-aims view. The idea of removing inconsistency and its associated troubles first surfaced in relation to our beliefs and basic concepts of the gods. The trouble caused by instability in these beliefs is not reducible to that involved in fearing the gods, but it is related. Further, physics explains natural phenomena without appeal to divine action; this is needed at least in part to stabilize the belief that the gods are inactive. Likewise, in relation to fear of death: physics explains our dreams of the dead in a way consistent with our mortality, and this is necessary for stable belief that the soul is mortal and death is the end for us. Still, the sheer range of Epicurean physics requires that we understand stable belief as a wider aim. That is, the Epicureans clearly do not only seek stable belief on those topics that are practically important according to the two-aims view.

Physical Study of Ethical Topics

Epicurus states another aim of physics in *Principal Doctrine* 11: "If our suspicions about heavenly phenomena and about death did not trouble us, and moreover, if not knowing the limits of pains and desires did not trouble us, we would have no need of natural science [*physiologias*]." He opens with those topics recognized by the two-aims view: suspicions about heavenly phenomena presumably concern their origin in divine agency. However, he also says that physics is needed to study the limits of pains and desires. These sound like ethical topics thrown onto a list of reasons for studying physics. But that raises puzzles: why must physics study the same topics as ethics? What does physical inquiry into them achieve that ethical inquiry does not?[18]

There would be no problem if physics [*to physikon, peri physeôs*] were different from natural science [*physiologia*]. Perhaps natural science comprises both physics and ethics. After all, Epicurean ethics often talks about nature—e.g., when it discusses "natural desire." On the other hand, Diogenes Laertius calls physics "the entire [*pasan*] theory of nature" (X.30). And there are other strong reasons to identify natural science and physics. Epicurus calls the *Letter to Herodotus* both a work in physics (*peri physeôs*, 35; *huper physeôs*, 82–83) and a work in natural science or *physiologia* (37, 78). One might say that *physiologia* in these passages is philosophy, the larger unity containing physics as a part, but this is not the natural reading. The *Letter to Pythocles* contains still more decisive evidence. Epicurus discusses the usefulness of his letter not only to Pythocles (an advanced student) but also to "those recently acquainted with knowledge of natural science [*physiologias*]." He then urges his readers to study that letter along with "the remainder [*tôn loipôn*]" sketched in the *Letter to Herodotus* (85). If the *Letter to Herodotus* covers "the remainder" of natural science, then natural science must be identical to physics, not philosophy as a whole. Both letters describe how physics helps us live well, but neither addresses ethical topics as such.[19]

Principal Doctrine 11 is not the only evidence that physics studies ethical topics. An early Epicurean text links physics with character development:

> natural science [*physiologia*] does not create boastful men nor chatterboxes nor men who show off the culture [*paideia*] which the many quarrel over, but rather strong and self-sufficient men, who pride themselves on their own personal goods, not those of external circumstances.
>
> (*SV* 45)

This sounds different from *KD* 11, which says that physics teaches the limits of pain and desire. But these two points are united in Cicero, *On Ends*. According to Torquatus, the fifth use of physics is that "we will have a better character once we have learned what nature requires"; in particular, physics offers "self-control, by explaining the nature and varieties of desire" (I.63–64). Torquatus says physics offers self-control or temperance [*moderatio*], while *SV* 45 says it makes one strong and self-sufficient [*sobarous kai autarkeis*]. But self-sufficiency is connected to temperance, for example in the *Letter to Menoeceus* (130–131; Gk. *sôphrosunê* = Lt. *moderatio). SV* 45 and *De Fin* I.63–64 thus make the same point about how physics builds character.[20] Cicero (but not *SV* 45) says how physics does so: by teaching the limits and kinds of desires, as *KD* 11 says it does. Clearly, then, physics does in fact study ethical topics like the limits of pain and desire. But what is involved in a distinct physical inquiry into these topics, over and above the ethical one—and why is such an inquiry useful?

One possibility is that physics plays the same role in relation to pleasure, pain, and desire that it does in relation to the gods and death: it stabilizes our beliefs on these topics. This seems right so far as it goes, and we may see traces of such a goal in Epicurean texts. Most notably, Lucretius discusses pleasure, pain, and desire from a physical perspective; his accounts are scattered but fairly extensive. For example, he gives physiological accounts of pleasure and pain. When our sense organs touch jagged atoms, we feel pain; when they touch smooth atoms, we feel pleasure (II.398–441; IV.615–672). When the living aggregate is disrupted, we feel pain; when it is restored, we feel pleasure (II.963–972; IV.858–876). Book IV gives an account of sexual desire and pleasure that is connected both to wider discussions of vital activities and to ethical claims about sex. Book III argues in a physical mode that death is the limit of severe pain (III.241–257, 469–473; cf. *KD* 4).

Lucretius does not derive ethical conclusions from these physical studies. Rather, this material shows that independent results of physical and ethical inquiry do not conflict. As we have seen, internal psychological conflict and instability is a major source of trouble for us, both in general and in relation to ethical topics. Unless our best ethical theories cohere with our best physical theories of ethically-relevant phenomena, we may worry that future physics could undermine presuppositions of our ethical views. Physical inquiry into the kinds and limits of pleasure, pain, and desire thus stabilizes our ethical beliefs and so calms the soul.

However, this is not the whole story. Part of the passage from Philodemus quoted above suggests another way in which physics bears on ethics:

> Besides, one must unfailingly draw the ethical arguments regarding both choices and avoidances entirely from the study of nature in order that they should be complete [*enteleis*]—if nothing else, the principle that nothing is produced without a cause and that … does not change.

This passage raises questions. What does it mean to say that physics completes ethical arguments about choice and avoidance? We might try to assimilate this to the point just made: perhaps physics merely stabilizes our beliefs on ethical topics. However, the last part

of the passage suggests that the basic conservation principles aid in decision-making. Conservation principles are not an intrinsically ethical topic, as pain and desire are. So, we must seek another way in which physics completes ethical arguments about choice and avoidance—and in particular, how grasping the conservation principles might do so.

Here we can draw on the analogy between philosophy and medicine: medicine treats the body and is useful only for that purpose; philosophy treats the soul and is useful only for that purpose. But while doctors are not natural scientists, they may need natural science to identify symptoms, diagnose conditions, and plan treatments. Medicine needs natural science and physiology, though it is not reducible to these. Likewise, in doing every part of philosophy—ethics included—the philosopher relies on natural science.

More particularly, I suggest that conservation principles are relevant to choice and avoidance because they entail that trouble in the soul has a cause. Since each psychological ailment has a cause, each can be cured by removing its cause. This suspicion is confirmed by the fact that Philodemus, in the very same work on choices and avoidances, gives several classifications of causes; for example, he distinguishes internal and external causes (*De Elect*. VI). The diagnostic and therapeutic significance of this distinction is shown by Lucretius' case of a man who fails to understand that the cause of his trouble is internal, not external (III.1053–1075). Under the misapprehension that his surroundings bother him, he travels restlessly between city and country. The real cause, though, is his fear of death; if he knew that, he would instead devote himself to studying the nature of things—i.e., to physics. So, knowledge of causes, and particularly the distinction between internal and external causes, can alter our choices and avoidances: it can lead us to abandon travel for philosophy.[21]

This hypothesis also helps to explain the claims in *SV* 45 and *De Fin*. I.63–64 that the study of nature improves character. Character is primarily a matter of one's evaluative beliefs, and such beliefs are among the main causes of living well or badly. Physics is thus relevant to living well in part because it draws distinctions among causes and enables us to alter those causes—among them, our evaluative beliefs. So, physics contributes to character development, making us moderate and self-sufficient.[22]

More speculatively, the ethical importance of grasping causes may also be seen in *Letter to Herodotus* 82, the list of sources of trouble we encountered in the previous section. As we saw there, Epicurus lists i) conflicting beliefs about the gods; ii) fear of eternal terror; and iii) fear of lack of perception in death. He then mentions a fourth cause: some suffer

> not as a result of their opinions but because of some irrational condition [*alogôi ... tini parastasei*]; hence, not setting a limit on dread, they suffer a disturbance equal to or even greater than what they would suffer if they actually held these opinions.

One could insist that the "irrational condition" is simply iii) above—i.e., fear of lack of perception. Lack of perception is not fearful, as we can see by thinking of a dreamless sleep (*DRN* III.919–927). So, believing that death is impercipience cannot cause fear of such a state. Therefore, the cause must be an irrational condition. However, it seems odd to single out a particular belief as the cause of trouble only to immediately insist that the belief is not the real cause, especially if this is not stated explicitly. Further, fear of impercipience can still be analyzed as the effect of false beliefs, as in Lucretius' rebuke to someone who fears lost opportunities (III.931–963). So, this "irrational condition" must be a distinct source of trouble.

Someone suffering from an irrational condition cannot be calmed by what philosophy teaches about the limits of pain and desire or the nature of death; such teachings can alter beliefs and the effects of beliefs, but cannot treat conditions that are not caused by beliefs.

However, such trouble could perhaps be cured by identifying its non-doxastic cause. For example, perhaps we do not *believe* that we will feel pain after death, but we nonetheless regularly *imagine* that we will. In such a case, attending to our beliefs will be useless, since they are already in order. Instead, physics might teach us to deal with such non-doxastic causes of trouble by entertaining competing, untroubling images of our own death, so that we no longer imagine things contrary to our own beliefs.

Conclusion

The Epicureans consider philosophy a purely practical pursuit, one whose sole aim is to make us live well by guiding our actions and removing trouble from our souls. Accomplishing these goals means philosophizing throughout life and even constantly each day, so that philosophy comes to be our entire way of life. This way of life is divided into three parts or topics: canonic, physics, and ethics. Unsurprisingly, each part of philosophy has its place in accomplishing the practical aims of philosophy as a whole. It is tempting, though, to suppose that a fully practical conception of philosophy would give ethics pride of place, and relegate other parts of philosophy to supporting roles. Physics, in particular, might be thought to explore the nature of soul and death and the operations of the world solely to support more properly ethical arguments against fearing the gods and death.

However, this paints too narrow a picture of the role of physics in Epicurean philosophy. Most importantly, physics removes ignorance from the soul that troubles us by its mere presence, replacing this ignorance with firm opinions that make us calm. Indeed, much of physics seems aimed at stabilizing our beliefs about the gods, death, pleasure, pain, and desire. Beyond this, though, philosophy brings calm by providing stable beliefs about how the world works in general—a topic on which we cannot suspend judgment, as we can concerning the correct analysis of poetry or the way to organize a persuasive speech. Philosophy also needs physics much as medicine does: for its therapies to work, it must grasp the causes of the illnesses it treats. So, physics makes us happy in more diverse ways than are usually recognized. This explains the sheer amount of physics that the Epicureans do, the great value they see in it, and their need for true accounts.

This chapter will not be the last word on its topic, in part because the nature, aims, and structure of Epicurean philosophy have rarely been treated explicitly and at length. Points that need more detailed treatment include: how all parts of philosophy are relevant to choice and avoidance (as Philodemus says); how classification of causes bears on therapy (including, but not limited to, the distinction between internal and external causes of trouble); and how inner conflict troubles us, both in the case of ignorance and in the case of other vices. I hope the present chapter prepares the way for more detailed work on all of these topics and more.[23]

Notes

1 If Epicurus does not state a view, but Lucretius or Philodemus does, that does not imply a development; our sources for Epicurus' own views are limited, and such arguments from silence are anyway limited.
2 Importantly, the Epicureans argue that the soul is both material and mortal. For more on this, see Robitzsch's chapter, "Epicureans on What There Is."
3 On ancient philosophy as a way of life, see Hadot 1995. However, Hadot sometimes transfers lessons about Stoicism and other schools to Epicureanism, where they may not apply.
4 LS 156 say that an interpretation of Epicurean philosophy as purely instrumental "cannot survive a reading" of this passage.

5 Cicero complains that an Epicurean cannot say that virtuous activity is immediately pleasant (I.25), as his Epicurean spokesman Torquatus later agrees. This does not conflict with Diogenes' claim, which is that *virtue*, not virtuous activity, is a simultaneous cause of pleasure. I cannot explore the issue further here.
6 Epicurus does not list courage, but "living honorably" includes every virtue; cf. Philodemus, *De Elect*. XIV.
7 Hessler 2014: 286–289 suggests that "philosophy" here is useless, non-Epicurean theoretical philosophy. However, the passage suggests that philosophy is valuable, though prudence is even (*kai*) more valuable.
8 This text requires some restoration and cuts off here—because, as mentioned in the introduction, our texts of Philodemus were preserved in a library buried in the eruption of Mount Vesuvius.
9 See below, n.18, for scholars who seem to endorse the two-aims view in their readings of *KD* 11.
10 For more on this topic, see Austin's chapter, "Epicurus on Sense-Experience and the Fear of Death."
11 Nussbaum 1994 presses this worry.
12 Early on he describes the letter as concerned with "things in the sky", including weather and celestial phenomena. However, the scope is wider, including earthquakes and related geological phenomena.
13 These limitations are sometimes thought to evince a lack of genuine interest in physical inquiry—but again, the evidence strongly suggests wide and deep interest in these and other parts of physics.
14 He focuses on fears about the afterlife as he moves towards the third source of trouble: fear of the loss of feeling in death. That does not entail that the first source involves fear about how the gods may act on us during life. See below on the fourth source of trouble on this list (and its relationship to the third).
15 One complication is that the first aim, which Torquatus discusses at length, concerns canonic and the achievement of stable beliefs. That may make trouble for the distinction between canonic and physics, and certainly makes trouble for the distinction between Torquatus' first and fourth aims of physics. The issue requires a fuller reckoning than is possible here.
16 Cf. Warren 2009: 235, though he does not cite Cicero. Warren also mentions uncertainty about the future, but Epicurean physics provides no predictive power concerning earthquakes, and in any case, Epicurus says that predictive power alone is useless or worse (*Ep. Hdt*. 79).
17 This feature of the Epicurean view of vice has been neglected, but again I cannot discuss the details here.
18 *KD* 11 is cited in the existing literature when discussing the aims of physics, but the last clause is often ignored; see, e.g., Nussbaum 1994: 124; Smith 2001: xxiii; Warren 2002: 179–80; O'Keefe 2010: 133.
19 Earlier, I sometimes assumed without comment that physics and natural science were the same; I hope the paragraph above vindicates that assumption.
20 So too Epicurus: physics makes one "incomparably stronger" (*asumblêton ... hadrotêta lêpsesthai; Ep. Hdt*. 83).
21 Some causes of trouble are external, though; for discussion in the case of fear of death, see Austin 2012.
22 Nussbaum 1994 raises worries about giving reason and argument purely instrumental value; it seems that the Epicureans would gladly take a pill to remove trouble if it did so just as well—perhaps by instilling the relevant beliefs causally rather than through reasoning. But this is at least not a unique view; Socrates in the *Euthydemus* declares himself willing to be destroyed and replaced with a wise duplicate (285a-c).
23 For feedback on earlier versions of this material, I owe thanks to Kelly Arenson, Emily Austin, Max Robitzsch, and audiences at an APA group session of the Hellenistic Philosophy Society, the SAGP, Transylvania University (especially David Kaufman), and the UCSD History of Philosophy Roundtable (especially Monte Johnson).

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