MODERN EPICUREANISM

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ABSTRACT

Epicureanism has long been perceived as a theory of hedonism imbodying many contradictions and unintuitive directives. The fact that much of the surviving work of Epicurus exists only through the works of Roman scholars seeking to discount his ideas is a good reason to believe that Epicureanism has been misperceived and misrepresented. From what we do have of Epicurus' work we *can* form a different picture of Epicureanism.

This thesis explores the idea that instead of designating Epicureanism as a theory of consequentialism and value monism as some out of misguided belief do, we should regard Epicurus as a proponent of virtue ethics that understands the good life to come about by valuing many things as good in and of themselves. Epicurus was working within a decidedly eudaimonistic framework, and sought to establish a conception of the good life in line with other scholars of his time, like Aristotle and Plato. It is clear from his surviving works that such a conception, although contentious, is not unfounded. I will further argue that we should regard what Epicurus described as the *katastematic* state, the highest state of pleasure, as a state of living tranquilly. This is the *telos*, the way of being, that Epicurus believed would create happiness.

This thesis also explores the Epicurean directive to avoid pain and anxiety and looks at why this is such an important aspect to Epicurean theory. Pain and anxiety, Epicurus argued, is the biggest obstacle to pleasure, and once this was removed, we could experience the greatest pleasure. It is not only the absence of pain that created happiness, but I will add that we must be positively experiencing life in a way that allows us to celebrate the absence of pain.

This thesis explores the notion that our modern society and growing inequality is presenting significant hurdles to achieving happiness in the form of cultivating anxiety. It looks to the nature of failing societies and identifies problems that are of concern for a Modern Epicurean aiming to live tranquilly.

Finally in order to counteract this problem it explores the ideas of politics and justice in Epicurean theory and expands on the few surviving fragments of Epicurus' works which discuss how an Epicurean should act in accordance with sociological conventions. For if we are to live like an Epicurean such a desire should not force us to sacrifice the many positive aspects of living within society.

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY OF THIS WORK

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution and affirms that to the best of my knowledge the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signed_____

I.   INTRODUCTION

Modern ethical discourse is very much concerned with comparisons between utilitarian and deontological theories. Nonetheless, in the last 20 years there has been a steady rise in an acceptance of virtue ethics as a viable alternative or at least as an essential supplement to consequentialsit or deontological normative theores. This has prompted many ethicists to look to the Ancient Greeks and the theories of virtue ethics left to us by Aristotle and Plato among others. There is, however, one ancient philosopher who has tended to be neglected in this discourse – Epicurus. Although it is true that there has been much written on his arguments about death, there is no body of Neo-Epicurean ethics comparable to the vast body of Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. This is more than likely due to the misperception that he espoused a hedonistic theory more closely aligned with consequentialism, and was thus unlike the other ancient virtue ethicists. However, serious historians of philosophy knew better, and this thesis will argue emphatically that Epicurus should be seen as a member of the *eudaimonistic* school of thought and a virtue ethicist. Further, it aims to discover how his theory can aid us in developing an understanding of the good life that is Epicurean in spirit and relevant to contemporary life.

Virtue ethics allows us to look at our lives and actions and to evaluate them according to what the virtuous person would do. Such a method is particularly helpful for those of us who not only seek to do what is right but to also create a complete and happy life for ourselves and those around us. Virtue ethics has been reincarnated in recent times in the works of Rosalind Hursthouse, Martha Nussbaum and Julia Annas. This thesis gratefully borrows many of these prominent philosophers' insights, but it is Julia Annas, in particular, who has been the true inspiration for the ideas that I will present to you. Annas has created a reading of Epicurus in her book *The Morality of Happiness*[1] which sees Epicurean theory as an extension of the wider school of Greek thought in the Hellenistic era, with more in common with Aristotelian ethics than the ideas of Jeremy Bentham.

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[1] Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995)

My aim is to reinvigorate Epicurean ethics in much the same way as Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists present the work of Aristotle — by holding onto the Aristotelian spirit, but going beyond or even at times conflicting with what Aristotle wrote. What I am trying to achieve in this thesis is not a historically accurate representation of Epicurus *per se*, nor an exact reading of his surviving works. I aim to present a reading of Epicurus for the modern ethicist, one, which is adapted and adaptable to modern life. This is why I will call my theory Modern Epicureanism. I do not seek to claim that what is written in these pages is exactly what Epicurus said, or that this is the only way an Epicurean theory could be developed. Rather I seek to develop a theory which captures the spirit of Epicureanism, distancing myself from many of the problems of fragmentary and conflicting evidence that confront historians of philosophy. The resulting theory is one that is derived from, sympathetic to and honours Epicurus himself.

The biggest issue in investigating ancient Epicurean philosophy is that much of Epicurus' work no longer survives, and that which does is represented in the works of those with polemical axes to grind, such as Cicero, Plutarch, Seneca and even at some points Lucretius, his most prominent Roman advocate. Many of the interpretations we now have of Epicurus contain significant amounts of conjecture and getting too caught up in this archaeological endeavour would be contrary to what I wish to achieve here. Instead of delving into the disputes among specialists in ancient philosophy and finding the truth of what Epicurus really meant when he said such-and-such, I have adapted the overarching principles and spirit of Epicureanism to answer a pressing problem that is not new to us — how do we avoid anxiety? I will argue that there are strong reasons to believe that one substantial catalyst for anxiety in modern society is inequality? I have taken interpretations from many different readings of Epicurus, and it may seem that I am polemically grinding my own axe, but I insist this is not the case. I am looking for answers to questions that we must confront now: how do we determine what is the right thing to do in relation to both ourselves and everyone else? What can we achieve from looking at our life as a whole, not just as singular moments of right or wrong?

My aim in this thesis is to understand how we can live as Epicureans in our modern age and how Epicureanism can help us to answer problems we face: anxiety, social involvement and justice. It is 'Modern' in that it does not hold that all of Epicurus' work is fully explained or correct. It may well be that Epicurus was himself sometimes not fully

consistent or started from premises we must now regard as implausible. But what I will present here is still Epicurean, and it holds true to the overarching theory that Epicurus expounded wherever it can. It is certainly inspired by his teachings.

This thesis' main contention is that Epicurus' concept of *katastematic* pleasure is best understood as living tranquilly. It argues that we should not regard Modern Epicureanism as a theory of hedonism — at least as modern philosophers understand hedonism — but instead as a theory of *eudaimonism.* Understanding *katastematic* pleasure as a *telos,* as living tranquilly, acts as a guiding principle for every action we choose and further, allows for Modern Epicureanism to value more than one thing in and of itself.

There is very little in the surviving Epicurean work that addresses the concepts of politics and justice, and so in the third chapter I launch into a position that decribes how a Modern Epicurean can be concerned with with these issues. I will argue that Epicurus did not have a concrete conception of what we must do to achieve our *telos* —of such a belief I am not alone — there is very little in his works that would motivate us to believe he had strict rules about what an Epicurean should and should not do. This gives us room to believe that a politically inspired life may be possible under Epicurean theory. Of course it will not be exactly what Epicurus believed was ideal, but it will hold true to the spirit of Epicurean theory. The reading that I will present here is a modern interpretation and differs slightly from ancient Epicureanism, nonetheless, I believe it would sit well with Epicurus if he were here today.

II.   UNDERSTANDING EPICUREANISM

II.I   Epicureanism

> So when we say that pleasure is the end, we do not mean pleasures of the
> dissipated and those that consist in having a good time, as some out of
> ignorance and disagreement or refusal to understand suppose we do, but
> freedom from pain in the body and from disturbance in the soul. For what
> produces the pleasant life is not continuous drinking and parties or pederasty
> or womanising, or the enjoyment of fish and the other dishes of an expensive
> table, but sober reasoning which tracks down the causes of every choice and
> avoidance, and which banishes the opinions that beset souls with the greatest
> confusion.[2]

Epicureanism is generally considered a hedonist theory because it values most highly the final end of pleasure. Nonetheless, this pleasure is not the common contemporary conception of pleasure — the pleasures of the profligates. Rather Epicureanism is distinctly *eudaimonist*. Pleasure for Epicurus, is the final end, the *telos,* of a happy flourishing life. Julia Annas explains that for the ancient ethical theories happiness is a widely interpreted concept.[3] There is much consensus that it is the final end, but as Aristotle explained, this point proves nothing, because there is much disagreement about what happiness consists in.[4] Nonetheless, all of the ancient ethical theorists, save the Cyreniacs, shared the methodological assumption that they were developing a theory of happiness. What they disagreed on, was what that was.[5] For Epicurus the *telos* was pleasure, or as this chapter will contend, a life lived tranquilly.

There are sufficient reasons to believe that the Epicurean conception of pleasure should be described as a life lived tranquilly. Epicurus contrasted pleasure with pain, and was

[2] Epicurus, Letters to Menoeceus 131, trans. A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers, Vol.1: Translations of the Principal Sources, with Philosophical Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 114.
[3] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* 1095a 14-30, quoted in Annas, *Happiness*, 329.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid., 333.

explicit that 'the greatest pleasure is perceived once all pain has been removed.'[6] Epicurus described this greatest pleasure as *katastematic* pleasure — a state free from pain. From this he established a two-tier conception of pleasure which included both *katastematic* pleasure, as described above, and kinetic, or sensory, pleasures. This two-tier understanding is supposed to give us clear knowledge of how pleasure functions and the difference between our end goal and what it is we pursue to realise that. However, in Cicero's *On Ends* he questions the Epicurean Torquatas on what this means.

> Cicero: 'Does a thirsty man, may I ask, take pleasure in drinking?' Torquatas
> (the Epicurean spokesman): 'Who could deny that?'
> Cicero: 'Is it the same as the pleasure of the quenched thirst?'
> Torquatas: 'No it is of a different kind. Quenched thirst involves katastematic
> pleasure, but the pleasure of the actual quenching is kinetic.'
> Cicero: 'Why, then, do you call such different things by the same name?'[7]

This quote illustrates how the Epicurean understands the two types of pleasure, but I am sympathetic to Cicero's objection here. Therefore, I argue that although the *katastematic* state is indeed pleasurable, it is more perspicuous to understand it as a way of living tranquilly instead of one of pleasure. This approach has two benefits: first, it clears up the confusion between the ideas of pleasure and second, allows us to understand the real role of the kinetic pleasures, that is, that when experienced tranquilly they form the *katastematic* state. It distinguishes between an action, which is pleasurable, and the greater goal of living tranquilly. But keep in mind, these distinctions don't identify different things, they only identify different aspects of the one experience. I will go onto explain exactly what I mean by this in due course, but first let me explain why regarding the *katastematic* state as living tranquilly allows us to separate Modern Epicureanism from hedonism and why hedonism is *not* the best way to describe Epicureanism.

Epicureanism is generally referred to as a hedonistic theory, and seeing as though it regards the *katastematic* state as one of pleasure, it seems counterintuitive to regard it as

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[6] Cicero, *On Ends* 137, trans. Long and Sedley, 113.
[7] Cicero, *On Ends* 2.9-10, trans. Long and Sedley, 118.

anything else. But to label Epicureanism as hedonism is misleading and does not convey the true intent of Epicurus. Hedonism implies living in a way that seeks to experience all the pleasure one can, generally referring to the maximisation of momentary and sensory, or kinetic, pleasures. Such a description of pleasure conjures up an idea of hedonism that implies value monism — defining the intrinsic good as only one thing, in this case, pleasurable actions. This does not describe Modern Epicureanism. The Modern Epicurean theory is rather, a theory of value pluralism; it values a multitude of things that are all guided by the end goal of living tranquilly. The collection of things that we value will change from person to person, but this just means that there are many roads to the Epicurean understanding of happiness. It is arguable that the ancient Epicurean conception of hedonism was also one that was very different from the monist description.

This is why Modern Epicureanism should instead be regarded as a theory of *eudaimonism.* I grant there are passages that contradict me and make Epicurus sound as though he is a value monist, but it is important to remember that Epicurus was working within a decisively *eudaimonist* tradition and there are other things he says that present Epicureanism as holding that there is more than one thing that is good in and of itself. It is also true that Epicurus finds value in some intermittent experiences of pleasure, but a life is better if it is not based around such fleeting moments. It is better, if it has a goal, a guiding principle to achieve a good life. Living tranquilly can be the goal of a life in a way that having intermittent experiences of pleasure cannot.[8] Such a life arguably includes living in a way that includes virtue, friendships, family and the kinetic pleasures. So it is acceptable for us to say that it is not only pleasure that is good, but specifically *katastematic* pleasure — a life lived tranquilly — that is the final end, the *telos*, for a good, flourishing and happy life. Importantly, this is not a specification of what has value; instead it is a specification of how one should live their life. It is a way that we can decide about what things are good, and which allows us to make rational choices about what desires we should pursue. It shows us that our final end, the *telos*, is not a thing, in the sense that it is something that is aimed at; instead it is in the sense that it describes

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[8] Daniel Russell, "Epicurus and Friends on Goals," *Epicurus: His Continuing Influence and Contemporary Relevance,* ed. D.Suits and D.Gordon (Rochester: Rochester Institute of Technology, 2003), 175.

the journey of obtaining that end.[9] Therefore, *katastematic* pleasure is the *telos*, the goal to which every choice we make is referred.[10] This makes Modern Epicureanism very different from the contemporary theories of hedonism, because *katastematic* pleasure, or tranquillity, is thought of as a guiding principle for all life's choices. To consider the two theories aligned has a much more counterintuitive conclusion than the one we mentioned before.

Therefore, the *telos* for Epicurus is complete, self-sufficient and choice worthy; it is natural and it provides us with a guide to live our lives. By living virtuously, valuing friends and family, and fulfilling kinetic pleasures and other goods in a tranquil way we can achieve the good life. This understanding of Epicureanism validates Epicurus' insistence on the value of friendships; it deviates from its hedonistic roots and describes a theory grounded in *eudaimonism*. In order for us to be clear about what it means to identify Modern Epicureanism in this way, let us review what Aristotle has to say about the final end or *eudaimonia.*

II.II   An Ancient Conception of the Good Life

In *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle explains what it is to reflect on our life as a whole. He states that 'every skill and every investigation, and similarly every action and choice, seem to aim at some good; which is why the good has been finally characterised as that at which everything aims.'[11] Aristotle takes this point as obvious and there are reasons to think that this is a rational position. Indeed our ethical standpoints are concerned with the considered actions and choices we make, not with the spontaneous things we do, like whistling as we walk. What Aristotle claims here is that every action and choice we make is directed at an end.[12] This, for him, establishes the intuitive plausibility that all actions are aimed at some good.[13]

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[9] Annas, *Happiness,* 34.
[10] Russell, "Epicurus and Friends," 175.
[11] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094 a 1-3, quoted in Annas, *Happiness,* 29.
[12] Annas, *Happiness,* 29.
[13] Ibid., 30.

The second component to Aristotle's reasoning and justification of the final end points out that there are some ends that are subordinate to others. He explains that ends form a hierarchy; my life is not just a series of one end after another. I do not, for example, drink a coffee just for its own sake. This action has the further impetus of making me alert, and further to be alert to write this thesis as a progressive step in a successful career. It is easily taken that most of the deliberate ends we aim at are nested in this hierarchical way.[14] Aristotle shows that if we put these ideas together we imply something substantial,

> If, then, there is some end (telos) of the things we can do, an end which we
> wish for because of itself, while we wish for the other things because of it; and
> if we do not choose everything because of something else (for it goes on ad
> infinitum that way, so that desire is empty and vain) – then it is clear that this
> would be the good, and the best [good]. So surely as far as our lives are
> concerned knowledge of this has great influence, and just like archers with a
> target we would be more likely to achieve what we ought?[15]

However, this 'nesting' of goods does not give us a sense of what the greater end goal is; the end to these higher-level goods. Annas argues that Aristotle wants to give us a dilemma; either we want one thing for the sake of another and this goes on *ad infinitum,* or, there is one final good, one thing we do want just for its own sake, and where everything else is wanted for its sake. Aristotle claims that there must be one final good — one does not stop with several aims that are wanted for their own sakes. Although I do ask what the point of having these aims is, my drinking of coffee to complete the aim of having a career does not stop there, why do I want to have a good career? Aristotle believes that there is one single answer: I do all these things because they contribute to my *telos,* my final end, which is my final good.[16]

There are two formal constraints that further explain how our final end, our *telos,* operates. Aristotle believed that the *telos* needed to be complete and self-sufficient. Completeness explains how an end puts a stop to desire; we could call this finality, but

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[14] Annas, *Happiness,* 31.
[15] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094 a 18-24, quoted in Annas, *Happiness,* 31.
[16] Ibid.

finality is not all Aristotle proposed completeness was. Finality could be seen as doing something purely as a means to an end: I want tools for the sake of doing a job, but if I can do that job without those tools then I do not want them. But the ends of a promising career or keeping fit are not means we would dispense with to reach our final end if we could. Thus, for Aristotle this final end will include all of the subordinate ends, like a promising career, or keeping fit. Therefore an end becomes more complete because it includes other ends. Just stopping our desire at some point and claiming that this goal is our ultimate end is not enough to fulfil this criterion. We require tranquillity to consist of these other subordinate ends. Annas calls this notion comprehensiveness and explains that for an ultimate end to be complete in the sense that Aristotle claimed it should be, it should not just be final but also comprehensive in this way. Of course there can be some ends which are not comprehensive, but the good we require is not like that. The ultimate end 'puts a stop to our desires by including and organising into a whole the ends of smaller scale desires.'[17]

The second formal condition on our final end is self-sufficiency, *autarkeia*. This applies to a person's life instead of their final good. We can say that a person's life is self-sufficient if it lacks nothing. Aristotle points out that this condition is compatible with having dependencies and needs that arise from family and politics; it does not require that one must do these things alone, but that one is free of certain pressures and needs that are outside of the kind of life one has chosen. For example my life will still be self-sufficient even though my well-being is dependent on the well-being of my children, if that is my chosen path. These dependencies are acceptable if they do not expose me to the external factors or things that are not a part of my chosen path.[18] Further, a life lacking in nothing does not invoke the absurd conclusion that it contains everything, just those things which are conducive to the final end.[19]

These conditions are not exclusive to Aristotle's theory; Epicurus is also adamant that self-sufficiency is an important part of his ethics. There are many passages that praise

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[17] Annas, *Happiness,* 40.
[18] Ibid., 41.
[19] Ibid.

self-sufficiency as a great good.[20] For Epicurus self-sufficiency constrains the good life[21] and likewise completeness for the Epicureans is regarded as the most important formal constraint on our final end.[22]

The way in which we identify and understand Epicurean *eudaimonia* is the same way that Aristotle believes such a life comes about through the pursuit of a final end, which includes a series of high-level goods that are valued for their own sake. In both theories we see this value pluralism that acknowledges that friends are valuable, family is valuable, practical philosophical reasoning is valuable. Nonetheless, there is one important difference — the final end, the *telos,* which each of these philosophers advocate for is different. For Aristotle the *telos* is a life lived *excellently:* this is the real import of his assertion that happiness is the life of activity lived 'in accordance with virtue',[23] for what is done 'in accordance with virtue' is done well or done in conformity to the standards of excellence. For Epicurus, happiness is a life lived *tranquilly*. By interpreting Epicurus as choosing to live a life tranquilly as the *telos*, instead of simply aiming at a life filled with friends, or a successful career means that we then have the ability to handle the plurality of higher-level goods in a successful way. This does not make friendship a means to an end, or instrumental. It just means that the tranquilly lived life regulates how we pursue those friendships or career achievements. Moreover, it does so in a way that is more inclusive than Aristotle's insistence that we regulate our pursuit of the plurality of goods by the standards of moral and intellectual excellence. After all, there might well be two career paths where the pursuit of each can be carried out in accordance with excellence, but where one of the two must inevitably involve anxiety. The Aristotelian *telos* does not effectively guide our life choice, but the Epicurean one does. To put it another way, the Epicurean *telos* provides the basis for a deeper critique of typical objects of human desire.

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[20] See Epicurus, *Letters to Menoeceus* 122, 130-131, *Vatican Sayings* 44, 45, 68, 77, Usener 200, 466, 476.
[21] Annas, *Happiness*, 42.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Aristotle , *Nichomacean Ethics* 1098a 12-17, quoted in Annas, *Happiness,* 367.

II.III   Navigating our Desires

According to Epicurus, humans experience many different types of desires but there are only certain desires we should fulfil that will allow us to experience this end state of living tranquilly. There are also desires that will only cause anxiety and pain. Knowing which ones to pursue and which to avoid is an invaluable skill for reaching our final end goal.

> Of our desires some are natural and necessary, some are natural but not necessary and some are neither natural nor necessary, but come about dependent on empty belief.[24]

Epicurus' tripartite understanding of desires is determined by comparing the natural and empty, and the necessary and unnecessary. Empty desires are harmful for someone who seeks them, as they can never be fulfilled in a way that leads to a tranquil life. Natural desires are the true desires, or desires that come from human nature.

> Moreover, since there is nothing left if you deprive man of his sense perception, it is necessary that nature herself judge what is natural and what is unnatural. And what does nature perceive and judge, with reference to what does she decide to pursue or avoid something, except pleasure and pain? [25]

Annas notes the extent to which Epicurus' writings tell us what is natural is minimal. She tells us that from what Epicurus gave us we can see that there are various ideas of natural that he uses. Nonetheless, Epicurus would have regarded what is natural as intuitive and readily accepted. He supposed that there was a way in which humans are, and the contrast between what is natural and what is empty suggests that what is natural is what is not harmful and mistaken. [26]

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[24] Epicurus, *Key Doctrine* 29, quoted in Annas, *Happiness,* 190.
[25] Epicurus, *On Goals* 30, quoted in Brad Inwood and Lloyd. P. Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co. Inc., 1988), 44.
[26] Annas, *Happiness,* 191.

Annas proposes — although this is not explicit in the Epicurean texts — that we need to regard the desires, in such a way, that first, the empty desires contrast with the natural desires and second, that we are able to determine the necessity of the natural desires. Annas suggests this is possible by having a generic understanding of the natural and necessary desires. This is done by *not* specifying what types of food, shelter and so forth.[27] Therefore to fulfil the first condition, because my desire for these things does not rest on any false belief — I clearly need them and I am not mistaken that I need them to survive — they then contrast in the right way with the empty desires. This also gives us the ability to determine the second condition, where the natural desires are determined as necessary or unnecessary; an unnecessary desire is a desire for a specific thing. The desire for wine will be a specific desire for drink, it is clearly not necessary because humans do not need wine to survive, but it varies the pleasure of fulfilling the desire for drink.[28]

> By natural and necessary Epicurus means those that bring relief from pain, e.g., drink when we are thirsty; by natural and unnecessary he means those that merely vary the pleasure, without removing the pain, e.g., expensive food; and by neither natural nor necessary garlands of honour and the setting up of statues. [29]

The first type of desire includes the natural and necessary desires. These are the desires that result in happiness, good health, and a tranquil existence free from anxiety and pain. A desire is therefore necessary if it is something we need, for example food, shelter, love or warmth. It is necessary if it brings pain when it is not satisfied, but comfort and happiness when it is. This pain is not to be confused with the pain caused by empty desires. The pain caused by the absence of necessary desires can be fatal or debilitating. For example, starvation, exposure, loneliness, depression and so on. The pain caused by the absence of an empty desire is anxiety, harmful in its own way but reconcilable with the right understanding of how it affects us.

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[27] Annas, *Happiness,* 191.
[28] Ibid., 193.
[29] Scholion on Epicurus, *Key Doctrines* 29, quoted in Annas, *Happiness,* 190.

The second type of desire is described as the natural but unnecessary. These are desires that we would like or want but we do not need. They can be natural and choice worthy as long as they do not cause the type of pain associated with empty desires. For example, I need a jacket to walk down the street because it is very cold. I go to my closet to get my favourite jacket, but find that it is not there, I have left it elsewhere. If I can use an alternative jacket without disturbing my tranquillity then I have a natural but unnecessary desire to wear this favourite jacket. If I get angry and turn my closet inside out looking for it, blaming someone else for my leaving it elsewhere, rant and rave, and let it ruin my whole day, then the desire I had to wear that jacket was empty. I have judged (falsely) that there is nothing else that can keep me warm enough to venture outside on a cold day. Unnecessary desires have the potential to become empty desires if they are not respected and chosen in a prudent manner.

The third kind, are the empty desires, which are neither natural nor necessary. These desires will never lead the desirer to happiness and tranquillity; they are harmful and cause pain and anxiety because they can never be satisfied. Therefore there are the three classifications of desires: natural and necessary, natural and unnecessary and unnatural and unnecessary, this last group is otherwise known as the empty desires.

It is tempting to look to the Scholion on *Key Doctrine* 29 above and classify the desires as this anonymous Epicurean once did.[30] However, there is more to understanding which desires to pursue than following someone else's lead. How the desires are determined is dependent on the nature of the person. Of particularl interest, because they can be difficult to determine is the second type of desire, the natural but unnecessary. Annas explains that the distinction between a natural and unnecessary desire and an empty desire can be blurred and an object can fit into both categories.[31] Epicurus did not condemn the unnecessary desires but the *way* in which they were sought. Therefore, it is not the desire that corrupts, but the anxiety and pain it will cause the person who is concerned by it not being fulfilled. So similarly to the jacket example, someone may have a desire for wine, and that desire does not need to be harmful. But if that person cares very much whether they have wine and becomes anxious and cannot be happy without it

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[30] Annas, *Happiness,* 192.
[31] Ibid.

the desire becomes an empty desire. So the desire will change dependent on that person's belief about the object.[32]

To achieve our end, the *katastematic* state of tranquillity, we should only pursue the desires of the first two categories: the natural and necessary desires, which we require for tranquillity, and the natural but unnecessary desires, which can give us a varied and different experience of pleasure.

> We must not compel nature but persuade her; and we should persuade her by fulfilling the necessary desires, and the natural ones if they do no harm, but harshly rebuking the harmful ones. [33]

By teaching us about the types of desires we have, Epicurus has given us a formula, where we can contrast the right, choice worthy desires with the empty and harmful ones. This provides us with a flexible guide to direct our actions towards our final end of *katastematic* pleasure and the Epicurean goal; a life lived tranquilly.

> If the causes of the pleasures of the dissipated released mental fears concerning celestial phenomena and death and distress, and in addition taught the limit of desires, we should never have any reason to reproach them, since they would be satisfying themselves with pleasures from all directions and would never have pain and distress, which constitutes the bad. [34]

II.IV   Understanding Katastematic and Kinetic Pleasures

The role of *katastematic* and kinetic pleasure is one of the most widely interpreted, controversial and misunderstood in Epicurean theory. Epicurus tells us that a life lived pleasantly and tranquilly is one lived in *katastematic* pleasure.

> The pleasure we pursue is not just that which moves our actual nature with some gratification and is perceived by the senses in company with a certain

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[32] Annas, *Happiness*, 192.
[33] Epicurus, *Vatican Sayings* 21, trans. Long and Sedley, 115-6.
[34] Epicurus, *Key Doctrines* 10, trans. Long and Sedley, 115.

delight; we hold that to be the greatest pleasure which is perceived once all pain has been removed.[35]

Katastematic pleasure describes a way of being where one is free from all bodily and mental pain. Where one is tranquilly, peacefully and painlessly experiencing life in the most pleasurable of ways. Nonetheless, *katastematic* pleasure is something more than an absence of pain. There is a positive phenomenological quality to it, in that we become tranquil, we enjoy, we rejoice in the absence of pain.

> For when we are freed from pain, we rejoice in the actual freedom and absence of all distress; but everything in which we rejoice is pleasure, just as everything that distresses us is pain; therefore the complete removal of pain has rightly been called pleasure.[36]

Epicurean theorists break down *katastematic* pleasure into two components, *ataraxia* and *aponia;* these respectively represent freedom from disturbance of the soul (tranquillity) and freedom from pain in the body. Many theories place a distinct emphasis on Epicurus' distinction between the two kinds of pleasure and misconstrue this distinction as implying that the two are different and independent kinds of pleasure. If we are to regard living pleasantly as a state of being where everything works in harmony to create a life lived tranquilly, then such a distinction must be false. Gosling and Taylor explain in their text *The Greeks on Pleasure*[37] that regarding *katastematic* and kinetic pleasure as two separate types of pleasure ascribes awkwardness to Epicurus' theory.[38] Many interpretations of Epicurean theory grant that the ultimate good of *katastematic* pleasure is composed of *ataraxia* and *aponia,* but they also claim that the combination of these two descriptions of being distinguishes *katastematic* from kinetic pleasures. Gosling and Taylor argue that Epicurus was very insistent that kinetic pleasures were equally as good when they are chosen for the right reasons and they *were* included in Epicurus' idea of *ataraxia* and *aponia.* Annas adds to this understanding of the mutual dependence *katastematic* and kinetic pleasure has by highlighting Epicurus'

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[35] Cicero, *On Ends,* 1.37 trans. Long and Sedley, 113.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Gosling, J.C.B., and C.C.W. Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982)
[38] Gosling and Taylor, *Greeks on Pleasure,* 371.

insistence that it is impossible to know how to conceive of pleasure if the kinetic pleasures of taste and smell, hearing, the pleasures of sex and of seeing beautiful objects were removed.[39]

Gosling and Taylor's interpretation of Epicurus' *katastematic* pleasure describes the state as one where everything is working correctly. In a passage from Cicero they note that Epicurus did not believe that sensory pleasures were of the greatest good but that there would be nothing left in a good life if they were not included.[40]

> For my part I cannot understand what that good is if one subtracts those pleasures perceived by taste, those from hearing and music, and those sweet movements, too, got from visual perception of shapes or any of the other pleasures generated by sense in the whole man. Nor can one hold that joy of mind is alone among the goods. For as I understand it the mind is in a state of joy when it has hope for all those things I have mentioned above, that nature may acquire them with complete absence of pain ... I have often enquired of those who were called wise what they had left among the goods if they removed those ones, unless they wanted to emit empty noises; I could learn nothing from them; if they want to boast about virtues and wisdom they will say nothing unless they mean the way by which those pleasures are achieved which I mentioned above.[41]

Epicurus knew that kinetic pleasures were a good to be enjoyed in the pursuit of *ataraxia* and *aponia*. Gosling and Taylor say that to regard *katastematic* and kinetic pleasure as two distinct things causes confusion about how we achieve our end goal. They believe that there is evidence in Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* that implies a connection between *ataraxia* and *aponia* that differs from the general consensus of Epicurean scholars. The pair argue that *ataraxia* and *aponia* should be regarded as a combined positive state initiated from the confidence that one may acquire sensory kinetic pleasures, now and in the future, with an absence of pain. Specifically, *aponia* is a condition of *having* sensory pleasures with no accompanying pain and *ataraxia* is a state

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[39] Annas, *Happiness,* 236.
[40] Gosling and Taylor, *Greeks on Pleasure*, 368.
[41] Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 3.41-2, quoted in Gosling and Taylor, *Greeks on Pleasure,* 368.

of confidence that one can *have* sensory pleasures with no accompanying pain.[42] They argue that this differentiation accounts for someone who may be painlessly experiencing sensory pleasures, but at the same time be burdened by false beliefs about death, the gods, a luxurious diet, the limits of bodily pleasure, about a long life and so on. These false beliefs disturb the mind and to obtain *ataraxia* one must remove them. But more than the absence of false beliefs is needed for *ataraxia;* they must be replaced with true ones, which allow a person to confidently expect a good and pleasant life. Without the removal of all anxiety, *katastematic* pleasure cannot be achieved. What is important for Epicurus, Gosling and Taylor explain, is to achieve a life of sensory pleasure untainted by pain. Where one is living pleasantly and confidently: '*ataraxia* is itself geared to *aponia*, and joy of mind generally is a matter of memory and expectation of unadulterated pleasure, based on true belief.'[43] *Ataraxia* and *aponia* are our *katastematic* pleasure, they are two components of the one thing. One component that enjoys the state and the other which controls and maintains it.

Although this interpretation is helpful in clarifying the relationship between the kinetic and *katastematic* pleasures, Gosling and Taylor do not go far enough in allowing for a similar relationship to be made between *katastematic* pleasure and other goods. I argue that for Epicurus, *ataraxia* is not *only* a confidence that we can experience kinetic pleasures with no pain, but also that we enjoy, we become tranquil, we rejoice in the experience of those kinetic pleasures. It is not just the absence of pain which creates *katastematic* pleasure, but the tranquil enjoyment of painlessness. This additional experiential description of what it is like to experience painlessness is important for understanding the relationship *katastematic* pleasure has with other things that we value, like friendships and family. It allows us to understand that we can live tranquilly even without the kinetic pleasures, because we can interchange the kinetic pleasures with friendships, and so forth.

It is not just the positive experience that requires further explanation to understand the correct functioning of *katastematic* pleasure. As we saw in the last section one must also avoid empty desires and false belief. Gosling and Taylor explain that the reason for

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[42] Gosling and Taylor, *Greeks on Pleasure,* 371.
[43] Ibid.

Epicurus' objection to the profligates is that they hold false beliefs about what brings about the greatest pleasure. If one holds the mistaken view that a life should be filled only with kinetic pleasures, such a person will fail to remove anxiety, and therefore will not have attained the highest pleasure. Take for example the false belief that fine food is necessary, such a belief will undoubtedly create an empty desire because its nature is such that it is a desire for something that is very difficult to maintain. Either it will lead one to excess, or will become beyond their means and consequently in both cases cause the desirer distress. The fear of losing what they desire threatens any pleasure they may receive from their delicacies.[44] We should note that Gosling and Taylor do not want to say that all sensory pleasures can lead to *katastematic* pleasure, but they do say that *aponia* is a condition of having painless sensory pleasures. They argue that it could be expected that *katastematic* pleasure is the pleasure we have of the organism working properly and pain is a state of its unnatural operation, therefore it follows that kinetic pleasures are not a different kind of pleasure from *katastematic* pleasure, instead they are an integral part to the operation working correctly. This is why Epicurus would not have needed to stress the importance of kinetic pleasures in his view.[45]

This understanding of Epicurean theory does not require us to sacrifice certain kinetic pleasures. Instead it shows us that if a kinetic pleasure causes pain, this pain can jeopardise our *katastematic* pleasure and we need to consider how we will manage this. Suppose Jones is in his 40s but still loves to snowboard with his friends at his favourite mountain resort. He loves the kinetic pleasure of gliding, jumping, flying through the air etc. He also knows that if he does this an old knee injury will flair up and he will be in pain for days after. If he can reasonably forsee that that this chronic pain is one he can handle without becoming irascible, it does not threaten his tranquillity, he can continue to visit the mountain and snowboard all day with his friends. But he will doubtless realise one day that it was *easier* to live a tranquil life in the days before his snowboarding meant a loss of *aponia.* If, however, he is so determined to hold onto his favourite pastime and still be able to hurl himself off jumps and through the air, but forsees that his knee cannot continue to hold when he lands, and that the likelihood of another serious injury will threaten the pursuit of his other goals, then he should stop

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[44] Gosling and Taylor, *Greeks on Pleasure,* 371.
[45] Ibid., 374.

trying to do so. If he tries to hold on to the memories of what he could do when he was in his 20s and before his knee injury and only value his snowboarding if he can do those things then his desire for snowboarding has become empty and he should abandon its pursuit. This is not because the desire to snowboard is an empty desire *per se*. It is only an empty desire for him at this point of his life because he cannot pursue it in a way that is consistent with his overall goal to live tranquilly.

This differs from many of the other interpretations of Epicurus that are advocated, which then see this sacrifice as an unintelligible and fundamental flaw in his theory. Many of these unfavourable interpretations make the mistake of designating a definite distinction between *katastematic* and kinetic pleasures. They advocate that the greatest good is *katastematic* pleasure, which it is, but they do not realise that kinetic pleasures are important components of this state. Kinetic pleasures can be experienced at any time: they are the satisfaction of our natural desires, and they play an important role in the realisation of *katastematic* pleasure because they create the situations, along with other goods, where this state arises.

It is of course possible to gain pleasure from satisfying empty desires, but according to Epicureanism, although these are undeniably and immediately pleasurable, the fulfilling of these desires is not choice worthy because they will never lead us to our desired state. Some may say that without fulfilling our natural and necessary or even unnecessary desires in a kinetically pleasurable way, we can still have *katastematic* pleasure, but that would be a rather short and brutish life requiring us to sacrifice nutrition, love, family, friends, laughter and many other things which make a life pleasurable. It is hard to see how one could achieve tranquillity without the inclusion of things that make life pleasurable. So the distinction between kinetic and *katastematic* pleasure that Epicurus gives us, allows us to see that *katastematic* pleasure is created out of kinetically pleasurable experiences as well as the experiences we share with friends, family and other things we can value for their own sake. The reason for the differentiation is because kinetic pleasures, that are also interchangeable with other goods, are the content of the one experience — a life lived tranquilly.

So *katastematic* pleasure can only occur when the body and mind are in harmony and functioning correctly. It is the pleasure we receive when we satisfy our natural desires

like, nutrition and good health, shelter, love from friends and family, freedom from starvation (which is separate from nutrition in that we can be free from starvation by eating only white bread, but this will not allow us to lead a healthy life without concerns about future ailments, undoubtedly causing anxiety), music, appreciation of beauty and knowledge. All these things that are good in and of themselves, not merely because they give us pleasure, and we value them accordingly. When pursued for the right reasons, they do however give us pleasure, but they do so in a way which give us confidence that they will not bring us any accompanying pain. In turn this knowledge frees us from anxiety and allows us to revel in the tranquil enjoyment of painlessness. This state of peaceful tranquillity is the greatest kind of pleasure.

Epicurus also told us that once *katastematic* pleasure is reached it is the limit of our pleasure; it can never be increased, only varied or embellished. I completely agree with Epicurus on this point, and clarify his argument by stating that the limit to pleasure can only be applied to the *katastematic* state, but that it is more than possible to increase, and decrease our kinetic pleasures. The limit to *katastematic* pleasure is best explained as a state when our body and mind are working in perfect harmony and have created our perfectly tranquil way of living. This is a state that cannot be increased, it is instead a way of being. This state also helps protect us from the invasion of the empty desires, of alcoholism, gluttony, drug addiction, and unmitigated desire for wealth, status and power — all those things seen as base, harmful or evil. *Katastematic* pleasure allows us to not only experience the greatest of all pleasures but it allows us to see that satisfying empty desires can only lead to pain. This is where the limit on the pleasure we experience in a *katastematic* state is of use to an Epicurean; if we cannot continue to gain more and more pleasure from the state then there is no point in pursuing more unattainable pleasures, as they will only lead us to anxiety and pain when we cannot realise them. If we are not living tranquilly after we have fulfilled a desire, we can know that this desire is empty. It makes us realise that once we reach a tranquil and peaceful state of *katastematic* pleasure, we have reached not only the greatest of all pleasure, but we have also reached the greatest of all goods. This allows us to be content with what we do have and not pursue pleasure to our detriment. This is also how we determine the categories of desire. We can experience any kinetic pleasure that exists but only if it is of the natural kind. Realising this and using this information to guide us in our lives, will lead us to the Epicurean life.

Once we have got this, all the soul's tumult is released, since the creature cannot go as in pursuit of something it needs and search for any second thing as the means of maximising the good of the soul and the body.[46]

II.V   Understanding Katastematic Pleasure and Other Goods

For the time when we need pleasure is when we are in pain from the absence of pleasure. But when we are not in pain we no longer need pleasure. This is why we say that pleasure is the beginning and end of the blessed life. For we recognise pleasure as the good which is primary and congenital; from it we begin every choice and avoidance, and we come back to it, using the feeling as the yardstick for judging every good thing.[47]

There are many ways in which we can live tranquilly and because there is not a specific list of things we must pursue, we can include a multitude of things including: family, friendships, good health, food and drink, art and culture, care for the environment and other people. That being said, such endeavours must be pursued in a virtuous way, and one must recognise how one desires them and what sort of effect they have on one's tranquillity. This concept is epitomised in the above quote from Epicurus which says that we should judge everything we do on the pleasure we receive from it. Consistent with how I have just explained pleasure this means that we must evaluate whether an action is consistent with the two positive types of desires and whether it is conducive to tranquillity.

It has however been claimed that because of this seemingly narrow objective that those things we desire for the tranquil life can only be instrumental in the pursuit of pleasure. I have already determined the sense in which pleasure is the *telos* of a happy life for Epicureans. I have also insisted that pleasure as an object we desire rests too heavily on the contemporary conception of value monistic hedonism. Epicureanism is quite unlike these contemporary forms; instead it values a plurality of things which are good in and of

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[46] Epicurus, *Letters to Menoeceus* 128, trans. Long and Sedley, 113.
[47] Ibid., 113-4.

themselves. Further, it is particularly important that we not only value things and experiences as being good, but also those who we care about, not as a means to an end, but as a good in and of themselves. Placing instrumental value on other people is clearly not compatible with living virtuously, and it is not the way an Epicurean should value others, in particular, not a Modern Epicurean. A Modern Epicurean, by bringing other people into their network of goods, creates a tranquil life, and this should not be mistaken as meaning that those people are a means to such a life. Instead it means that when we live in a way which includes friends we value in the right way, we realise that we are living tranquilly, and this is the greatest good.

There is a perceived problem for traditional Epicureanism that arises when we look at what it means for an Epicurean to assert that *katastematic* pleasure is the highest and most desirable of goods. It is hard to see how you can have true friendships without sacrificing pleasure at some point. It is obvious that sometimes friends do not always give us pleasure. Sometimes we have to help them move house in hot weather, listen to their sad stories, comfort them and make sacrifices purely for their sake. A friendship requires us to give as well as take and this includes things that do not necessarily involve experiencing pleasure. Epicurus knew this and to read him in a way that ignores this aspect of friendship is misleading and does not understand how Epicureanism is a practical theory of the good which requires that we value the people in our lives in the right way.

The dispute over the interpretation of *Vatican Saying* 23 has undoubtedly caused confusion over how Epicurus said we should value our friends; it is not even clear whether Epicurus was the author of this sentence or not, casting further doubt over how much credence we should put in its claim. Nonetheless, if we grant that these were the words of Epicurus, or at the very least one of his 'more timid', 'more recent' Epicureans, as Cicero suggests of Torquatas in *On Ends,*[48] this inclusion in Epicurean theory answers the criticism of Epicureanism that it can only value friendship for the sake of pleasure. The most common translations of *Vatican Saying* 23 tell us that either: 'Friendship is an

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[48] Eric Brown, "Politics and Society," *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism,* ed. Warren James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 188.

intrinsic *virtue*',[49] or 'Every friendship is by itself a virtue,'[50] or further as the widely accepted Usener emendation explains, 'Every friendship is worth choosing for its own sake.'[51] One thing is clear in each of these translations; not one of them suggests that friendship is something we value instrumentally.

Therefore, it is perfectly reasonable for us to believe that Epicurus acknowledged that friends have value in and of themselves and that there is no other way a friendship can be. It is completely compatible for an Epicurean to value friends for their own sake and also to make living pleasantly and tranquilly her final end. Moreover, living a life full of good experiences, people and pleasure, one which avoids anxiety and pain, *will* result in a tranquil existence. But the way in which this can be understood is by changing how we regard the actions we partake in to create *katastematic* pleasure. We need to see *katastematic* pleasure not as a thing but as a way. For an Epicurean, this state is the greatest of all goods: it is the pleasure we receive when fulfilling our natural desires and our desire for friendship is a natural one. This state is what we describe as living tranquilly, we are experiencing all of these things in combination and we enjoy it, we rejoice in it. Furthermore, because Epicureanism values more than one thing as good in the pursuit of the *telos*, it is intuitive that one of these things is friendship. In fact living tranquilly would be unachievable without it.

> [One cannot live pleasurably without living intelligently, nobly, and becomingly], and also bravely, temperately, generously, in a way that makes friends, with goodwill to mankind, and in general without all the other virtues existing in oneself; because the greatest errors in our choices and avoidances occur when people who think the opposite [i.e. that pleasure can be obtained otherwise] and thus are in the grip of the vices act as they do.[52]

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[49] Epicurus, *Vatican Sayings* 23, trans. Long and Sedley, 126.

[50] Epicurus, *Vatican Sayings* 23, quoted in Brown, "Politics and Society," 183.

[51] Epicurus, *Vatican Sayings* 23, trans. Inwood and Gerson, quoted in Russell, "Epicurus on Friends", 167.

[52] Philodemus, *On Choices and Avoidances,* quoted in David Armstrong, "Epicurean Virtues, Epicurean Friendship: Cicero vs the Herculaneum Papyri." In *Epicurus and the Epicurean Tradition,* edited by Jeffery Fish and Kirk R. Sanders. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011), 124.

There are of course readings of Epicurus which claim that only pleasure could lead to *katastematic* pleasure — the tranquil life — but from this quote above and from what I have shown through the work of Julia Annas we can see that the ancient theories strongly held on to the belief that a virtuous life which practised genuine concern for others was essential to *eudaimonia*. It was the same for Epicurus as it was for Aristotle and such a standpoint is implied in the existing works of Epicurus. Dan Russell shares a similar belief, and develops a solution for the unintuitive problem of genuine other concern.[53]

Russell outlines the problem as being, 'How can I do everything for the sake of my own pleasure, and do some things for the sake of other people?'[54] He presents the Usener emendation where Epicurus tells us 'every friendship is worth choosing for its own sake, though it takes its origin from the benefits it confers on us.'[55] Russell takes this statement from Epicurus to present two main lines of thought in Epicurus' conception of friendship: (1) a real friendship must be something that friends pursue for its own sake, and (2) much of the point of a friendship is what friends can gain from that friendship. This, says Russell, is not to give a 'mercenary' description of friendships but rather to say that there are things in which we gain from friendships. Friendships do not need to be selfless endeavours, because however devoted I am to my friend, my interests also count, and there are limits to what a friendship can take. There must always be 'a balance of both interests and motivations.'[56] So there is no reason that compels us to make huge sacrifices on account of a friendship.

Russell describes the problem with Epicurus' idea of friendship as the 'loose ends' problem. He explains that friendship must be a 'loose end' because it is something that I take to be good in itself and not because it promotes my tranquillity. So the value is detached from my final end of pleasure. It is a loose end.[57] Other philosophers have argued that if we dilute or play with the notion of friendship we may find a resolution to

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[53] Russell, "Epicurus and Friends".

[54] Ibid., 167.

[55] Epicurus, *Vatican Sayings* 23, , trans. Inwood and Gerson, quoted in Russell, "Epicurus and Friends," 167.

[56] Russell, "Epicurus and Friends," 167.

[57] Ibid., 170.

the problem. John Cooper argues that friendships are more of a way of passing time so as not to lapse into boredom.[58] David O'Connor argues that an Epicurean will choose the friendship for its own sake instead of valuing the friends themselves.[59] Tim O'Keefe argues that loving a friend is a range of behaviours with respect to that friend.[60] But Russell argues quite legitimately against these viewpoints because he says that weakening Epicurus' concept of friendship makes it hard to see how one can take pleasure in the memory and idea of certain friends. Even so, Russell tells us, we cannot dilute the value that Epicurus gives to friendships because a 'diluted conception' will not match what Epicurus tells us is the role friendships play in a good life.[61]

Russell wonders if Annas' solution to the problem, which asks us to see Epicurus' conception of friendship as a two level view of practical reasoning, is legitimate,

> In making and keeping friends, we do not refer every act of friendship to increasing our overall pleasure; rather we accept as our aim that of having genuine other concern for our friends. But the aim of this whole policy, of having friends rather than coping with life in some other way, is guided by the aim of increasing our pleasure. Thus pleasure is our aim when we are thinking of the policy as a whole; but it is not our aim in individual acts of friendship, which are aimed at the friend's good for its own sake.[62]

But not even Annas can deny that Epicurus ruled out a two-level view when he said in *Key Doctrine* 25 that we must always 'refer our actions to our goal of tranquillity'.[63] Russell says that Epicurus would not have believed in a two-level view that would have us compartmentalise our concern for our friends, in either the individual actions we take or in the value we place on them, from the concern for our own pleasure.[64] Further, constructing a two-level view of friendship admits that the two-levels will conflict with each other and therefore the two-levels will be unstable, making the adoption of such a

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[58] Quoted in Russell, "Epicurus and Friends," 171.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid., 171-2.
[62] Annas, *Happiness*, quoted in Russell, "Epicurus and Friends," 172.
[63] Epicurus, *Key Doctrine* 25 & *Letters to Menoeceus* 128, quoted in Russell, "Epicurus and Friends," 172.
[64] Russell, "Epicurus and Friends," 173.

view irrational.[65] Such a view is not only a conflicting and unworkable way to consider Epicurus, but ultimately it violates the virtue condition he places on obtaining pleasure; it cannot be virtuous to use someone as an instrument for your own pleasure. Epicurus insisted that an Epicurean must always act virtuously otherwise our *katastematic* pleasure will be compromised.

Russell's solution to the problem argues that to value a friend for his or her own sake does not need to be seen as a loose end when we consider Epicurus' hedonic conception of our final end in the right way. He argues that it is perfectly consistent to value a friend for his or her own sake. To do this we need to understand what it means for Epicurus to refer our actions, values and projects to the final end of tranquillity. In his view referring our choice of a friendship to our final end of tranquillity is perfectly consistent with Epicurus' teachings. So if we claim that,

> (A) Everything I do, I refer to the goal of pleasure

It does not follow that,

> (B) Everything I do, I do for the sake of pleasure.

Russell says that because the latter inference is invalid therein lies the key to valuing friends for their own sake and at the same time directing all our actions towards *katastematic* pleasure.[66]

Russell argues that if we approach the loose ends problem from this angle we can say that for the Epicurean 'all goods form a network in which all goods beside pleasure must be appropriately connected to pleasure.'[67] So anything that is within that network must be connected to pleasure and can be a good. Arguably some aspects of friendship are definitely within this network; friends bring us security which is necessary for peace of mind and undoubtedly friends can bring us happiness. However, Epicurus says that we

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[65] Russell, "Epicurus and Friends," 173.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.

must pursue friendship for its own sake. So Russell asks if pursuing a friendship for its own sake can be brought into the network that is connected to pleasure. Russell sees that when we consider pursuing a friendship in connection to pleasure it could be possible to say that it can increase the sum, quality, duration and or intensity of our pleasures. But Epicurus rejects any maximising condition on *katastematic* pleasure. This is because he believes that *katastematic* pleasure can never be increased, only varied. Russell correctly realised that this means he must also reject a friendship maximising conception of *katastematic* pleasure.[68]

For Epicurus kinetic pleasures vary our *katastematic* pleasure but cannot increase it. They do however make *katastematic* pleasure possible. Russell sees these two qualities as ways that the two concepts are connected. But he says there is a third type of connection. Kinetic pleasures, he says, are goods in and of themselves — not merely because they vary our *katastematic* pleasure but because they are goods in and of themselves by virtue of the fact that they are types of pleasure. This could cause confusion about what pleasures we are to seek. Should we seek *katastematic* pleasure or should we seek the kinetic pleasures? But, Russell tells us that Epicurus clears up this confusion by explaining that although every kinetic pleasure is good for its own sake and worth pursuing we cannot base our lives around intermittent experiences of kinetic pleasure. What we get from a life that includes a multitude of things that are good for their own sake is something that meets our need to have a cohesive and full life, which is something that kinetic pleasures cannot do by themselves. Tranquillity on the other hand can be the object of a life plan in the way that episodes of enjoyment cannot. 'So we must have some single final end to regulate how, when and where we are to partake of kinetic pleasure.'[69] Our desire for *katastematic* pleasure allows us to determine which kinetic pleasures will lead us to *katastematic* pleasure, and Russell argues these must be separate from each other. Russell says that therefore *katastematic* pleasure can be our final end because it offers us guidance and gives us a perspective on how we should live our life as a whole. This regulating that *katastematic* pleasure does, can allow us to forgo some kinetic pleasures and may even involve experiencing some pains. But Russell tells us that even though we are pursuing things that are not necessarily pleasurable, we are

[68] Russell, "Epicurus and Friends," 175.
[69] Ibid.

not abandoning hedonism because the final end is still one of pleasure. Our pursuit of these other goods still allows us to be hedonists because everything we choose to pursue is 'regulated' by our overarching need for tranquillity and therefore refers to our final end of *katastematic* pleasure.[70]

Russell tells us that anything an Epicurean pursues for its own sake must be determined as rational from their perspective to pursue it. An Epicurean needs to determine whether or not it leads them to their final end. So Russell is not arguing that friendships are kinds of kinetic pleasures, but that there is a regulative network that exists between kinetic and *katastematic* pleasure and this is the same kind of network that exists between friendships and *katastematic* pleasure. This regulative connection can make friendship something we pursue for its own sake and also connected to our final end of tranquillity. Furthermore, there is no need for an Epicurean to believe that the only goods are pleasures; they must however believe that all the goods that they do pursue will lead them to *katastematic* pleasure. 'If pleasure is the final end which regulates all of my pursuits, then I can be a hedonist even while I pursue certain goods, such as friendships for non-hedonic reasons.'[71]

II.VI   Living Tranquilly

What Russell has done here is explained how an Epicurean can pursue friendships and still 'aim at' pleasure. There is much we can take from Russell, in that we aim all our actions at the final end of tranquillity, and that there is a distinct difference between *katastematic* and kinetic pleasure which allows us to substitute things like friendship in place of the kinetic pleasures.

However, I hold that to live as an Epicurean is to live tranquilly, and this presents a slight difference to Russell's view. Russell refers to the *telos* as tranquillity; I hold it is better to understand it as living tranquilly. This may appear as if I am splitting hairs, but there is an important difference. Tranquillity can be viewed as a thing or an object to

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[70] Russell, "Epicurus and Friends," 176.
[71] Ibid., 177.

which we aim and can thus result in a perception that there are things which are instrumental in obtaining it. Living tranquilly on the other hand is a *way* of living one's life. This adverbial conception, I believe, is more consistent with the ancient theories' view of the good life and understanding of the *telos*. It ensures there is no confusion between aiming at an object and aiming to live our lives in a certain way. To illustrate this point we may consider a musician who tells us that her *telos* is excellence. But this does not mean that playing music for her is merely a means to excellence. She is a real musician who values the music she makes as important in and of itself. She plays music for its own sake, for the art of making music; she plays excellently because she knows this is where the value of playing music lies. Living tranquilly and referring every choice to the goal of living tranquilly is to live in pursuit of a *telos*. Therefore, Epicureanism values the way in which we reach our end goal and this allows us to value a plurality of things: the kinetic pleasures, living virtuously, genuinely caring for our friends and family. These are the things that make up our life, and the tranquil enjoyment we have of these things is the best way our lives can be. When we are not tormented by the false opinions 'that beset souls with the greatest confusion',[72] when we live in a way that eliminates anxiety, where we rejoice in and enjoy our tranquillity, and where we have the confidence that this state will continue, we are living life in the most pleasant manner possible.

> I expect people will understand that cruelty brings hatred from all and justice and mercy bring their love, and that what bad men try for and lust after comes instead to the good. It is hard to convince men that virtue is desirable in itself. But that pleasure and tranquillity come through virtue, justice and goodness is both true and capable of proof.[73]

II.VII Reconciling the Pleasures and the Goods

The further difference that this reading has to Russell's is that he believes that *katastematic* and kinetic pleasure are two distinct things. He says the two are opposed as

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[72] Epicurus, *Letters to Menoeceus* 131, trans. Long and Sedley, 114.
[73] Cicero, *Fam.* 15.19.1-3 *On this Letter*, cf. Griffin 1999, quoted in Armstrong, "Epicurean Virtues", 113.

kinetic pleasures are the phenomenal experiences of pleasure and *katastematic* pleasure is not an active state but one which occurs when all mental and physical pain is removed.[74] This suggests that there is no phenomenal character to *katastematic* pleasure. But this is not the case. *Katastematic* and kinetic pleasures are not two distinct things. K*atastematic* pleasure occurs when our body and mind are working in perfect harmony and we are free from all troubles, where we are living tranquilly and peacefully. Yet there are things that we *will* be doing and experiencing when living tranquilly. When we have chosen to pursue those natural desires that do not give us any pain now, or in the future, this leads us to this most desirable state.

So, we cannot have *katastematic* pleasure without experiencing some aggregate of kinetic pleasures. Consider what kinetic pleasures are: like enjoying the taste of a glass of wine, enjoying sitting in a beautiful garden, enjoying a warm breeze or the sun on your back, or enjoying spending time with a certain someone. These are all kinetic pleasures and are particularly pleasant ways of being tranquil and importantly they are pleasant parts of our *katastematic* pleasure. They can all exist independently of one another, there is no link that one has to the other, and it is not that once we experience a kinetic pleasure that we have achieved *katastematic* pleasure. What it required for them to be a part of *katastematic* pleasure is that one must be tranquilly enjoying such kinetic pleasures with the absence of pain. Therefore k*atastematic* pleasure is the tranquil enjoyment of being pleased that one is enjoying such pleasures.

The same can be said for the relationship between *katastematic* pleasure and the other goods we choose for their own sake, those, which refer us to our end of *katastematic* pleasure. Involving them in our lives amounts to a state where the experience of *katastematic* pleasure occurs. Friendships and valuing family, although they are not pleasures, also have the ability to contribute to *katastematic* pleasure and make it more accessible to those who believe that valuing these things are integral to a good life.

The above example is one way *katastematic* pleasure can be, and it can be many different ways. It is, afterall, a subjective experience. What is definitive about it is that it is

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[74] Russell,"Epicurus on Friends," 174.

composed of one or more things, but importantly, they must be experienced tranquilly with an absence of pain. When we are peacefully and tranquilly experiencing kinetic pleasures, then we have reached that state of being that an Epicurean should seek. In the same way that we tranquilly enjoy kinetic pleasures because they are good in and of themselves, we also enjoy other things that are good in and of themselves: virtues, friendships, family and so on. This is because they also have the ability to constitute a state lived tranquilly.

Katastematic pleasure is not a thing that you can obtain; instead it is a way of being. For example, I can say that 'I want to have tranquillity', but I cannot say, 'I want to have living tranquilly.' The latter makes no sense; instead I would say, 'I want to live tranquilly'. *Katastematic* pleasure is the experience of living tranquilly; it is something that occurs only when everything is working in perfect harmony. The tranquil life cannot be separated from the kinetic pleasures and other goods, because they are what constitute the state. There are things like anxiety, hatred and fear, that will affect one's ability to live tranquilly, and we must be careful to not allow these things into our lives. It may come about that even though we are experiencing all of those things which would normally make us tranquil, we could be worried by some false belief that jeopardises our tranquillity. Such beliefs and the desires for them are to be avoided at all times. *Katastematic* pleasure is the state of being that occurs when all is working in a way that is peaceful and harmonious. This state is the limit of our pleasure. It is possible to change the way we experience this state, for instance we can enjoy different kinetic pleasures and goods in different situations with different friends, but we cannot increase the amount of pleasure we have once we have reached this state. You are either living tranquilly or you are not; such a state cannot be increased or decreased. This is what Epicurus meant when he said that there was a limit to our pleasure.

II.VIII   The Limit of Pleasure and Luxuries

The pleasure of the flesh does not increase when once the pain of need has
been removed, but it is only varied. And the limit of pleasure in the mind is

produced by rationalising those very things and their congeners which used to present the mind with its greatest fears.[75]

This excerpt from Epicurus appears to claim two things: that pleasure can never be increased and further that all pleasure must have the same phenomenal experience. If we conceive of pleasure as having only one aspect then such a claim appears absurd. How could Epicurus possibly have argued that eating stale bread and feasting on a banquet held the same amount of pleasure? Obviously some experiences are more pleasurable than others. Thankfully, Epicurus is not claiming that all pleasure is the same, but he is saying that the removal of pain brings about the greatest pleasure. So instead we should understand this excerpt as explaining the relationship the two types of pleasure have on this ultimate state. The pleasure Epicurus refers to in this quote is the ultimate conception of pleasure — *katastematic* pleasure — and this form of pleasure does in fact have the one phenomenal experience, that of living tranquilly and being free from pain.

The other type of pleasure we can experience, say of eating, is a kinetic pleasure and that can be increased, or decreased, but the pleasure of a feast instead of stale bread, does not change the enjoyment and peaceful feeling of a full belly. The belly is full either way and the pain from hunger has been removed. The state of *katastematic* pleasure has been achieved; the state of having the desire for food has been sated. So, we can say that some experiences are more kinetically pleasurable than others, but we cannot say that we can increase our *katastematic* state. It is rational for us to choose a feast over a piece of stale bread because it is more pleasant, but the feast will not make our life better in relation to happiness. So Epicurus tells us that once we have achieved our state of *katastematic* pleasure, nothing can improve upon it or increase it. Once pain and worry is absent it can not be made 'more' absent. Epicurus does not tell us that we should be happy to survive on bread and water, and he undoubtedly allows for some experiences of fine foods when he says in *Letters to Menoeceus* 130,

Plain flavours produce pleasure equal to an expensive diet whenever all the pain of need has been removed; and bread and water generate the highest pleasure whenever they are taken by one who needs them. Therefore the habit

[75] Epicurus, *Key Doctrines* 18, trans. Long and Sedley, 115.

of simple and inexpensive diet maximises health and makes a man energetic in
facing the necessary business of daily life; it also strengthens our character
when we encounter luxuries from time to time, and emboldens us in the face of
fortune.[76]

Epicurus undeniably proclaims the simple life is always a reliable pathway and an option
most conducive to the tranquil life. This is because it protects us from anxiety and empty
desires. Therefore, he does not say that bread and water are all a person needs. Rather,
he says that when a starving person is given them they will generate the highest
pleasure. These are two very different statements. This passage also shows us that he
does not condemn luxurious ways, but the way in which they were sought. It is not the
luxury that corrupts, but the anxiety and pain it will cause the person who is concerned
by its absence. So we should not reject fine things, rather, we should be happy to be
without them if need be.

Raphael Woolf discusses Epicurus' rejection of luxury and comes to the conclusion that
Epicurus did not reject luxurious pleasure because it was an evil, but because Epicureans
should be content to live the simple life.[77] If a luxury came their way, as long as they felt
no pain about not having that luxury at some future time, there was no reason to avoid
it. He uses an example of an Epicurean who when catching a plane is offered an upgrade
to business class from economy. Woolf states, 'The Epicurean, it seems to me, will
accept. The Epicurean had no desire for or expectation of an upgrade, is perfectly
content without one, and would remain so if unselected.'[78] This seems plausible. In a
comparative line of argument presented in this chapter, Woolf rejects the limit of
pleasure claim made by Epicurean scholars. He says, 'At this point Epicurus has no wish
to deny the obvious, that subject to the details of the given case, sober reasoning might
be expected to declare that luxury promises a greater quantum of pleasure than
simplicity, and is thereby to be chosen.'[79] This may appear a perfectly acceptable claim to
make, but it is not compatible with Epicurus' insistence on the limit of pleasure — that

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[76] Epicurus, *Letters to Menoeceus* 130, trans. Long and Sedley, 114.
[77] Raphael Woolf, "Pleasure and Desire," in *The Cambridge Companion to Epicurus,* ed. Warren
   James, 158-178 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)
[78] Woolf, "Pleasure and Desire," 160.
[79] Ibid., 166.

pleasure cannot be increased, only varied — but even if we concede this point, it is not as fatal to Epicureanism as may be thought. Instead of rejecting Epicurus' claim outright we should rather understand it better.

First, however, it is prudent to look at the way in which Woolf uses his example of the upgrade. If we look a little closer we see that there could be many intuitive objections to Woolf's argument about how Epicurus would view luxury, but the real problem is that it does not divulge the *motivations* behind the action of accepting the upgrade. If the person is accepting the upgrade when they are flying for a reason that fulfils an empty desire, like in the pursuit of status, then the upgrade becomes an empty desire. But if they are flying for a reason which fulfils a natural and or necessary desire, i.e., to visit a good friend they have not seen in a long time, then the upgrade is a part of the satisfaction of a natural desire. Woolf's example does not tell us any of this and there is no way to determine which desire is being fulfilled from the example, so it is not adequate to describe the difference between something as sufficient and something as luxurious.

Claiming that an Epicurean need only suffice with mere bread and water, to illustrate how an Epicurean sees the limit of pleasure, misses the point of what Epicurus meant when he used this example. Furthermore, in no way could a life existing on simply bread and water amount to a pleasurable state except to relieve a person from starvation in the short term. The most obvious reason for this is that, although it staves off hunger and thirst, it does not stave off malnutrition. For the human body to function correctly (and remember this is a component of the ability to be able to reach *katastematic* pleasure) it needs a wide variety of foods with many vitamins and nutrients. Nonetheless, discussing food is a good way to illustrate the difference between luxury and sufficiency in Epicurean philosophy. Obviously we need all those things I listed above. It should not be a question that they contribute to the simple life, but importantly they also supply what we need for *katastematic* pleasure. There are of course many other things we can consume that are more lavish and extravagant or unhealthy that we should class as luxuries. The difference that must be identified between these items is how we desire them — are they natural or unnatural desires? So there is food we need — the objects of a natural and necessary desire — and there is food, which is natural but not necessary, food we must be able to take or leave, and then there is food that is neither natural nor

necessary, where the desire for it is an empty desire. What I hope is clear, is that, this is not caused by the food itself, but by the person's attitude to it.

> We also regard self sufficiency as a great good, not with the aim of always living off little, but to enable us to live off little if we do not have much, in the genuine conviction that they derive the greatest pleasure *from luxury* who need it least, and that everything natural is easy to procure, but what is empty is hard to procure.[80]

Furthermore, we need to avoid looking at food as something that can increase our *katastematic* pleasure. Instead, acknowledging food as something that varies it. Although food cannot increase our happiness, it can increase our kinetic pleasure. This is because food has a distinct quality, in that it cannot be classed as an empty desire on its own. Not everyone will get the same pleasure out of it as others. Where a certain food may be a delicacy and expensive in one place it may be a staple food in another. So it is not the food that has an intrinsic quality of being empty, it is the person who consumes it and the attitude they project on to obtaining it which gives the desire for it an empty status. This is not to say that we cannot easily identify 'status achieving' foods. In Epicurus' time fish was regarded in this way, but now people consuming French champagne and sashimi, or whatever the 'it' food of the day is, can be seen to be 'enjoying' these things, not for their own sake but for the status that is attached to being seen to consume it. This reiterates the point that it is not the food, but the person's or even society's attitude towards consuming it that determines the status of the desire.

> For what produces the pleasant life is not continuous drinking and parties or pederasty or womanising, or the enjoyment of fish and the other dishes of an expensive table, but sober reasoning which tracks down the causes of every choice and avoidance, and which banishes the opinions that beset souls with the greatest confusion.[81]

Therefore, Epicurus does not condemn the pleasure, but the way in which it is sought. When it becomes an empty desire and causes pain when it is not obtained, then it

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[80] Epicurus, *Letters to Menoeceus* 130, trans. Long and Sedley, 114.
[81] Epicurus, *Letters to Menoeceus* 131, trans. Long and Sedley, 114.

cannot be a pleasure that is sought with 'sober reasoning'. It is a soul which has empty and never ending desires for certain luxuries that should be condemned and avoided, not the luxury itself.

> No pleasure is bad per se: but the causes of some pleasures produce stresses
> many times greater than the pleasures [82]

So, the pleasure we gain from foods does not increase or decrease the amount of *katastematic* pleasure we have, because the *katastematic* state is the state of being we achieve when we have chosen to fulfil the right kinds of desires, ones which avoid anxiety and pain. The pleasure we gain from food in a kinetic way, however, can increase and decrease. This is more than obvious: a piece of stale bread and a croissant are two very different things and it is implausible to say that one would reject the croissant for a stale piece of bread if they valued pleasure and really enjoyed a croissant! What is distinct about Epicurus' claim about these things is that both will achieve the fulfilment of the natural and necessary desire for freedom from starvation.

II.IX   Epicurean Pleasure Defined

From all of this discussion we have come to three conclusions about Epicurean pleasure. They are:

First, *katastematic* and kinetic pleasures are not two wholly distinct and separate things. It is true that kinetic pleasures can be experienced without *katastematic* pleasure occurring but this is only if we choose to fulfil the wrong desires; those desires which are base, empty and lead us to anxiety and pain. When we fulfil the right desires, the natural ones, it is then possible to experience *katastematic* pleasure. It is the fulfilment of the natural desires which become the parts of our *katastematic* pleasure. *Katastematic* pleasure is the state that occurs when our body is working in perfect harmony and we are free from all anxiety and mental and physical pain.

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[82] Epicurus, *Key Doctrines* 8, trans. Long and Sedley, 115.

Second, that we can value things for their own sake. An Epicurean can value things like friendships, family and the environment as ends in themselves and still achieve a tranquil life. This is because we can choose to value things and the value we place on them is not that they give us pleasure, but by valuing them in the right way the consequence is a positive one where we will live pleasantly and tranquilly.

Third, when Epicurus says that we cannot increase the limit of our pleasure, only vary it, he is not talking about kinetic pleasures, but the *katastematic* state. This state is not something that can be increased, because it is a state of awareness, of being, where we are free from pain and we are living tranquilly, happily and pleasantly. Once we reach this state it cannot be increased, but to say that pleasure — kinetic pleasure — cannot be increased is a misunderstanding and an unintelligible conclusion. To confuse the two notions is to confuse Epicureanism and not see the multitude of benefits it has in guiding life choices. This results in some interpretive costs for the traditional Epicurean, but what we should really be concerned with for this modern interpretation is creating a reading of Epicureanism, that while holding true to the overarching principles, can also be a realisable theory. This ultimate goal requires us to view kinetic pleasures as the type of pleasure that can be increased and view *katastematic* pleasure as a state, a way of being, which can only be varied.

III.   EPICUREANISM AND AVOIDING ANXIETY AND PAIN

III.I   The Problem of Anxiety

> Avarice and blind lust for status, which drive the wretched people to encroach beyond the boundaries of right and sometimes, as accomplices and abettors of crime, to strive night and day with prodigious effort to scale the summit of wealth – these sores of life are nourished in no small degree by fear of death. For as a rule the ignominy of humble position and the sting of penury are considered to be incompatible with a life of enjoyment and security, and are thought to imply a sort of premature loitering before the portals of death from which people, under the impulse of unfounded terror, desire to flee far away and be far removed.[83]

Epicurus believed we needed to remove everything from our lives that caused us pain. This meant removing all false beliefs, and the desires that depend on them.[84] The Roman Lucretius' study of Epicurean theory, *De Rerum Natura (On The Nature of Things),* fervently argues that these false beliefs spring from a fear of death. Fear of death, he wrote, is most likely to cause us pain because it is the catalyst for the desires of wealth and status. Further, it is these desires, which distract us from our end of *eudaimonia*. Both Epicurus and Lucretius agree that *eudaimonia* requires a process of removing all the desires that impede a happy life and this subsequently means removing the fear of death. They argued that by doing so the resulting desires of status and wealth will become redundant and hence the obstacles to a tranquil and happy life will be removed.

According to Lucretius many people mistakenly believe that their humble position creates a life of pain and fear and to protect themselves against such a life, one should acquire great wealth, status and power.[85] Lucretius claimed these people were mistaken because it wasn't wealth and status that allowed them to achieve freedom from fear, but ironically it was the pursuit of those empty desires that caused them pain and further

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[83] Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* 3.59, trans. Martin Ferguson-Smith, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 2001), 69 .

[84] Martha Nussbaum, "Mortal Immortals," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* Vol. 50, No. 2 (1989): 306.

[85] Nussbaum, "Mortal Immortals," 309.

exacerbated their fear. Another way to look at Lucretius' claim is to say that these people did not necessarily have a fear of death, but possibly an exaggerated desire for life — a fear of losing that very thing that they value above all else — existence. Whichever the reason, desire or fear, it was irrational, narcissistic and self-indulgent.

> Shame on you! Even good Ancus closed his eyes and left the light of life and he was a far, far worthier man than you. Since then, many other kings and potentates have passed away — men who held dominion over mighty peoples.[86]

Lucretius and Epicurus did not only regard the fear of death as irrational because it is self-concerned and narcissistic but also because it is destined to cause unnecessary pain with no positive influence on one's life. They argued that because one cannot experience pain once one is dead, it is irrational to allow this notion to cause one pain while alive. Lucretius regarded the fear of death as damaging because it causes anxiety, cannot be sated and can never lead to anything good. He claimed that those who fear death could never find satisfaction in any activity because it will never be equal to immortality.

> The correct recognition that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not by adding an infinite time, but by removing the longing for immortality.[87]

Left unchecked the fear of death would grow to poison all aspects of life.[88] The only way to rid oneself of the anxiety that it causes, is to remove the fear, and once it is accepted that death is inevitable and that it will not cause you pain to no longer exist, one can achieve tranquillity.

> For there is nothing fearful in living for one who genuinely grasps that there is nothing fearful in not living. Therefore he speaks idly who says that he fears death not because it will be painful when present but because it is painful in

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[86] Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* 3.1025, trans. Martin Ferguson-Smith, 1st ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 1969), 126.
[87] Epicurus, *Letters to Menoeceus* 125, quoted in Nussbaum, "Mortal Immortals," 303.
[88] Nussbaum, "Mortal Immortals," 308.

anticipation. For if something causes no distress when present it is fruitless to be pained by the expectation of it.[89]

Lucretius also believed that it was a fear of death that drove people to religion. He claimed that religion is superstitious and irrational. It is built upon a false belief that is harmful to an individual because it drives the person to rely on the insights and guidance of priests, and not on their own judgement. Priests, Lucretius claimed, stimulate one's fears and create even more dependence, and dependence on religion then gives one justifiable reasons — in their deceived eyes — to commit heinous crimes and injustices.[90] We can see in Lucretius that it is not just the fear of death that is to be avoided but also the other false beliefs that arise from it.

> Let them, then, sweat out their blood and weary themselves in vain, struggling along the narrow path of ambition, since their wisdom is derived from the mouths of others and their aims are determined by hearsay rather than by their own sensations; and such folly does not succeed today and will not succeed tomorrow any more than it succeeded yesterday.[91]

Epicureanism is predominantly a theory of the good life founded in avoidance of pain. It does not tell us what we should do to achieve *eudaimonia* — it is not restrictive in that way — rather, it gives us guidance about which type of desires inhibit us in reaching our goal. In most cases these are the desires based in false belief. Epicurus observed one kind of false belief that inhibited happiness was common among those who aimed to increase their wealth and status and create a life to leave a legacy. He knew that these people were mistaken and it was this mistake that held them back from the tranquil life. He saw that those who were tainted by false belief in the pursuit of happiness sought those things that instead should be avoided. He observed that it was not only detrimental to the individual, but their misperceived notions of what created happiness also resulted in anti-social and harmful behaviour. This behaviour culminated in an unstable and insecure society, with nothing to be gained from it. Martha Nussbaum explains how Lucretius likewise believed that the fear of death and its disturbing effects were 'so bad

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[89] Epicurus, *Letters to Menoeceus* 126, trans. Long and Sedley, 149.
[90] Lucretius, *Nature of Things* 3.1025, 1st ed., 126.
[91] Lucretius, *Nature of Things* 5.1135, 2nd ed., 168.

and so pervasive' that we have reason to get rid of them, even independent of their falsity.[92] Lucretius argued that false belief is the central cause in many of the worst human ills. He believed that it is only the enlightened Epicurean who understands truly what it means to live life tranquilly and who has the knowledge of what impedes the happy life. Those who do not understand will continue to pursue the wrong paths and only ever lead themselves to further pain.

III.II   Acknowledgement of the Problem

Epicurus and Lucretius identified the fear of death as being the root of all the empty desires. However, it could be possible that someone may argue that there are motivations for empty desires that do not originate from a fear of death. Although I am willing to give them the benefit of the doubt and grant that they may be correct, Lucretius is adamant that the bad behaviours associated with fear of death are not necessarily accompanied by an acknowledgement of the fear.[93] Lucretius claims that those people who deny that they have this fear can be brought to see it in themselves given the right circumstances. The claim is that these circumstances are moments of truth brought about by a direct confrontation with our mortality.[94] Given this we should understand Lucretius as arguing that the fear of death is, a fear generated from the acknowledgement that one will not be able to experience those things that are coincidental with existence any longer. From this understanding Lucretius shows us that we fear death because we fear losing those things we love and value. This Lucretius says can cause anti-sociable behaviour and importantly for an Epicurean a fear of death has a detrimental effect on one's ability to avoid anxiety and pain. Therefore, it is integral to the maintenance of our tranquillity that we rid ourselves of the notion that death is something to fear.

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[92] Nussbaum, "Mortal Immortals," 306.
[93] Ibid., 309.
[94] Ibid., 310.

III.III The Real Problem is Status

For Epicurus the misunderstanding of status was one of the false beliefs he was particularly concerned with and he taught that living tranquilly required changing that belief. Status achievement, he argued, inevitably led to anxiety and pain in the individual, and is therefore considered an empty desire. Furthermore, it is not only the individual who suffers as a result of her anxiety about status; it is society as a whole. We have just seen that Lucretius believed that the fear of death was the primary catalyst for all of the empty desires, and I do not dispute that the fear of death is a significant concern and has many negative consequences in its own right. Nonetheless, status anxiety has very real world consequences and although it very well may be the case that it is motivated by the original *fear* it is more helpful to our understanding of the origin of false beliefs that we addressed it on its own. Status anxiety and the fear of social failure is a fear every bit as pervasive and destructive as the fear of death. Further, status anxiety is not necessarily a consequence of fearing death. It can come about independently, and in this chapter we will examine what is believed to be at least one of the catalysts of this socially destructive phenomenon. We will also see that Epicurus and Lucretius' claims that status anxiety has debilitating effects on society resonate with the claims of psychologists and social workers working on these issues now. Of course it is not an exact science and there will exist in the wider discourse many claims that are contrary to the viewpoints I will discuss. Nonetheless, the evidence does lead many in these fields to believe that status anxiety is something we should be concerned about, and that this notion should be addressed in the policies and strategies that are implemented to tackle these pressing issues. If it is true that status anxiety is such a large factor in causing social problems it does appear that Epicurus and Lucretius were right in their claims about the role status plays in society. Therefore, it would behove us to consider, at least in some respect, what they believed would control these problems in how we now address them.

The type of status recognition that we are concerned with is the one where its seeker aims to be recognised as an exceptional person, a person to be held in a higher regard than others. We must not confuse this with the aim of the marginalised who are seeking status of the form that brings them up to a level of recognition and acceptance that is granted to the general population; such as members of the gay and lesbian community,

women, the disabled or the poor. In these other cases, by denying people such common rights as marriage, access to education, health care and so on, basic rights that should be held by every member of society, we are denying them their humanity. The ethical problems that are associated with such situations are too many and too complex to be discussed in this thesis, although for our purposes the difference of status attainment must be recognised. It is important to differentiate these two facets of status because we are aiming for an equality of humanity, and these two forms lie on either side of that equality. The significant difference between the recognition of equal dignity as a form of status and the type of status achievement that is an empty desire, is that somebody gaining the status of equality does not diminish my claim to equality. Whereas, pursuing the type of status which aims at wealth and fame will not only cause me anxiety, it will be a constant battle to maintain the high status I have achieved and someone else who achieves such status will detract from mine, because only a few people can be exceptional. This is the nature of fame: there is only so much to share around. The process will be fraught with anxiety and pain, living on the edge in constant fear of being shunned, and ultimately, the eventual realisation that it is a battle I will never win, will only further exacerbate this state of pain. So from here on in when referring to status I am speaking of the form that regards and holds oneself over and above all others.

We can imagine Lucretius would identify a number of examples in contemporary society that manifest this affliction, in particular the quest of 'stars' to stay young and beautiful. Plastic surgery, Botox, personal stylists, and trainers — the lists of professions and processes these 'stars' enlist to keep them on the front page of magazines and in the public's favourable eye is insurmountable and all conducive to a life lived in anxiety and pain. Lucretius would argue that the incessant pursuit of status causes more harm to the individual than could ever be gained from it. He believed that it is the fear that overtakes the individual from either the demise of status or, the possibility of never being held in such regard before they die. Lucretius even mocked those he witnessed in their endeavour to gain status recognition.

> But nothing is more blissful than to occupy the heights effectively fortified by
> the teaching of the wise, tranquil sanctuaries from which you can look down
> upon others and see them wandering everywhere in their random search for
> the way of life, competing for intellectual eminence, disputing about rank, and

striving night and day with prodigious effort to scale the summit of wealth and
to secure power. O minds of mortals, blighted by your blindness![95]

This excerpt from Lucretius tells us that those seeking to remove pain from their lives, through wealth and status, have a mistaken conception of what the good life is. People set on such an end bring fear into their lives, fear of loss of face, of death, and fear of loss of fortune. Fear that only creates more and more anxiety. Not only that, but as Lucretius further explains,

To this end, they swell their fortune through the bloodshed of civil war and
greedily multiply their wealth, heaping up murder on murder; they take cruel
delight in a brother's death that should be mourned, and their relatives' tables
are objects of abhorrence and fear.[96]

Lucretius claimed that the desire for wealth and status created an environment of mistrust and disloyalty. It turned the tables of families and friends, and the ritual of togetherness and community – a supposedly safe and secure environment – into a place of fear, manipulation and mistrust. An elite Roman could very well worry that relatives might poison his food in order to inherit! The anti-social behaviour seeped into all aspects of society and no one was safe from the harm it caused. Anxiety initiated by the incessant pursuit of status and wealth in Classical Greece and Rome created anti-social behaviour and led to violence, cruelty and exploitation: of women, slaves, children and those unlucky enough not to be regarded as citizens of the cities; those in positions of weakness. Anxiety was not only confined to the streets and the marginalised but entered homes and destroyed families and the bonds of trust between fathers and brothers. However, for the original Epicureans within the enclosed environment of 'The Epicurean Garden', all were equal and regarded with value. While outside their walls poverty, inequality, anti-social behaviour, greed and avarice reigned.

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[95] Lucretius, *Nature of Things* 2.7-14, 1st ed., 35.
[96] Lucretius, *Nature of Things* 3.70-73, 1st ed., 69-70.

This brings us to our second point of interest in Lucretius' above excerpt. Epicurus and his friends and followers believed that the only way to avoid anxiety and the ensuing social problems was to abstain from involvement in society, as Lucretius states,

> But nothing is more blissful than to occupy the heights effectively fortified by the teaching of the wise, tranquil sanctuaries from which you can look down upon others.[97]

It was of paramount importance that the Epicureans maintained a tranquil life. The ability to enclose themselves within 'The Epicurean Garden' and retreat from society was an effective way to avoid the societal problems of the time, and therefore the anxiety that went along with them. This is a natural way to think about the teachings of Epicurus — that there was an absolute withdrawal from society. However I wish to advance a further thesis, not explicit in the Epicurean texts, but which I believe follows from the theory's core principles. One that explains how, as an Epicurean reached enlightenment and was taught that one needed to protect her tranquil state, that such protection involved participation in the polis. It was possible that the outside world did present an imminent threat to the tranquil life of an Epicurean's in Hellenistic Greece and that the original Epicureans could retreat and avoid most of the problems created from the anxiety of the non-Epicurean sages. But, just as an Epicurean sage living at that time would have realised that in certain situations such action was inevitable, so is it something that an Epicurean living in today's society must realise.

We now live in an undeniably and unavoidably connected world and the 'outside world' must be of our particular concern. Consequently, there are two ways in which a Modern Epicurean may be concerned about living in modern society. First, it is extremely difficult to retreat from the population and live in isolation, either by yourself or with a group of likeminded friends. This means that unequal societies and the problems that arise from them, which I will go on to explain in the following sections, can cause the ubiquitous problems that can affect the tranquil life if left unchecked. In this case it is important to fend off the negative effects of society's problems and therefore maintain the tranquil life. Second, living within a society which has a large disparity between rich and poor, as in

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[97] Lucretius, *Nature of Things* 2.7-14, 1st ed., 35.

Australia, means a prospective Epicurean is already susceptible to the incapacitating effects of anxiety. This means a prospective Epicurean is restricted in her ability to reach tranquillity right from the start. Therefore, I put forward that because of the situation that Modern Epicureans will find themselves in – modern society with all its ills – this new Epicurean sage will be compelled to find solutions to the problems that confront them. Even if this means, for some whose character permits such action, becoming politically involved. There are aspects to traditional Epicurean theory which hint at such practice in the right circumstances and when undertaken with the right attitude.[98] Although it is not ideal Epicurean theory, it is allowable to venture into the polis and serve the interests of the community as well as one's own desire for a life lived tranquilly. But before we diverge into explaining how this is possible it is prudent to consider how it is that society, as it is now, leaves us open to anxiety and to make clear the socially destructive similarities that we share with the ancients. With the parallels drawn, it makes it even more convincing that to address the problems now we should look to the ancients for guidance.

III.IV   Anxiety and Status in Modern Society

The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better[99] investigates many of the social problems modern societies are facing and attempts to uncover their causes. Authors Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, explain that many of the social problems we face arise from a large and widening gap between the rich and poor. They claim that more unequal societies have higher levels of violence and social problems. The upshot of this is that such behaviour indirectly drains necessary resources away from more purposeful social policies like health care and education. To make matters worse the general well-being of citizens living in unequal societies in respect to health, obesity, cancer and heart disease is lower than citizens living in more equal societies.

> We are the first generation to have to find other ways of improving the real
> quality of life. The evidence shows that reducing inequality is the best way of

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[98] See Epicurus, *Letters to Menoeceus* 130, trans. Long and Sedley, 113.
[99] Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone*.
   (London: Penguin Books, 2009)

improving the quality of the social environment, and so the real quality of life,

for all of us...this includes the better-off. [100]

Wilkinson and Pickett argue that it is greater equality that feeds into the promotion of well-being across a population. Countries that perform better in regards to social standards have greater equality.[101] They argue that we are individually sensitive to inequality within a society because we are vulnerable to its effects. This is because greater inequality increases people's anxieties about how they are seen by others, which increases the importance of social status. Instead of seeing each other as fellow human beings as may be the case in a more equal society, in an unequal society we tend to evaluate each other on our social position.[102] Greater inequality, they argue is likely to accompany greater status competition and greater status anxiety. They say it not only matters to each of us where we fit in to society, but that we pay more attention to social status in how we see and judge each other.[103]

Jean Twenge, a psychologist at San Diego University has compiled compelling evidence that we are more anxious as a society than forty years ago. One effect of such high anxiety is depression. Among adolescents, rises in anxiety and depression have accompanied rises in behavioural problems, such as crime, alcohol and drugs. These problems have affected males and females in all classes of society.[104] Wilkinson and Pickett are careful to say that the while trigger to these problems was not inequality, it is clear that inequality aggravates them. Another effect of high anxiety is narcissism. Twenge has observed that at the same time as anxiety escalated, so did people's perceived notions of themselves. Twenge says that in the 1950s only 12 per cent of teenagers agreed with the statement 'I am an important person'. By the late 1980s, 80 per cent of teenagers agreed with it.[105] Twenge also found that by 2006 two-thirds of American college students scored above what had been the average narcissism score in 1982. Wilkinson and Pickett contend that research in this field has found that although

[100] Wilkinson and Pickett, *Spirit Level,* 29.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid., 43.
[103] Ibid., 44.
[104] Ibid., 35.
[105] Ibid., 36.

people were scoring well on high self-esteem measures, it was also observed that the same group were prone to violence and racism, were insensitive to others and had more difficulties in relationships than other groups. They also showed a preoccupation with themselves, with success and with their image and appearance, particularly in the eyes of others.[106] Wilkinson and Pickett explain the reason for this appears to be that increasing anxieties of how we appear to others has produced a defence mechanism to give us confidence despite our insecurities. 'The defence involves a kind of self-promoting, insecure egotism which is easily mistaken for high self-esteem.'[107] The appearing picture is that self-esteem rising alongside anxiety is false, and it is instead a rise in narcissism that is causing our problems, and that this rise in narcissism is strongly connected to the anxiety we feel about any threat to our 'social self'.[108]

Sally Dickerson and Margaret Kemeny, psychologists from the University of California, have used the results from over 208 published reports of experiments in which people's cortisol levels (the central stress hormone, released by the brain to help us deal with potential threats or emergencies) was measured while the subject was exposed to stressors. The pair found that tasks, which included a social evaluative threat or where others could negatively judge one's performance, provoked higher releases of cortisol. These were instances when there was a high perception of a threat to one's social status. There are many studies into the causes and effects of stress on the body and Wilkinson and Pickett claim that the most powerful causes of stress and its impact on health fall into three categories: low social status, lack of friends and stress in early life. They claim that stress in these cases is seriously detrimental to health. [109] Friendship, however, has protective effects on our stress levels because we feel greater security and ease amongst friends. They make us feel appreciated and because we feel they like us for who we are, friends protect us from social status anxiety. Lack of friends on the other hand leaves us open to self-doubt and anxiety.

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[106] Wilkinson and Pickett, *Spirit Level,* 37.
[107] Ibid., 36.
[108] Ibid., 37.
[109] Ibid., 39.

Wilkinson and Pickett also claim that while large inequalities exacerbate the problems we have just discussed they can also weaken community life, reduce trust and increase violence.[110]

> Empathy is only felt for those we view as equals, 'the same feeling for one another does not exist between the different classes'. Prejudice...was an imaginary inequality which followed the real inequality produced by wealth and law.[111]

Inequality fosters a case of 'us and them', and makes it harder for people to relate to those who are struggling with poverty and marginalisation, therefore reducing our understanding of how to help them. The result of this diminished understanding is observed as a vicious circle of inequality, poverty and mistrust, which further exacerbates the problems of inequality. The picture that Wilkinson and Pickett have painted is that the way society currently functions increases inequality. They suggest that such inequality is almost impossible to reverse from an individual standpoint because of the walls we build to protect ourselves from its negative effects — it is easier to ignore the situation and retreat into groups of like-minded people, This in turn promotes further inequality. However, this is not a situation anyone should advance, in particular not someone who wants to achieve tranquillity and happiness. However, it appears that solving these societal problems will be difficult for the individual to do on their own. Therefore, inequality should be addressed by organised groups and through government initiatives.

III.V   Inequality Leads to Anxiety

Wilkinson and Pickett, using the studies of James Gilligan, argue that acts of violence are 'attempts to ward off or eliminate the feeling of shame and humiliation.'[112] Gilligan, a psychiatrist at Harvard Medical School, discovered that when talking to young men who had committed violent offences, the trigger to violence was overwhelmingly a threat to

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[110] Wilkinson and Pickett, *Spirit Level,* 45.
[111] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* quoted in Wilkinson and Pickett, *Spirit Level,* 52.
[112] James Gilligan, quoted in Wilkinson and Pickett, *Spirit Level,* 133.

pride. Gilligan goes so far as to claim that he is yet to see an instance where this was not the case. Wilkinson and Pickett claim that this phenomenon was most predominant among young men because of the importance they place on high status. What does this mean? The pair discusses psychologists Wilson and Daly's findings from their 1988 book *Homicide,* and show how young men 'have strong incentives to achieve and maintain as high a social status as they can – because their success in sexual competition depends on status.'[113] Reckless and violent behaviour, Wilkinson and Pickett claim, 'comes from young men at the bottom of society, deprived of all the markers of status.'[114] They ask what it is that makes certain societies more able to deal with this problem than others? The simple answer is that greater inequality amps up the competition for status; in fact, status in more unequal societies matters more to individuals than in a society which has greater equality.[115]

So, why, when we know that the pursuit of higher status is such an insurmountable obstacle to happiness, and can cause such debilitating anxiety, is this status so highly pursued? The most likely answer is that status is the only gauge we have to explain where one stands in society and this is something that we have deemed necessary. In the face of diminishing communities, rising isolationism and social evaluative threats, achieving a high level of status is how we gain respect from others. We believe this because we are taught to believe that those with high status are 'better' people. Even a prospective Epicurean can struggle with the problem of desiring a higher level of status; this problem is not isolated to marginalised groups of people, but those in such groups have an increased pressure to increase their status level because they are believed to be and most likely see themselves as 'bad' examples of what a human should be. In an unequal society, using this reasoning, there are fewer examples of 'good' (i.e. wealthy) people and more examples of 'bad' (i.e. poor) people. And so, this ramps up the competition for people to distance themselves from the latter group. This flight from anonymity results in more violence, anti-social behaviour, narcissism, drug abuse and crime, because as Wilkinson and Pickett show, status anxiety and social problems go hand in hand.

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[113] Wilkinson and Pickett, *Spirit Level*, 134.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.

To clarify what we mean when we say that status is a problem it is important that we consider the distinction between the type of status that shows us where we fit in to society and the type that seeks to increase our status over and above all others. Although the former is a necessity — we must know how we fit into society — greater inequality increases its detrimental effect on society and on the individual. If we happen to find ourselves on one of the lower rungs of society, the pursuit of rising above and being regarded as an equal, is a valid pursuit – we all need to feel as though we are respected by others. But this pursuit also make us anxious. Therefore there is a need to eradicate this feeling of disempowerment. A solution to this is to create a more equal society, where people are not marginalised and placed in such a position to begin with. Doing so will mean that as a society we also resist those who try to increase their status over and above all others. This does not mean that we do not allow people to succeed, in fact we should encourage that pursuit, but we must be cautious of both the level of importance we place on the pursuit and the types of success we value, because this pursuit is likely to increase inequality.

Looking at this issue from an Epicurean perspective we know that the intense quest for high status is a destructive and harmful desire for an individual, but Wilkinson and Pickett show us, that it is also socially destructive. The anxiety that results from the absence of status especially in unequal societies appears to result in violent behaviour among those seeking to gain recognition. If Wilkinson and Pickett, Gilligan, Wilson and Daly are all right about this phenomenon, not only do we have a reason to relieve those living in unequal societies from their desire for status but we also have a reason to remove the primary cause for their status anxiety in the first place – inequality.

There are many things from what Wilkinson and Pickett claim about living in unequal societies that we can see reflected in what Epicurus set out to avoid. He knew that friendships helped us avoid anxiety and made us happier. He fostered an equal and reliant community, purposefully creating a situation designed to avoid the negative effects of the inequality that were present in Hellenistic Greece. He surrounded himself with people who allowed him to maintain a tranquil life, not only for his sake, but also for the sake of every member of his community. The difference between what Epicurus believed and this Modern Epicurean reading is that this modern version does not

demand one to retreat from society. Instead it advocates that we can live our lives tranquilly even in a wider community. Modern society focuses on individual benefit instead of community, mass consumerism and competitiveness, which means a prospective Modern Epicurean must tread carefully. Nonetheless, there are options for a Modern Epicurean, and these can include — if undertaken with the right attitude — political action and social involvement to help reduce inequality and its negative effects. Wilkinson and Pickett have claimed something even further — that no one is impervious to the detrimental effects of inequality in the modern structure of society — and there is one train of thought in Epicurean theory suggesting that in such times, political involvement is required of an Epicurean in order for them to maintain their tranquillity. But I will not go so far as to claim that political involvement is something that is *required* of an Epicurean. Instead I hold that if one is so inclined, it can be an acceptable endeavour. This is because it does not need to be something that puts the tranquil life in jeopardy.

Undoubtedly a Modern Epicurean must surround themselves with people who maintain their state of happiness and tranquillity; it is just that now there are many more people to surround oneself with. If our Modern Epicurean, as a member of the wider community, can achieve happiness and tranquillity, she has then created a secure environment, fortified by her community of friends. The resultant idea is that the bigger the support network of people, the less likely one is to have their tranquillity jeopardised.

This is an option an Epicurean must consider as it is especially important that for one to be able to live tranquilly, there be no impending threat on one's safety and no possibility that one may be thrust into a position of weakness. The obvious and historical answer for an Epicurean is to resort to insular environments and avoid these problems altogether, but this can only be a band-aid solution. An Epicurean needs to avoid pain, but it is also prudent to create safeguards against such instances arising.[116] If one is better equipped to deal with what is likely to cause pain, the less one needs to avoid such

[116] Brown, "Politics and Society", 180.

situations, such as the outside world.[117] This is why it is an astute Modern Epicurean who considers becoming involved in charity work or political action. In Peggy Thoits and Lyndi Hewitt's study 'Volunteer Work and Well-Being'[118] the pair provide empirical research that argues that not only is social work conducive to helping society, it is conducive to the individual's well-being. The results from their study show that volunteer work significantly increased happiness, life-satisfaction and physical health[119]. Additionally these researchers found that involvement in volunteer groups, increased all of the above and also significantly decreased depression.[120]

In Epicurus' time, it may have been a feasible option to retreat from society and avoid the threat of those competing for a position in society. For a Modern Epicurean, this is not something easily done. The way in which society functions and the roles we play, as well as our interconnectedness make isolation unrealistic. It is not a violation of Epicureanism to reject the notion to 'live unnoticed', but instead it is an addendum to the existing theory, included to help us understand Epicureanism for our modern life. In some cases, including when our tranquillity is threatened, it is acceptable to involve ourselves socially and politically. As I will show in the next chapter, it can be legitimately argued that political involvement can be a natural desire. It is natural to want to prevent pain and anxiety and it is necessary for tranquillity that we act in a way that prevents it. So in the same way we satisfy our desires to satiate hunger and thirst, seek shelter, warmth and so on, so can we fulfil our desire for political involvement. Therefore there are three reasons for why one would become politically and socially involved: First, it satisfies the desire to create a secure and safe environment, second, it satisfies the desire to help others because we genuinely care about their well-being, and third, it satisfies the desire to be politically involved, as it is something that we enjoy and can bring us happiness.

There are philosophers working on Epicurean thought, such as Eric Brown, who suggest there were later members of the Epicurean community that regarded the participation in

[117] Brown, "Politics and Society", 180
[118] Peggy Thoits and Lyndi Hewitt, "Volunteer Work and Well-Being," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior,* vol. 42, no. 2 (Jun., 2001), 115-131.
[119] Ibid., 122
[120] Ibid., 126.

political life as risk aversion,[121] and it is not a stretch to consider this as an option for our modern doctrine. We certainly do not stray too far from the teachings of Epicurus to concede this is the case, but I will argue that there are more conditions that need to be added before we can accept political involvement as a legitimate Epicurean action. Yet by looking at the theory in this way we address a problem we face in the modern world. Gross inequalities lead to status anxiety and from the social studies we have just examined we can see that status anxiety is not an individual problem; it radiates into society and affects us all through violence and a host of other social problems. Considering this, it appears rational and justified to care about inequality and work to reduce it and its effects and by such action increase our security and most importantly, reduce our anxiety.

III.VI   Injustice, Inequality and Unequal Wealth Distribution

Epicurus' ideas of how justice is determined within a society are based in equality and a mutual respect for each other. The equality he condoned was not necessarily an equal distribution of wealth, but importantly, an equality of opportunity for all members to succeed in their goals. In Brown's discussion of Epicurean politics we see that all members of the Epicurean community, whether they were men, women, children or slaves, were treated as equals – a way of life that was very progressive for its time. In our age we have abolished slavery and in most modern societies the law protects women's rights to a certain extent. So in this respect we have begun to overcome exclusion. However, we still have vastly unequal societies, where an individual's ability to participate in society is determined by their wealth and social status, or lack of it. Recent studies have shown that very unequal societies also have much lower levels of social mobility.[122] We have abandoned (to some extent) types of discrimination associated with race and gender, but not rid ourselves of one of the most injurious — class distinction – we have created this form of discrimination by evaluating one's worthiness as a human being by what one has, not who one is. This is a significant problem for an Epicurean

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[121] Brown, "Politics and Society," 181.
[122] OECD, "A Family Affair: Intergenerational Social Mobility across OECD Countries," *Going for Growth 2010* (2010): 17, http://www.oecd.org/eco/public-finance/chapter 5 gfg 2010.pdf

because although an Epicurean believes justice is developed from societal conventions and is not an objective or universal fact, many people in the current model are excluded from being able to contribute fully to society, because they are limited in their opportunities. This exclusion flies in the face of true social reciprocity and the Epicurean notion of justice.

The biggest problem of determining social status based upon this criteria is that very few people have great wealth, and that percentage is becoming smaller and smaller, all the while the pressure to display wealth is becoming stronger and stronger. This means that more people are living beyond their means and teetering on the edge of debilitating anxiety and depression, financial ruin and all its associated problems. To demonstrate how many people are teetering on this 'edge' we can look to the U.S and Australia as examples. In the U.S the distribution of wealth is astoundingly in favour of a very small number of Americans. One percent of the population owns approximately 40 percent of the nation's wealth.[123] The Gini Coefficient, the most common measure of inequality, examines the changes in income inequality over time, with 0 being perfect equality and 1 being perfect inequality.[124] In the last thirty years in Australia the Gini coefficient has risen, from around .27 to .32.[125] The existence of steadily rising inequality highlights the futility desiring high status and wealth under a system that is the result of many complex interactions and a background set of rules that has effectively given a small group of people vastly more money than others. This facilitates anxiety because within such a system when somebody wins, there are a vastly higher proportion of people who lose. Holding onto the idea that one may be able to achieve 'exceptional' status is a zero-sum game. When one wins, there is not enough space left for someone else to also take up that same position. There is not enough and as good left over for others. This creates further anxiety and stress for those that have had their 'fair share' taken away. So such a pursuit has a twofold effect, in that no one else can achieve that position and it also takes away from others what is rightfully theirs. Therefore the pursuit of wealth and status is

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[123] Noah Adams, "Study: America's Wealth Not Widely Distributed," *NPR* (April 16, 2011) *http://www.npr.org/2011/04/16/135472478/study-americas-wealth-not-widely-distributed*
[124] Adams, "America's Wealth".
[125] Department of Treasury, "Income Inequality in Australia," *Economic Roundup,* Issue 2,(2013)http://www.treasury.gov.au/PublicationsAndMedia/Publications/2013/Economic-Roundup-Issue-2/Economic-Roundup/Income-inequality-in-Australia

an empty desire and one who pursues it is guaranteed to fail, and furthermore, according to our Epicurean theory is bound to jeopardise their tranquil life. What is different about our Modern Epicurean theory in comparison to the original Epicureanism is that it asks us, if able, to work to eradicate this structure and create conditions to avoid anxiety in all levels of society. A mere acknowledgement that the pursuit for wealth and status is futile and individual avoidance is not enough. A direct involvement in the promotion of equality should be adopted so as to both protect the tranquil life from the adverse effects of an unequal society and to strengthen the network of kinetic pleasures and other goods that a life lived tranquilly consists of.

Equality as a solution to the problem of status anxiety solves multiple problems for an Epicurean who understands that to live in a tranquil, peaceful and happy society all members of the community must be able to achieve a common level of humanity. Such a level of humanity requires more than a level of contentment with one's position in relation to others, but also the opportunity for social mobility and the ability to contribute to the betterment of society as well as to the individual. A secure and equal society is not only created by people receiving government handouts and the like, but also requires members to contribute to the system when in a position to do so. Social mobility is another indicator of equality in societies, or inequality as the case may be. It gives individuals the ability to increase their position in society through their own hard work, and this concept is created through equal access to education and opportunity. The promotion of individual satisfaction creates a system of reciprocity and inclusion, thus reducing anxiety and creating a more stable society. In the USA social mobility slowly climbed between 1950 and 1980, but as income differences widened dramatically, social mobility rapidly declined.[126]

It could be that to desire what is unattainable is a dominant trait of humanity, and at a superficial level it could be implied that because of this empty desire the Epicurean theory of happiness is unachievable for many. Simply pointing out to people that this is an empty desire and one they should change, may not be as simple as it seems, and is likely to be ignored. What is attractive about the Modern Epicurean theory is that if a

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[126] Wilkinson and Pickett, *Spirit Level,* 159.

prospective Epicurean is compelled to involve herself in fixing the cause, rather than closing herself off from the world to 'occupy the heights effectively fortified by the teaching of the wise'[127] this is an acceptable endeavour to undertake. And instead of changing each individual's desire for something they cannot obtain, a Modern Epicurean could involve themselves in changing the situation where such a desire resides – the inequality. (I will go into more detail about how this is consistent with Epicurean theory in the next section, but for the moment it is quite acceptable for us to understand that it is a possible endeavour that a Modern Epicurean can undertake.) We have learnt from Wilkinson and Pickett that more equal societies have lower occurrences of anti-social behaviour. So there is the double effect of reducing the likelihood of being subject to empty desires, and reducing the likelihood of being victim to the spill-over effects of crime and disease, which thrive in unequal environments. If inequality is eradicated or diminished, the competitive desire to be included in the higher class would also be diminished, and the stress and anxiety that are correlated with inequality would similarly be reduced or eradicated. Reducing inequality also promotes social mobility and restricts persecution of those with differing beliefs, resulting in a society where people are free to be themselves and benefit accordingly, thus also reducing anxiety.

Living in societies as we do today, every member of the community can affect another. If a group within a community is subjected to persecution through lack of access to basic needs, it is likely that they could also jeopardise everyone else's ability to live well. Likewise if a group of people do not reject the empty desires because they believe they are what create the good life, they can also affect the balance of happiness by tainting other people's ideas of what creates the good life. Working towards a fair and just system promotes the natural desires and avoids the unnatural desires that were explained by Epicurus. As we have seen above in the studies of Wilkinson and Pickett and others, the lack of status and wealth in the face of another's status and wealth is the main cause for its desire, and in turn the anti-social behaviour that jeopardises happiness and tranquillity. Even though Epicurus underestimated how the interrelatedness between people created more stable societies and in turn fostered tranquil and happy people, he clearly had this idea on a small scale in respect to his Epicurean Garden. Nonetheless, he

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[127] Lucretius, *Nature of Things* 2.7-14, 1st ed., 35.

neglected to acknowledge the role the rest of society could play in helping to maintain and fortify one's tranquillity. In particular how it could be possible, under the right conditions, to have happiness on a large scale. Rather, Epicurus encouraged isolation from the rest of the *polis* and for this reason the theory was destined to fail, because he did not allow for his theory to disseminate. The situations that occurred outside of the closed environment of the Epicurean Garden were destined to encroach on and jeopardise the peace within. Whereas, if society is stable and equal, there is no need to guard oneself from it, instead what is created is an even greater network of kinetic pleasures and things we value like friendships, family and so forth, all of which are aspects that our *katastematic* pleasure consists in. The bigger the network of these things, the safer and less vulnerable our *katastematic* pleasure becomes.

III.VII An Epicurean Problem Indeed

An Epicurean sage, one who has reached *katastematic* pleasure and can maintain their state of *ataraxia* and *aponia* at all times, is not one who will be affected greatly by the poverty of others. An Epicurean sage is mostly only concerned with the fulfilment of her natural desires, and only the imminent threat of very severe restrictions on these desires would cause an Epicurean sage anxiety. Meanwhile, there exists the other 99.9 per cent of us, those of us who could be in direct contact with poverty either experiencing or falling victim to its negative effects, in regards to crime, violence, an economic and political unstable society or some such other effect. Or at risk of poverty directly — suffering hardship, hunger or insecurity. The concern for inequality that this thesis discusses, relates to the relatively poor, those living within an affluent society. The effects of inequality manifest themselves in many different forms and there are many different root causes. I do not contend that all of society's problems are caused by inequality but there is a strong correlation between many social problems, and as mentioned earlier, while inequality may not be the cause of unstable societies, it definitely exacerbates such problems.

Although, our paradigm Epicurean sage will have little or no problem with the effects of poverty, for a prospective Modern Epicurean poverty is undeniably an obstacle to happiness. Poverty enhances our desires for money, security, food and health, all factors

that cause stress and anxiety when not fulfilled. In today's world children and young adults are now 25 per cent more likely to be poor than the rest of the population, and single parent families are three times more likely to be poor.[128] This means that as a society we are entrenching our young populations in a life of stress and anxiety. A state that is not conducive to a healthy and happy life. Of particular concern are children naive to the Epicurean notions of *katastematic* pleasure, those who have not learnt aversion to anxiety, or something of similar value. It is particularly imperative that a Modern Epicurean pays close attention to the development of children and seeks to curb their exposure to inequality and its detrimental effects. The upbringing we give children is of paramount importance because the perception of themselves and of society that they hold will shape future society. All Epicureans should be concerned with this matter. This is an intergenerational problem, but one in which we have a direct responsibility for. If societal problems continue to increase, even an Epicurean sage will feel the effects of a malfunctioning society, and this is a concern for our generation as well as future ones. OECD Secretary General Angel Gurría claims that the current solution to reduce poverty and inequality through higher taxes and wealth distribution is no longer effective, and that increasing employment and social mobility is the best option we have for reducing poverty. A positive and proactive solution to reducing poverty and inequality is also conducive to a happy and tranquil life, more so than the existing structure of band-aid solutions.

> Growing inequality is divisive. It polarises societies, it divides regions within countries, and it carves up the world between rich and poor. Greater income inequality stifles upward mobility between generations, making it harder for talented and hard-working people to get the rewards they deserve. Ignoring increasing inequality is not an option.[129]

Modern Epicureans who aim to reach *katastematic* pleasure and happiness, must avoid the anxiety that goes hand in hand with inequality. There are two possible ways to do this: Firstly, we could consider Epicurean therapy — an education of people to avoid and reject the empty, base and unnecessary desires like wealth and status. Although this is

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[128] OECD, "Income Inequality and Poverty Rising in Most OECD Countries," (October, 2008) http://www.oecd.org/general/incomeinequalityandpovertyrisinginmostoecdcountries.htm
[129] Ibid.

the desirable option according to an Epicurean, it is also a slow and laborious task, fraught with failure, not something easily achieved, and not something which whole populations can accept. The other alternative is to reduce inequality so that the pernicious effects of desire for status are not so marked, as seen in very unequal nations like Australia or the USA.

According to our Modern Epicurean doctrine, tranquillity is the highest good one should aspire to, and the avoidance of anxiety and pain is of utmost importance. Gurria proposes that the best way we can eradicate poverty, inequality and its resulting anxiety is by being active and contributing members of society.[130] It is easily argued that those who live functional and purposeful lives are more rounded and happy people. So what Epicurus prescribed in living isolated from society, we now know does not have the same powerful effect on happiness as living in, and being a contributing member of, a highly functioning society. There are obviously limits to this, and all actions require prudent consideration. Over-work and the stress that arises from it, on our bodies, families and lifestyles is not a prudent and duly considered action, and will undoubtedly be an obstacle to happiness. Nonetheless, is there a minimum amount of social involvement required for a good and happy life? Friends, family, colleagues and the community in general protect us from the onset of depression, anxiety and pain. And it seems that a larger middle class with a smaller disparity between the rich and the poor is the answer to a better life for more people. So should it be of all of society's concern to reduce poverty and inequality? What about Modern Epicureans? Should each and every one work to reverse the effects of poverty, the risk of the stress and anxiety that arises from such a disparity of welfare? The next section will argue that although all of this social evidence amounts to a wretched situation, it is a special type of Modern Epicurean that will be able to step up to the challenge.

> Poverty, when measured by nature's end, is great wealth, but unlimited wealth
> is great poverty.[131]

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[130] OECD, "Income Inequality".
[131] Epicurus, *Vatican Sayings* 25, trans. Long and Sedley, 116.

IV. CREATING AN EPICUREAN CONCEPTION OF POLITICS AND JUSTICE

IV.I   Preliminary Considerations

This chapter has two aims: (i) to understand how Epicurus conceived of justice and (ii) to develop an exception to Epicurus' dictum to 'live unnoticed'. The purpose of such an endeavour is to address in an Epicurean way how we can avoid the pain and anxiety caused by unequal and unjust societies as explained in the previous chapter. Such an endeavour has been motivated by my argument that the best way to protect ourselves from the resultant anxiety of increasing inequality is by working to change the system where such inequality is rife.

I have made it clear that a Modern Epicurean should not be required to live in isolation in a Garden like environment and that the ambition of this thesis is to bring the Epicurean and her perspective out into the modern world. I also do not insist that the Modern Epicurean be the perfect sage, I understand that many people are only on a path to tranquillity. As such, these considerations raise at least three questions that we need to answer about how a Modern Epicurean should conduct herself in society: (i) What sort of theory of justice should our Modern Epicurean bring to the table? (ii) How will this understanding fit into the wider political sphere? (iii) Can such an endeavour lead us to tranquillity? To determine the answers to these questions we need to first examine Epicurus' ideas about social justice that we do know of.

IV.II   Natural Justice

Epicurean theory is very sparse as far as political theories of justice go, but this does not mean we have to regard Epicurus as being amoral about politics and justice. Epicurean justice generally explains the ideal situation for the fully developed sage who lives in an isolated environment with like-minded friends. This is not the same situation that a Modern Epicurean finds herself in, but it is nonetheless important that we understand what this entails. Diogenes of Oenoanda gives us an account of what the ideal Epicurean community would be like,

> But if we assume [wisdom] to be possible, then truly the life of the gods will pass to men. For everything will be full of justice and mutual love, and there will come to be no need of fortifications or laws and all the things which we contrive on account of one another.[132]

This tells us that if everyone were to adopt the practices prescribed by Epicurus, there would be no need for a convention of justice because Epicureans have an innate and natural sense of justice. The Garden *was* an ideal environment for tranquillity to flourish, and so it could be argued that there was no need for a conventional understanding of justice because the Epicurean sages were all truly just and virtuous people. However, this does not lead us to believe that Epicurus had no conception of justice. Brown suggests that Epicurus saw justice as something born out of conflict; a tool to restrain the unwise and protect the wise.[133] It is only because of the inability of humans to adopt the Epicurean philosophy that we need to place safeguards against harms that another person may inflict on us. This means that in the non-ideal situation outside of the Garden we have perfectly good reasons to develop a convention of justice. Of course it would be nice to not require one, but we can identify that when there is a need to adopt one, there are Epicurean ideas that describe how we should do so.

> Justice was never anything per se, but a contract, regularly arising at some place or other in people's dealings with one another, over not being harmed.[134]

In *Letters to Menoeceus* 132, Epicurus argued that one could not live pleasantly without living justly. This suggests that the Epicurean Garden was full of justice and no further understanding was required, but in *Key Doctrine* 32-3 Epicurus is clear that there cannot be justice without some sort of social convention in place that disallows the inflicting and suffering of harm. Although the Garden was a truly tranquil place where justice was conceived of as natural, some type of convention was useful to an Epicurean. Epicurus realised this and accounted for a system of justice which was applicable to them, even if that meant an arbitrary system to coordinate each member's role. Therefore, Epicureans

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[132] Diogenes of Oenoanda, fr. 56, trans. Smith, in John. M. Armstrong, "Epicurean Justice," *Phronesis,* vol. 42, no. 3 (1997): 326.
[133] Brown, "Politics," 192.
[134] Epicurus, *Key Doctrine* 33, trans. Long and Sedley, 125.

required a conventional justice that was a reciprocal arrangement between people and at the same time they understood that it was in the nature of a virtuous person to be just.

We could be forgiven for believing that this entails two separate ideas of justice in Epicurean theory. One which relates to those outside the Garden — a societal convention of justice — and the other to those virtuous sages within — a personal sense of justice.[135] Brown, however, argues that this assumption is false, he says Epicurus 'gives no whisper of a distinction'[136] between two conceptions of justice. According to his reading, he claims that there is no difference between Epicurus' natural and conventional justice and that Epicurus did not need to distinguish between the two to be consistent. According to Brown, justice for Epicurus is a natural concept. All humans uphold an idea of justice as what benefits each other, resulting in a reciprocally beneficial community. When we say that something is 'just' we refer to just things and these are things which each person would agree to on the grounds of individual benefit and this counts to what is beneficial to the community.[137] So, how exactly does this direct us how to deal with those outside of the Garden? Well, one interpretation is to say that we mirror the natural justice that is inherent in the virtuous sage, who naturally understands the reciprocal agreement to not harm, in the wider society. This means that we do not have two conceptions of justice, because justice is derived from the reciprocal convention to not harm, and this is a natural way to be for *all* humans, not only for the fully virtuous Epicurean sage.

> Nature's justice is a guarantee of utility with a view to not harming one
> another and not being harmed.[138]

We can then see that in Epicureanism there is an underlying principle for what justice is, but once again Epicurus leaves the interpretation of how we bring about such a convention up to us. There are, however, ways we can determine whether an action is

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[135] Brown, "Politics and Society," 192.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Epicurus, *Key Doctrine* 31, trans. Long and Sedley, 125.

just. In *Key Doctrine* 37-8, Epicurus defines two necessary and sufficient conditions of just and unjust actions.

> What is legally deemed to be just has its existence in the domain of justice whenever it is attested to be useful in the requirements of social relationships, whether or not it turns out to be the same for all. But if someone makes a law and it does not happen to accord with the utility of social relationships, it no longer has the nature of justice. And even if what is useful in the sphere of justice changes but fits the preconception for some time, it was no less just throughout that time for those who do not confuse themselves with empty utterances but simply look at the facts.[139]

This tells us that an action is unjust if it is forbidden by the reciprocally beneficial convention made between people, and contrarily just if it is an action which a person is obliged to undertake under such a convention. Therefore a person is just if they act in accordance with these specifications and unjust if they do not. Although, Epicurus believed that the idea of not harming one another premises all actions that we define as just, he did not think that how justice is enacted, is a universal concept. How societies bring about justice varies with different groups of people and their needs.[140] It is ever changing and holds a direct relation to what the people of that society require from each other. This does not mean that it is whatever anyone says it is, but it does mean that it is a system which is malleable and beneficial to all. We see evidence of this idea in Porphyry's report of the Epicurean Hermarchus. He explains that justice is decided by the members of a community and derived from what is useful for their security.[141]

> The masses complied with their legislators voluntarily, as a result of now having a better grasp of what was useful in their social groupings.[142]

So justice needs to be a mutually agreed upon convention and beneficial in respect to one's desire for personal security as well as the community's. Personal security was an

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[139] Epicurus, *Key Doctrine* 37, trans. Long and Sedley, 125.
[140] Epicurus, *Key Doctrine* 36, in Brown, "Politics and Society," 195.
[141] Porphyry, *On Abstinence* 1.10.2, trans. Long and Sedley, 130.
[142] Porphyry, *On Abstinence* 1.12.3, trans. Long and Sedley, 131.

important consideration for Epicurus because it creates freedom from fear, which of course is a significant aspect of maintaining the Epicurean end, and important for avoiding anxiety. John Armstrong claims that Porphyry's discussion of Hermarchus explains the 'Epicurean chain of justification.'[143] Porphyry links the security of a social life, to individual security and in turn to an individual's freedom from fear.[144]

> Some of the most talented men of the time remembered that they themselves abstained from murder because that was useful for their preservation; and they reminded the rest from what they gained from their social life, that by keeping their hands off their own kind they might safeguard the community which contributed to the individual preservation of each person.[145]

It is not only that justice is required to uphold personal security, but there is also the added risk to an Epicurean of violating that reciprocally beneficial social contract. Epicurus believed that no one could harm another without harming themselves. So for the sake of one's own tranquillity an Epicurean must never breach the social contract that upholds justice.

> No one who secretly infringes any of the terms of a mutual contract made with a view to not harming and not being harmed can be confident that he will escape detection even if he does so countless times. For right up to his death it is unclear whether he will actually escape.[146]

This quote illustrates how Epicurus believed that the anxiety and fear of being caught will consume the person and never leave them right up until their death. The fear of retribution or even a guilty conscience will always travel with the person, and will ultimately jeopardise their *telos* of a tranquil life.

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[143] Armstrong, "Epicurean Justice," 329.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Porphyry, *On Abstinence* 1.10.2, trans. Long and Sedley, 131.
[146] Epicurus, *Key Doctrine* 35, in Brown, "Politics and Society," 195.

> It is not easy for one who infringes the common contracts of peace by his
> deeds to lead a calm and tranquil life. For even if he escapes notice by the race
> of gods and men, he must lack confidence that it will stay hidden for ever. [147]

Of course, we can see that it will only be a rational person who will be affected in this way, an irrational person can delude himself into believing that he will not be caught and thus be free from this fear. However, since it is impossible to achieve *eudaimonia* through irrationality and self-deception, (because for Epicurus only rational actions lead one to tranquillity) criminal conduct is incompatible with *eudaimonia.* For these reasons, violating the reciprocal social agreement can never be conducive to tranquillity and therefore justice is something that all Epicureans share because it is a useful tool for obtaining their end and is not a means to that end that can be dispensed with.

So, we have just seen that Epicurus did indeed have a conventional conception of justice which is the same as the natural justice of the virtuous sage. Therefore there is only the one form of justice; one that an Epicurean will apply in either dealing with those amongst her community of likeminded friends or with those in the wider community, who may not necessarily share her same beliefs. So armed with this information about how Epicurus determined justice from the ideal point of view and from how a perfectly virtuous person would act, we still need to be able to understand how a Modern Epicurean would act in this situation. By hypothesis, my Modern Epicurean is not perfectly virtuous and similarly we see that our world is not ideal. The relationship that our Modern Epicurean must have with her society must also be compatible with the realities of our world.

IV.III   The Virtuous, or not so Virtuous Epicurean

We can see that we model our ideas of justice off the conventions rational people agree to, but what does that really mean for a Modern Epicurean? Specifically, what does it mean to say that it is enough that they are on the path to virtue? Epicurus understood there to be three different types of people in relation to virtue. These were: the fully

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[147] Lucretius, *Nature of Things* 5.1151-60, trans. Long and Sedley, 128.

virtuous person, the not quite so virtuous person, but nonetheless, on the right path to virtue, and the vicious person. We see these distinctions illustrated in a section from Porphyry,[148]

> For what distinguished the men who popularised such practices from the masses was not their physical strength and totalitarian power but their prudence. They established a rational calculation of utility in those whose previous perception of this was irrational and often forgetful, while terrifying others by the magnitude of the penalties.[149]

We can take from this that the truly virtuous person is one who adheres to the mutually beneficial convention that gives the specific content to justice because she sees that this is beneficial to her community and consequently to her tranquillity. Because she can identify the advantages of justice and direct her actions in ways that increase the likelihood of advantage she is free from 'countervailing temptations'. Epicurus contended that the ability to act in these ways came from a fully just disposition and the wisdom to identify the limits of pleasure and pain.[150]

The second kind of person was not fully virtuous but was on their way to becoming so. This person likely needed to be reminded of where the advantage in acting virtuously lies, and would probably have to calculate carefully how this could be done. Therefore this person was not completely virtuous, unlike the person above, who was not in need of such a decision process. But importantly, this person could be reminded and could make a decision resulting in a virtuous action. They were 'making progress towards virtue'.[151]

The third and final kind of person, the unjust person was so unwise that it was only fear of punishment that could ever motivate him to live in accordance with conceptions of justice.

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[148] Brown, "Politics and Society," 192.
[149] Porphyry, *On Abstinence* 1.7.3, trans. Long and Sedley, 129
[150] Brown, "Politics and Society," 193.
[151] Ibid., 193.

Here we can see that Hermarchus identifies the person that I have formed this Modern Epicurean theory for: the person who is not yet perfectly virtuous but who sees why they should be and also sees the path they need to travel to get there.

IV.IV   Justice as a Virtue

Annas, however, is not convinced that we can apply the natural Epicurean justice so easily to those outside the Garden. In fact she argues that it is only the fully virtuous person who can act with justice. She says that justice is not a natural convention that everyone can act in accordance with, it is instead a virtue which only the fully virtuous person can hold. She claims the reciprocal contract theory that Epicurus proposes attaches itself to a specific idea of human motivation, and this idea is not necessarily compatible with an Epicurean conception of justice according to the pleasant life. In other words, what motivates the Epicurean to adopt a social contract is not the same motivation she has for acting justly. The just person does not calculate what is just in order to do the just thing.[152] But adopting a social contract requires the Epicurean to take into account what the unjust person would do. This, she tells us, requires Epicurus to prescribe a two-level view, which of course an Epicurean cannot accept. This split, Annas argues, is incompatible with the Epicurean explanation of how we reach our final end as described in *Key Doctrine* 25. In this passage an Epicurean is directed to refer every action or avoidance at her end, and if there is something else which she refers her actions to then her theory will be inconsistent.[153] Annas argues this presents a significant problem for an Epicurean theory of justice.

John Armstrong, however, believes that Annas' dilemma is a non-issue. Like Brown he holds that there is only the one conception of justice for Epicurus. He says that this split between the individual and the societal notion of justice, which Annas identifies, does ascribe the same motive. He says there is no difference in being concerned about our own security and being concerned with our end. If it were a matter of the Epicurean being concerned for *another* person's freedom from security then Annas may have a

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[152] Annas, *Happiness,* 300.
[153] Ibid., 300-1

point, but he says Annas gives no evidence for that.[154] I agree, although I come to a different conclusion than Armstrong does. He believes that this understanding commits Epicureans to egoistic actions endorsed by their end.[155] I deny the egoistic conception of Epicureanism that Armstrong advocates, and I believe I have shown successfully that we cannot achieve our end without living in a way that promotes tranquillity. Our end is not a thing we aim at, but a way of being. Furthermore, according to Epicurus tranquillity and virtue are interdependent concepts, and when we looked at the similar problem of Epicurean friendship, we saw that refering all our actions to our end was not the same as doing these things for the sake of our end.

Even the Modern Epicurean who is not entirely virtuous will see that being virtuous is conducive to tranquillity and can be reminded that this is the way she should be, directing herself to act accordingly. Furthermore, because she is not entirely virtuous but can still live justly, this appears to negate Annas' understanding. Justice and the social contracts it develops are there for humankind to use as a tool for a mutually beneficial existence, and according to Epicureanism living justly will be living in a way that is peaceful and tranquil. We do not need to say that because the Modern Epicurean has to be reminded to live justly that therefore she is not living justly. If we remember from *Letters to Menoeceus* 132, Epicurus says,

> It teaches the impossibility of living pleasurably without living prudently,
> honourably and justly, and the impossibility of living prudently, honourably
> and justly without living justly. For the virtues are naturally linked with living
> pleasurably, and living pleasurably is inseperable from them.[156]

It does not follow from this that we must be perfectly virtuous it only directs us to live in virtue, these are two very different statements. One does not start from perfect virtue, there are very few examples in humanity of perfectly virtuous people. One does however see that acting virtuously is a more desirable way of being. The more one makes decisions that are in accordance with virtue, the more one realises that this is a better way to live one's life. This doesn't mean that a Modern Epicurean can have a complacent

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[154] Armstrong, "Epicurean Justice," 331.
[155] Ibid., 333.
[156] Epicurus, *Letters to Menoeceus* 132, trans. Long and Sedley, 114.

attitude about acting justly, it means that justice is a tool which prescribes the social convention all people require for security. It is integral to living tranquilly that we act in just and virtuous ways towards our fellow citizens.

Even if I am wrong on this account, what is important is that we create an Epicurean understanding of justice that we can adapt to our imperfect world. If that means we need to be a bit flexible in how we regard virtuous actions, then this may be something we have to sacrifice in order for the theory to have a practical application. Even Diogenes of Oenoanda denies the purely virtuous position for an Epicurean when he says,

> Pleasure is the end of the best lifestyle, while the virtues which are now being inappropriately fussed about by them (being transferred from the position of means to that of end) are in no way the end, but the means to the end.

Our aim here is not to generate a perfectly virtuous theory of the good, it is to understand how a life can be lived in the best way possible. So fundamentally the Modern Epicurean understands that acting with virtue is the ideal for her, but exercising the virtue of justice can only be gauged by how she acts within the natural convention of justice and this does not require her to be perfectly virtuous, only to act with justice.

In response to our earlier questions about what sort of theory of justice a Modern Epicurean can adopt and how this relates to wider society, there is indeed an Epicurean conception of justice that the Modern Epicurean can subscribe to. If we apply a simple contractarian idea of how society should relate — 'don't harm me and I won't harm you' — this does not require too onerous a task from our Modern Epicurean who is on the path to virtue. An added bonus to such a theory is that it also does not require too much from the 'unjust' person. So, by implementing a simple reciprocal system of justice we have taken measures to protect our personal security. This helps us eradicate a fear of others, and further, because the Epicurean is required to abstain from harming someone else — since such an action would jeopardise her tranquillity and she would never be free of the anxiety of being caught, or the guilt that resulted from it — the Epicurean presents herself as even less of a threat. This in turn reduces the likelihood that the Non-Epicurean or unjust person would take preventative measures against their being harmed. Therefore such a conception of justice even in a non-ideal world

functions as an effective mechanism for insuring security and freedom from fear and does not place too onerous a duty on any one member of society.

IV. V Epicurus on Politics

We have just established the best way a Modern Epicurean can conceive of justice. But there is a further problem that needs to be addressed if we are to fulfil our objective of reducing the anxiety caused by income inequality – that is creating a compromise on political involvement. It is widely known that Epicurus discouraged such action because he believed that involvement in politics caused anxiety and pain. It was a key component of his theory that Epicureans adopt the dictum λάθε βιώσας (to live unnoticed). 'The life of politics' in the ancient world was very much about *timê* or status and he believed that those who sought freedom from fear through elevated social status were mistaken. Security, he claimed, could only be found in a community of like-minded friends. There is, however, much contemporary literature[157] that instead argues the traditional conception of Epicurus' decree to live unnoticed was overstated. We will explore in this chapter the works and ideas of Eric Brown, Gert Roskam and Jeffery Fish, who all argue that the prohibition on political involvement was not as decisive as previously thought. Although the viewpoint is changing, there still exists uncertainty on what it took for an Epicurean to be politically active and what sort of circumstances Epicurus would have granted as being a legitimate exception to the rule. An obvious reason for the divergence of opinion is that Epicurus had no concrete conception of politics and therefore many scholars, who attempt to attribute any type of political stance to Epicurus, inadvertently or not, project their own agenda onto his work. This results in a confused understanding of Epicurus and his doctrines. But this need not be the case; the way we should be considering Epicureanism is not by putting words into his mouth, but instead by using his theories and honestly applying them to modern culture. We need not be scared of deviating from the doxographical view or attributing a view point to Epicurus that is consistent with the valuable insights in his philosophy but otherwise unattested in the limited evidence we have of what he wrote or believed. We do not live in Ancient Greece

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[157] See Eric Brown, 2009. Gert Roskam, 2007. Jeffrey Fish, 2011.

and our world is a very different place. If we want Epicurean theory to survive, we need to create a dynamic and adaptive theory. Fortunately, there is much in Epicureanism that allows us to do this.

For a view to be suitably inspired by Epicurean teachings — even if that means applying it to our world in creative way — it must have a degree of similarity to what Epicureans in the ancient world thought. I will argue that it is consistent with the essence of Epicureanism that the Modern Epicurean become politically involved. So, first, let us look at the existing literature and how the directives to live unnoticed and avoid political involvement have become so controversial.

I have just presented a reading of Epicurus that showed how 'the Garden' was an innately just co-existence, because Epicureans had no reason to harm one another. Nonetheless, there was a need for Epicureans to develop a system of justice that related to the outside world.[158] Epicurus strongly discouraged political involvement in the outside populace because of the risk to the tranquil life, to the extent that the Epicureans were at the mercy of outside forces. Nevertheless, Epicureans required the presence of a 'favourably disposed, traditional political community nearby, to guarantee security against potentially powerful enemies.'[159] So, they required some form of reciprocal contract with those in the wider political sphere to maintain their safety. This meant that for an Epicurean to create safeguards against instances of pain and anxiety, *sometimes* political involvement in the outside populace was required to maintain their secure community.[160] This need created two things: an Epicurean conception of justice and an exception to the dictum 'live unnoticed'.

According to Brown, the Epicureans never rejected politics outright. They pursued pleasure through a cultivated community of friends, and Epicurus created a version of justice to suit the needs of the Epicurean community.[161] This entails a reciprocally beneficial convention made to not harm one another.[162] Without such a convention,

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[158] Brown, "Politics and Society," 196.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid., 180.
[162] Ibid., 192.

nothing is just or unjust. Anyone who spurns the agreement and seeks to harm others will fail to achieve tranquillity, because he cannot be secure in the fact that he will not go unpunished, and further, that someone will not harm him.[163] 'The just life is most free from disturbance, but the unjust life is full of the greatest disturbance.'[164] Tranquillity requires security from harm and confidence of sustenance and both of these require co-operation with other human beings.[165] Justice for an Epicurean is determined by the value placed on aspects of it by society and the benefit society gains from not harming one another and not being harmed. Therefore, it is continually changing and malleable.

> What is legally deemed to be just has its existence in the domain of justice whenever it is attested to be useful in the requirements of social relationships, whether or not it turns out to be the same for all. But if someone makes a law and it does not happen to accord with the utility of social relationships, it no longer has the nature of justice.[166]

Brown says that what was just for Epicurus was relative to 'particular facts that are subject to great variation.'[167] It is from this understanding that Brown suggests the reason for why there is no concrete Epicurean political philosophy. If the facts of justice vary from time-to-time and place-to-place it is not an easy task to pin point exactly what are the correct conceptions of justice. Even without the traditional institutions that define a political community, the Epicurean garden was still a politically just society within itself because its members valued virtuous and mutually beneficial norms.[168] Therefore it was supposed that there was little need for a further understanding of justice. As we saw in the preceeding section, this was not an entirely accurate assumption.

Nonetheless, Epicurus did advise Epicureans that it was best to avoid politics outside the Garden, because 'he insist[ed] that those who seek security from political power through honour are mistaken about how to achieve freedom from fear.'[169] However, Epicurus'

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163 Brown, "Politics and Society," 193-4.
164 Epicurus, *Key Doctrines* 17, trans. Long and Sedley, 125
165 Brown, "Politics and Society," 194.
166 Epicurus, *Key Doctrines* 37, trans. Long and Sedley, 125
167 Brown, "Politics and Society," 195.
168 Ibid., 195.
169 Ibid., 180.

advice to avoid politics was not as concrete as some might claim. For Epicurus a tranquil life required not only the avoidance of situations where there is likelihood of pain and anxiety, but an Epicurean also needed to create safeguards against such instances of pain arising. Brown recognises that these two strategies pull in different directions. If one is better equipped to deal with what is likely to cause pain, the less one needs to avoid such situations, whereas, the more one avoids pain the less likely they will be able to deal with a painful situation if one arises.[170] So, although it was a better option for an Epicurean to retreat from the wider population, there were justifiable exceptions to the directive to live unnoticed. These were cases were political involvement was the lesser of two evils; where there was a need to mitigate matters directly affecting their tranquillity.[171] Avoidance is not abstinence and although it is often advisable to avoid situations where pain and anxiety can be expected, if avoiding that situation creates a worse situation for oneself it is advisable to do something about it.[172]

> In order to obtain protection from other men, any means for attaining this end
> is a natural good.[173]

So, there were exceptions to living unnoticed that came about when one's tranquillity was jeopardised. Brown argues that where there is a serious threat to one's tranquillity that can be averted through political involvement then an Epicurean should get involved.

Gert Roskam[174] and Jeffrey Fish[175] progress this idea and show us even more instances of when it would permissible for an Epicurean to become involved in politics. They demonstrate that there was flexibility in Epicurus' attitude towards politics and they both argue that the prohibition on political involvement is not as clear-cut as previous Epicurean scholars would hold. If the circumstances were right, an Epicurean did not

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[170] Brown, "Politics and Society," 180.
[171] Ibid., 181.
[172] Ibid., 180.
[173] Epicurus, *Key Doctrine* 6, "Principal Doctrines," *Epicurus & Epicurean Philosophy,* (1996), http://www.epicurus.net/en/principal.html
[174] Gert Roskam, *Live Unnoticed, On the Vicissitudes of an Epicurean Doctrice. Philosophia Antiqua, v. 111.* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007)
[175] Jeffrey Fish, "Not all politicians are Sisyphus," in *Epicurus and The Epicurean Tradition,* edited by Jeffery Fish and Kirk R. Sanders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011)

have to abstain from politics. Instead, involvement could be encouraged. For Roskam the motivation for political involvement was justifiable as long as one considered actions with due measure and the circumstances were such that they permitted action when it was important to the individual. However, involvement must always adhere to the hedonistic *calculus*. Roskam develops his ideas from a comprehensive understanding of the surviving works of Plutarch and Epicurus' own *Letter to Idomeneus* and a clarification of Seneca from Diogenes Laertius. Fish, on the other hand, argues that there were circumstances when abstinence caused a great threat to tranquillity, and in such cases, 'a political career might prove the best choice.'[176] Fish uses the work of Philodemus' *On the Good King (De bono rege)* to show that there is a positive case for Epicurean statesmanship, and through the virtuous exercise of power such pursuits are conducive to pleasure and security.[177] All three authors argue that their interpretations are consistent with the ideas of Epicurus himself. I believe I can further add to this understanding of Epicurus by highlighting the fact that it was not the pursuit of power that Epicurus found abhorrent and advised against, but it was the attitude that the pursuer attached to the exercise which caused the arousal of pain and anxiety. If an Epicurean proceeds in the right way, then political involvement is more than an acceptable means to the end goal of tranquillity.

Roskam argues that there are some circumstances in Epicurus' philosophy that allow for political involvement. Standard interpretations in the existing secondary literature tell us Epicurus advised against involvement in politics and convey this idea as clearly established and beyond dispute without any possibility for subtle differences. Roskam therefore concludes that these sources should be disregarded because they contain 'polemical misrepresentations and doxographical generalisations, and tell us more about the presuppositions of their authors ... than about the view of Epicurus.'[178]

Roskam says that if it were true that Epicurus felt so strongly about the doctrine to 'live unnoticed' he would not merely have sought to dissuade his followers from the practice of political involvement, but would have adopted a very critical view of it and of

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[176] Fish, "Not all politicians," 73.
[177] Ibid., 73.
[178] Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 45.

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statesmen and legislators. To Roskam, the evidence suggests that Epicurus more than likely had a two-fold attitude towards politics. First, that politicians should be praised to the extent that their political involvement promotes their own security and pleasure and second, that those politicians who endured pains that did not contribute to their overall pleasure should be the objects of ridicule.[179]

Roskam argues that interpretations that come from Plutarch and Diogenes Laertius insist on the point of living unnoticed because their focus is on the avoidance of pain and anxiety and not on *ataraxia* and *aponia*; the positive aspect of Epicurean theory. They also invoke the importance of limitation. Indeed, limitation is an important part of Epicurean theory, and it is this concept which describes how happiness operates, but it is commonly held that happiness cannot come from holding offices of power. Confusing the cause of happiness means pursuing the wrong type of desires, the unnatural and unnecessary.[180] Cicero presents further arguments for why Epicurus was against political involvement. First, he explains, it requires 'arduous efforts', even entailing a risk to one's life. Second, politicians are at the mercy of the people they serve, and prone to misfortune. Third, Cicero argues, most politicians are woeful beings whose company is best avoided. The harsh reality of political life should warn prospective politicians and especially Epicureans away from its grasp.[181] Roskam tells us that it is also from Plutarch that we get the positive reasoning for abstinence from political involvement. Plutarch states that there is an ideal, which is more attractive and far superior to the advantages of political office, that of *otium, quies* and *tranquillitas* — leisure, rest and tranquillity. It is these traditional opinions of the Epicurean idea that tell us what paths are worthy of pursuing.[182]

Roskam concedes that such arguments sufficed to keep the Epicureans within the Garden, and that of course Epicurus would have used similar arguments to persuade politicians from public life, and that this was Epicurus' ideal contention. However Roskam argues, there are 'scanty fragments' available to us which would make us believe that Epicurus' arguments were more concrete and adapted to the individual nature of his

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[179] Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 45-6.
[180] Ibid., 46-7.
[181] Ibid., 47.
[182] Ibid., 47-8.

addressee. In particular, we could coherently make such an assumption from the surviving parts of a letter to Idomeneus.[183] In one small section, Epicurus advises Idomeneus to run as far as he can before he loses the freedom to withdraw but that he should wait for the καιρός (right moment). Epicurus has not advised *why* Idomeneus should do this but *how*, showing, Roskam argues, that Epicurus did not limit himself to providing abstract theoretical advice, instead he gave Idomeneus concrete advice on how to act. In essence, Epicurus' advice to Idomeneus is not to be hasty in his decision to abandon politics, and if he indeed sees fit to do so, it should be a rational and well-considered decision.[184] In the second excerpt from this letter, Epicurus says,

> If you are attracted by fame, my letters will make you more renowned than all
> the things which you cherish and which make you cherished.[185]

Roskam argues that this is Epicurean therapy at its best, because the statement presupposes the theoretical argument and gets straight to the point, taking into account the individual nature of the addressee. Epicurus knows he is not talking to an Epicurean sage, one who has already achieved tranquillity, but one still attracted to and harmed by empty desires. Roskam concedes that although Epicurus does allow individual circumstances to determine how we should approach the idea of living unnoticed, he does show us that happiness is best served from his perspective.[186]

The interpretation of Epicurus we see in Roskam mirrors my interpretation of Epicurean therapy being a process. It is written for people who have not attained the ideal of the Epicurean sage. It understands that prospective Epicureans can still be attracted to those things that are unnatural and unnecessary. Epicureanism is not an absolute theory; instead, it is practical, dynamic and adaptable.

Although these arguments appear to strengthen Epicurus' advice to avoid politics, Roskam believes they still allow for political participation, and there are some important qualifications that we should consider before we reach the conclusion that to live

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[183] Epsit. 22,5-6 = fr. 133 Usener, In Roskam, *Live Unnoticed,* 48.
[184] Roskam, *Live Unnoticed,* 48-9.
[185] Epist. 21,3 = fr.132 Usener, in Roskam, *Live Unnoticed,* 49.
[186] Roskam, *Live Unnoticed,* 49.

unnoticed is the only option for an Epicurean. First, Epicurus' argument for not participating in the *polis* did not imply that one should completely ignore it and its institutions. The Garden was not in the complete wilderness but was set just on the outskirts of Athens, and the laws and institutions could have been important for the Epicurean. Roskam further argues that Epicurus took into consideration the laws of Athens.[187] Second, Epicurus' preference for a life lived unnoticed, did not exclude all interest in political life. He was close friends with many Athenian politicians and his knowledge of the Stoics proves that he closely followed the political events of the time. Third, and most importantly there is an argument which is justified from the hedonistic *calculus.* Epicurus believed that there could be exceptional circumstances in which one should engage in politics. Therefore, to live unnoticed was not an *a priori* rule for everybody.[188] Roskam invokes the Latin phrase summarised by Seneca: *non accedet ad rem publicam sapiens, nisi si quid intervenerit* (The wise man does not engage in public affairs except in an emergency). Similar phrases were found in passages from Cicero and Plutarch. From the latter work Roskam cites what he calls a 'beautiful illustration' of Epicurus' qualifying philosophy; explaining that although politics may not be the best way to achieve tranquillity, it is *a* way and Epicurus makes it perfectly clear that there can be exceptions to the general rule.

Then in cases of *si quid intervenerit* an Epicurean may enter political life, and Roskam lists four philosophers who take this line. Fowler thinks that political action could be required in order to protect an Epicurean community from destruction.[189] Similarly, Griffin thinks political action could be justified if there was a true breakdown of justice.[190] Besnier argues that when in certain circumstances, Epicureans need to change laws that threaten their happiness, then they can become politically involved[191] and finally Asmis believes intervention in politics can be justified in so much as it protects the political stability Epicureans require to maintain their personal happiness.[192]

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[187] Roskam, *Live Unnoticed,* 49-50.
[188] Ibid., 50.
[189] Quoted in Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 51.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Ibid.

All of this considered, Roskam rejects this line of argument, because it is does not rest on strong enough evidence to be completely consistent with Epicurus. Roskam argues that Epicurus would never have had to deal with any of these situations, and even though they are presumably consistent with his thinking on the matter, accepting this line of argument can only be mere conjecture. Furthermore, when considering the hedonistic *calculus*, Roskam argues that the political circumstances would need to be extremely bad to validate such action. He tells us that even if a law or circumstance was bad the hedonistic *calculus* will show that it is often much less trouble to live under a bad law than to try to change it.

Roskam looks at David Sedley's attempt – using a passage in Plutarch's *Life of Brutus* — to suggest that later Epicureans could defend the view that the Epicurean sage can be driven by 'an overriding sense of obligation to their non-philosophical fellow citizens.'[193] This seems perfectly reasonable and aligns with the contemporary psychological studies that suggest social work significantly increases happiness, well-being and physical health.[194] Sedley tells us this interpretation supports the hedonistic *calculus* since it clearly brings about sufficiently great pleasure to counterbalance the pain caused by the political involvement.[195]

Unfortunately for Sedley's idea, Roskam argues this understanding is open to the same objections as we saw from the *si quid intervenerit* theories. It presupposes a motivating force of political emergency situations. Furthermore, it only applies to later generations, and even the evidence for supposing that is tentative. Statilius the Epicurean rejects this reason and no other parallels can be found in the works of Philodemus. Roskam further proposes that Brutus more than likely posited this idea in general terms, those of which were not connected with Epicurean theory.[196]

Nevertheless, Roskam moves on to derive more meaning from Seneca's claim *si quid intervenerit* and from Plutarch again finds a representation of the dictum.

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[193] Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 52.
[194] Thoits and Hewitt, "Volunteer Work and Well-Being," 122.
[195] Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 52.
[196] Ibid., 52.

> Not even Epicurus believes that men who are eager for honour and glory should lead an inactive life, but that they should fulfil their natures by engaging in politics and entering public life, on the ground that, because of their natural dispositions, they are more likely to be disturbed and harmed by inactivity if they do not obtain what they desire.[197]

This principle is given by Plutarch to present the nuances of Epicurus' position in a 'polemical' attack on Democritus.[198] Nevertheless, there is much to garner from this passage. It is not that the person is motivated by an external situation; instead, it is by their own nature. If a person is eager for honour and fame, and political *inactivity* would thwart this desire causing confusion and anxiety, then it is reasonable that she should pursue her political ambition. The important component to this argument is the understanding of how the unnecessary desire works, and how it relates to the individual who has it. In Epicurean doctrine, an unnecessary desire is one that does not bring pain if unfulfilled, but in this segment from Plutarch not achieving honour and fame does lead to pain and so in this case such a desire could be seen as a necessary desire. This means that we cannot have a concrete designation of desires without qualification. Thus, the Scholion on *Key Doctrine* 29 is too absolute in the objects of desire it lists.[199] 'Desires may be unnecessary for the great majority, but *de facto* necessary for a small minority.'[200]

In the case of Idomeneus, his desire for political involvement would cause him pain if unfulfilled, and Epicurus advised that he must find the καιρός to withdraw from politics. For Idomeneus, it was advisable to continue with his political involvement, until he had undergone sufficient Epicurean therapy to relieve him of this desire and when he could 'live unnoticed' without pain. This again cements the idea that Epicurean theory is malleable and interchangeable. The surviving fragments of his letter to Idomeneus show how Epicurus adapted his arguments to the nature of the addressee. Nonetheless, Roskam is wary that Plutarch may have had a biased view and that this claim might only be a hypothetical concession. There is nothing to tell us whether or not Plutarch may

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[197] Plutarch, *De Tranquiltas. An.* 465F-466A = fr. 555 Us, trans. Helmbold, W.C., quoted in Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 52.
[198] Roskam, Live Unnoticed, 52.
[199] Ibid., 53.
[200] Ibid.

have omitted restrictions or qualifications that did not suit his purpose.[201] Even though neither option is substantiated, Roskam argues that Plutarch misleads the reader by replacing the descriptive view of Epicurus with a normative one. Therefore, according to Roskam, this disqualifies Plutarch as a reliable source for shedding light on Seneca's phrase *nisi si quid intervenerit*.[202]

There is one further passage that Roskam uses to bring about the conclusion we are seeking. Diogenes Laertius writes that 'the Epicurean sage will pay court to a king when the occasion is appropriate.[203] It is argued that Epicurus favours a monarchy as the best political institution because it is most easily reconciled with 'live unnoticed'.[204] This however only holds in the non-ideal situation. In an ideal Epicurean situation, there would be no need for kings or laws.[205] The sentence that Roskam here focuses on here speaks of the non-ideal situation 'monarchy might be the easiest system to live with, and if circumstances required action, it might well be right.'[206] Roskam argues that it is more than likely not the idea of the monarchy that we should be focusing on; instead, we should rest the emphasis on the 'circumstances'. Still, in what circumstances can the Epicurean pay court to a king? Roskam concedes there is no right answer here, but uses Epicurus' own decision to approach the king through his followers.[207] This shows that we need not refer to emergency situations, but that we can instead refer to situations that are individually important or which are important for one's community. This, says Roskam, would hold for any political commitment.[208] So a short participation in politics not only contributes to the long-term prospects of the Epicurean, but she can also receive pleasure in the act itself. This latter concession is evident in *Letters to Menoeceus* 131, where Epicurus argues that a simple way of living allows for more appreciation of extravagance. Applied to the argument for political involvement, the Epicurean can better enjoy moments of political involvement if she is used to an isolated life.[209]

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[201] Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 54.
[202] Ibid.
[203] Diogenes Laertius, 10,120 =fr. 577 Usener, quoted in Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 54.
[204] Gigante and Dorandi, "Anassarco e Epicuro," in Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 54.
[205] Fowler, "Lucretius and Politics," 130, quoted in Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 54.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Plutarch, *Adv. Colot.* 1126C, in Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 55.
[208] Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 55.
[209] Ibid., 55.

Jeffrey Fish argues that there is a theme which runs through the work of Philodemus, the Roman Epicurean contemporary of Lucretius, and is explicit in *Key Doctrine 7,* which states that glory is a risky pleasure, but one that if found to be risk-free would provide pleasure through security and the virtuous exercise of power.[210] It is through the work of Philodemus that Fish argues Roman statesmen were able to connect two themes in Epicurean doctrine and continue in their roles in politics. First, that the virtuous traits of good will and love of others are actually pleasurable, and second, that power can lead to safety. This then led to the conclusion that the virtuous exercise of power promotes security as well as pleasure.[211] Fish claims that Epicurean statesmen in previous generations would have also held the same view. Fish concedes that whether political power creates security is not clear-cut, and is instead controversial. Especially in light of the Epicurean claim that an Epicurean ought to live unnoticed, which held that security could only be found in the company of like-minded friends. However, the Epicureans of the Late Republic thought otherwise and Fish argues there is a good case to be made in support of them.[212]

Fish maintains that an Epicurean becoming involved in public life is not merely a knee-jerk reaction to their perceived inability to reconcile their philosophy with a political life.[213] The decision of the Late Romans, such as Cassius and Piso, to continue in their public roles was perfectly reasonable. They did not need to deny that withdrawal from political life was the best option. They could see that there were completely justifiable reasons consistent with Epicurean theory that allowed them to persist in their possession of power.[214] It was reasonable to at the same time involve themselves in politics and enjoy the benefits of an Epicurean perspective. Epicurus did not discourage the possession of power just the ambitious pursuit of it.[215] Fish examines two sources, which he believes validate his claim: Epicurus' *Key Doctrine 7* and a passage from Philodemus'

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[210] Fish, "Not all politicians," 75.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Ibid.
[214] Ibid., 76.
[215] Ibid.

On Vices.[216] Using *Key Doctrine 7* Lucretius argues vehemently that politics should be avoided.

> ...all in vain, since struggling to advance to the height of honour they saw to it that the path of their life was filled with danger. And yet envy like a thunderbolt, sometimes strikes and hurls them down with great scorn into bitter Tartarus, since envy like a thunderbolt, usually sets ablaze the heights of whatever raises up higher than the rest. [217]

Fish explains that there is an incongruity in Lucretius' rhetoric about political involvement and that instead of finding reasons for explaining away the apparent conflicting idea, we should embrace it as an acknowledgement of a possibility. Fish argues that although Lucretius more than likely acknowledged this possibility grudgingly, he does allow for the possibility that security can be found through political power. This, he says, lies in Lucretius' use of the Latin *interdum* which means 'sometimes', or 'from time to time'. It appears that Fish is grasping at straws to justify his point in the face of Lucretius' extremely dogmatic interpretation of Epicurus. In a footnote, Fish even concedes that Lucretius never entertained the point that a political life could lead to security.[218] Although I agree with Fish on the greater point, that Epicurus did believe there were circumstances which called for political involvement, I believe that Fish is allowing too much to hang on a specific translation of this one word in Lucretius, and I doubt this is going to provide us with a conclusive answer to our problem. However, there is something that we can hold on to in *De Rerum Natura* that will allow us to see that Lucretius did not define all aspects of politics as a bad choice for an Epicurean. Fish would have done better to look at the passage immediately preceding the one he has highlighted, instead of hanging his argument on 'sometimes'.

> Day by day those with outstanding intellect and strength of mind would give increasing demonstrations of how to change the earlier mode of life by innovations and by fire. Kings began to found cities and to establish citadels for their own protection and refuge. They distributed cattle and lands, giving

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[216] Fish, "Not all politicians," 76.
[217] Lucretius, *Nature of Things* 5.1120-5.1130, in Fish, "Not all politicians," 83.
[218] Fish, "Not all politicians," 82 (fn. 37).

them to each man on the basis of his looks and strength and intellect; for good looks counted for much and strength was at a premium.[219]

For Lucretius, it is not that people who aim to change society for the good always aim at an empty desire. Before the advent of money and property, political involvement was not certain to lead to pain and anxiety: in fact it could aid in tranquillity. It is the nature of society and the establishment of private property and money that motivates Lucretius' contempt of political involvement.

> Later came the invention of private property and the discovery of gold, which easily robbed the strong and handsome of their status; for in general people would follow the wealthier man's party … but men wished to be famous and powerful, to secure a stable foundation for their fortune and the means of living out a peaceful life with wealth. To no purpose – in struggling to climb up to the pinnacle of status, they made their journey perilous.[220]

Roskam in *Live Unnoticed* argues that many authors, like Lucretius, desired to create an apodictic and minimally nuanced reading of Epicurus,[221] and undoubtedly in Lucretius we find a guide to achieving security. He went to great lengths to stress his point that politics would cause anxiety, but this was because he found it inconceivable that one could achieve tranquillity in the existing political climate of Ancient Rome — where wealth created depraved power — and any political endeavour would only result in pain. What Fish has failed to see is that Lucretius did believe that if the situation were different and if it were possible for an Epicurean to achieve their goal of tranquillity, then he would have granted that such an endeavour was valuable. Instead, Fish has tried to alter the meaning of a single word of Lucretius' which is translated differently by many scholars and cannot provide us with the justification we need.

Nonetheless, we should not reject Fish's entire argument based on this one misstep. Fish presents further evidence that Epicurean theory allows for political involvement. Much of this comes from Philodemus who wrote that a virtuous person, as opposed to a vicious

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[219] Lucretius, *Nature of Things* 5.1105-5.1110, trans. Long and Sedley, 128.
[220] Lucretius, *Nature of Things* 5.1110-5.1120, trans. Long and Sedley, 128.
[221] Roskam, *Live Unnoticed,* 180.

person, may pursue safety and security through a good reputation. This very point shows us that Philodemus' take on Epicurean philosophy was a positive view (while Lucretius focused on the negative). Fish argues that Philodemus dedicates several columns in *De Bono Rege* to showing that safety and security are attainable by a virtuous king and that Philodemus praises 'kingly virtues' because they lead to a sound monarchy.

> Departing therefore from such topics, let us again recommend that which is good for a king, to be averse to a harsh, austere and bitter character, and to practise gentleness, goodness and a king's mildness and leniency as much as possible, since these lead to a sound monarchy and not arbitrary rule based on fear of a despot.[222]

Fish tells us that Philodemus emphasised that gentleness in a king should be evident to his subjects so that they will love him in return. This consideration is not unique to Philodemus and Fish tells us that it can be found in much kingship literature.[223] However, what is different in Philodemus' advice to the king is that it has an end. Virtue is instrumental in obtaining a secure and prosperous reign. This, says Fish, is specifically suited to Epicurean theory. A king should avoid shameful and despotic behaviour so that he will be loved with reverence. Without such reverence there is no motivation for power, because there is no use of it. No security or safety can be obtained. A just ruler will reign over prospering and peaceful kingdoms, but Fish argues this, according to Philodemus, was not for the purpose of the people but for the benefit of the king. There was also the added benefit for the monarch of receiving enjoyment from ruling and living justly.[224] Fish argues that Philodemus' exploration of how a ruler should act virtuously, to create a safe and stable kingdom, possibly picks up on a theme in Epicurus' own lost work, *On Kingship*.[225]

This can also be seen in light of the modern theory I propose. My theory is consistent with how an Epicurean lives tranquilly, in that the good king does not rule justly, fairly and virtuously for the sake of tranquillity, in the way Fish describes, but by ruling in this

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[222] Philodemus, *De Bono Rege,* col. 24,6-18, trans. Dorandi, quoted in Fish, "Not all politicians," 89.
[223] Fish, "Not all politicians," 89.
[224] Ibid., 90.
[225] Fish, "Not all politicians," 91.

way he creates a *way* of being, which is conducive to living tranquilly and happily; beneficial for both the king and the common person.

We can see there is much evidence that early Epicureans allowed political involvement that was consistent with the pursuit of a tranquil way of life. I do not claim that Epicurus would have prescribed such an endeavour for all Epicureans, but I do claim that for some it is possible to be involved in politics where it does not disturb your tranquillity. Although much of the work that attributes a public political presence for Epicurus is contentious, it is clear that our aim to adopt a theory consistent with the valuable insights of Epicurus, but adaptable to a modern conception of morality, is not an insurmountable hurdle. We do not need to abandon our Epicurean roots.

Nonetheless, there is a finer point, in how I have previously defined what an empty desire is, that if clarified further allows us to add a further reason to making an exception to λάθε βιώσας (live unnoticed). I have previously established my contention that what motivates an Epicurean into political involvement is the maintenance of one's tranquillity and I insist that every action must be referred to one's ability to live tranquilly. If an object of desire is of the unnecessary kind and falls into the category of an empty desire, it will jeopardise tranquillity, and so must be abandoned. Political participation is an unnecessary desire, and such desires walk a thin line between being natural and unnatural. The attitudes we have in seeking such desires are how we determine their status. If the desire stays on the natural side then it is conducive to living tranquilly and can be pursued. But if it causes us pain and anxiety, it is empty, and must be abandoned. There are many roles in political life where this is the case. However, if approached in the right way the desire for political life need not become an empty desire.

> Whenever intense passion is present in natural desires which do not lead to pain if they are unfulfilled, these have their origin in empty opinion; and the reason for their persistence is not their own nature but the empty opinion of the person.[226]

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[226] Epicurus, *Key Doctrines* 30, trans. Long and Sedley, 115.

Epicurus has a tripartite understanding of desire. He identifies three types of desires, the natural and necessary, the natural and unnecessary, and the unnatural and unnecessary, otherwise known as the empty desires. Epicurus did not give us a specific list of which desires fit into where, instead he directs us to seek these with prudence and wisdom. It is in this way that the virtues are an integral part to Epicurean philosophy. How each desire applies to each of us is something which we are to determine on our own; no one person's pleasure is the same as another's. From what Epicurus did give us we can see that there are various ideas of natural that he uses. Epicurus would have regarded what is natural as intuitive and readily accepted. He supposed that there was a way in which humans are and the contrast between what is natural and what is empty suggests that what is natural is what is not harmful and mistaken. [227]

The first category of desire is easily determined — the natural and necessary are the things we require for tranquillity, and which give us freedom from anxiety and pain. These are things like food, water, security, shelter, warmth and so on. It is the unnecessary desires and whether they are natural or unnatural that is hard to determine. The natural and unnatural distinction is not a distinction between the objects of our desire, instead it is a psychological distinction we create from how we treat the desire. Because of this we cannot give a specific list of what they are in the same way as we can with the necessary desires. When we consider a desire and wish for it to be fulfilled, we project an attitude onto the object that we wish to attain. This could equally be explained as a reason for why we desire the object. It is this reason and the motivations behind it that give us the information we need to categorise the desire. If we seek the desire for any other reason except that bringing it into our network of goods will allow us to live tranquilly then we can identify this desire as empty.

There are some desires, which are only sometimes conducive to our tranquillity. These are the unnecessary but natural desires. They are fine to pursue as long as they do not cause us any pain and anxiety and as long as they do not jeopardise our tranquil life. When we mistakenly start to believe that these are of the necessary kind, we start to pursue them in an unhealthy way, and because they are desires that are not necessary

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[227] Annas, *Happiness*, 191.

and can only vary our pleasure, they can never be fulfilled. When a desire is like this, it is empty and we need to abandon it. When we abandon it our suspicions that it is not necessary are confirmed and it is then that we realise that we are better off without it. It is then that we become aware of its empty status.

Empty desires are defined specifically by the harm they cause. The reason they are so harmful is that when we pursue them we falsely believe that they are necessary for happiness and pursue them to our detriment. When in actuality they do not provide any freedom from fear, pain and anxiety, instead they exacerbate the pre-existing condition that they were sought to remedy. We cannot identify what sort of desire we have without evaluating our attitude towards it. In some cases, this may mean a trial and error system, but this is part of the Epicurean therapy, to use virtue to assess how the desires we have fit into our lives.

I claim that it was a common mistake of Epicurean critics to say that Epicurus rejected the object of the desire. It is not the case that there is a specific list of empty desires that must be avoided. Lucretius tried to provide a list, but that was specific to his time, and there is no reason why we must stick to them. Another reference we have to lists of desires comes from the Scholion on Epicurus' *Key Doctrine* 29, which says,

> Natural and necessary [desires], according to Epicurus, are ones which bring relief from pain, such as drinking when thirsty; natural but non-necessary are ones which merely vary pleasure but do not remove pain, such as expensive foods; neither natural nor necessary are ones for things like crown and erection of statues.[228]

This Scholion provides us a list of what could easily be seen as those things which fit into each category. However, these were not lists of things given by Epicurus himself and we do not have to take this as absolute. There are a couple of reasons for this. First, is that objects are historically relevant. If we reconsider our most recent discussion of Lucretius, he did not believe that political involvement was something that could be conducive to living tranquilly. He saw political involvement as only causing pain and anxiety, but this

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[228] Scholion on Epicurus, *Key Doctrines* 29, trans. Long and Sedley, 116.

was because he was living in the final days of the Roman Republic, which was an unstable and mean political environment and Lucretius did believe that there was a time in the past where political involvement could lead to a tranquil life. There is no reason for us to deny that now is an equally good time to be politically involved. Epicurus left the classification of desires open to an individual psychological understanding. And we saw in *Key Doctrine* 30 that it is not the object of desire but the opinion of those who desire it. A desire is given its status from the attitude that an individual projects on to it.

Preliminary lists are fine for a general guide, and can be of great help to burgeoning Epicurean sages, especially in respect to political involvement. It is easy enough to have the right attitude about trivial luxury items like wine or expensive food. However, having the right attitude about political involvement, status and wealth is a much harder task. It is only the experienced Epicurean who can navigate these unnecessary desires with the right attitude. It is true that there were statues erected in Epicurus' likeness, feast days were held in his honour and Epicureans wore signet rings with Epicurus' face on them. But Epicurus had the right attitude about these things, they were done for the purpose of promoting the tranquil life, to encourage burgeoning Epicureans to live tranquilly, and were not done to validate Epicurus' existence and promote his own importance. He involved himself in the political sphere because it enabled him to make sure that the Epicureans were adequately considered in the politics of the day. As Brown tells us, Epicureans required property to protect themselves (as shown in *Key Doctrine* 14)*, and this required negotiating the local property laws.

Therefore, from this analysis of how the desires operate to form the content of our *katastematic* pleasure we can see that desires are subjective to each individual. Roskam showed us in *Live Unnoticed* that Epicurus felt this way when advising Idomeneus about his involvement in politics, arguing that this was why there was no concrete understanding of Epicureanism. Each individual must instead consider their decisions with prudence, due measure and in the καιρός (right moment). As I have presented *katastematic* pleasure — the end goal for an Epicurean — it is something that is a way of being, the aim is to live tranquilly, pleasantly and happily and this requires us to experience things that lead us to this end goal. Therefore, as long as we have the right attitude about what political involvement can do for us, there is no reason why we cannot pursue our tranquillity through the exercise of political involvement.

V.   CONCLUSION

Epicureanism has a kind of initial plausibility that recommends it to a modern world. Most of us don't suppose that there are interventionist gods or immortal souls, and we can see the attractions of pleasure and tranquillity. But on closer inspection of Epicurean ethics many readers have been turned away from the initially attractive picture. It seems too self-centred and too insular to be a philosophy for our times. I have argued that this allegedly more informed impression of Epicureanism does not consider all the nuance and potential in our ancient evidence. I believe I have shown that this *prima facie* assumption is false. We should take another look, and revise the judgements and enable ourselves to see that Epicureanism is not a theory we should abandon to the history books. There is a feeling, a way of life, that the *telos* of Epicureanism prescribes for us and that is a life lived tranquilly. Within this we can find exceptions to the strict dictums which Epicurus described in his few surviving works.

Just like any philosophical theory, for its truth to resonate with the people who follow it, it must be adaptable to what they require from it, and Epicureanism is no exception. Static conceptions of ethics can never achieve this pragmatic requirement. By allowing Epicureanism to be a dynamic theory that duly considers the societal conventions in which it exists we have seen that Epicureanism is not an unmovable theory of the good. It allows its followers to assess and adapt their desires to what will achieve tranquillity for them.

We have also determined that self interested and hedonistic interpretations of Epicureanism are false. It is true that Epicureanism requires adherents to critically examine their old desires and purify them, but it does not follow that the desires that survive this process are all egoistic and purely self interested.

We have also seen that an Epicurean must avoid: (i) anxiety, the main cause of pain, and as Lucretius proscribed (ii) fear of death. We also have strong reasons to believe that the persistent and ever-increasing inequality in society correlates with growing anxiety — the biggest obstacle to tranquillity according to Epicurus. I have argued that a possible antidote for anxiety for a Modern Epicurean consists in working towards the eradication of inequality. It is true that this will require much more involvement on the part of our

willing Modern Epicurean than Epicurus would ever have advocated, but I believe I have shown that there is good reason for this. I hope I have been successful in showing that when presented with a situation such as the pervasive inequality we now see, even Epicurus would have advised at least some people to involve themselves in the endeavour of political and social involvement in aid of reducing inequality and therefore the social threats that emanate from it.

I reiterate that I have at no point advocated that what is argued here is exactly what Epicurus said and I have never intended to. Epicurus, I know, was adamant that the secluded life was the most conducive to achieving what he believed was the *telos* – the tranquil life — but I do believe that if he was faced with the modern realities that we are faced with that he would believe there could be exceptions *si quid intervenerit*. Importantly however, political involvement would not be a requirement for an Epicurean, but an acceptable endeavour for one so inclined. Modern life demands more from us than what was required from the Ancient Greeks. There are factors that *will* encroach on any attempt to live tranquilly. It is virtually impossible to live in isolation in this age and the detrimental aspects of modern society should be dealt with instead of fruitlessly retreated from.

Furthermore, we have seen that Epicurus was not completely opposed to the concepts of justice and political involvement. He had been misrepresented in this way, but because we rely for much of our knowledge of Epicurus on testimony from critics who *were* diametrically opposed to his ideas, this is more than understandable. Nonetheless, it is not that he was against these concepts; rather he had no requirement for them in his ideal environment of the Garden. We, however, do have such a requirement, and to think that we must apply ideal Epicurean theory to our non-ideal modern world is naive and simplistic. The non-ideal theory I have discussed centres around identifying problems and working to fix them instead of creating an ideal theory of justice to hope for.

I hope by this point that I have shown successfully how I believe Epicureanism can be a legitimate ethical theory in our modern world, and how it can present a viable alternative theory in the attempt to solve some of the big issues that the modern world is faced with. I also hope that I have shown along with my predecessors, Julia Annas,

Rosalind Hursthouse and others, that virtue ethics is more than a viable option for ethical decision theory in our modern age and it is not necessarily a concept that must be resigned to the Ancients.

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