Finding Morals in a non-Moral Universe: Epicureanism in the Modern Context

by

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Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the accompanying thesis by Paul Joseph Eschbach has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in Philosophy.

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**Table of Contents**

I.a The Modern Worldview ................................................................. 1
I.b Past Ethical Theories May Not Help ........................................... 4
I.c Implications of 'Non-Neutrality' .................................................. 8
I.d The Case for Neutrality, Epicureanism ....................................... 11
II.a Objections to Hedonism ............................................................. 16
II.b Authenticity-based Objections .................................................... 17
   II.b.1 False Happiness ................................................................. 19
   II.b.2 Hollow Happiness ............................................................... 24
II.c Virtue-based Objections ............................................................. 30
   II.c.1 Our Overvaluing of Virtue .................................................. 32
   II.c.2 The Epicurean 'Conscience' ............................................... 40
III.a Conclusion ................................................................................ 49

Appendix - The Lost Key to Eudaimonia: Epicureanism in the Ancient Context .... 53
   Introduction .................................................................................. 54
      I.a How Cicero Uncharitably Portrays Epicureanism .................. 59
      I.b Cicero's Insightful Criticisms of Epicureanism .................... 62
Epicurean Responses to Cicero .......................................................... 65
      II.a Defense of the Epicurean Account of Pleasure .................... 65
      II.b Defense of the Epicurean Account of Virtue ...................... 70
III.a Epicureanism Provides the Best Path to Happiness .................. 78
III.b Epicurean Happiness is Fully Authentic .................................... 81
Conclusion ....................................................................................... 87
Bibliography ..................................................................................... 89
I.a The Modern Worldview

Today, we hold a worldview that is more valueless than that of any other period of recorded history. We have lost many religious and teleological underpinnings which people used to take for granted, so we tolerate more diverse viewpoints and ways of life than we used to. Indeed, the only value we still seem to endorse readily is that no one should force his values on another.²

Historically, such a nonjudgmental, secular viewpoint would have been considered strange, if not overtly immoral. We saw ourselves as more than just another species trying to propagate its genes, for we noticed we are uniquely complex, intelligent, and purposive -- after all, does it not just feel intuitively true that humans are better and more important than the world around them? We therefore figured that the reasons for our uniqueness and supposed importance would ultimately point us to some sort of divine or otherworldly force which intended us to exist and to act in certain ways. Hence we created and enforced values upon the world because we believed that we would fail to have led fully human lives without such imposition of value. But much has changed in the last few centuries.

¹ By 'valueless' I do not mean worthless or useless. Rather, I mean something like neutral or indifferent. In claiming that the world has little or no value for us, I only wish to indicate that we do not see it as something to which we can attach moral values, that we neither wish to say "the world is bad" or "the world is good". For most of us moderns, the world simply is. Our ethical considerations take place apart from the raw, inanimate materials which compose the world.
² Indeed, is this not more or less a description of the United States Constitution? It seems the framers of that document held a viewpoint similar to the one described above: people should generally be able to pursue happiness as they see fit, and the purpose of government centers around securing such freedom. And since this document was written, we have only solidified such secular, egalitarian views. Slavery was abolished, women fought for the right to vote, we became more religiously and culturally tolerant and so on, all because these cases showed us circumstances contradictory to the idea that each person should be as free as possible to live just as he likes. So at least in America (and most of the industrialized world), we have been consistently strengthening our conviction that value should be something each person gets to discover for himself. It ought not be foisted on him by a government, church, or whatever else.
Science has shown us that non-purposive, unthinking natural processes can fully explain our existence and current condition, and our modern political arrangements have brought us up to believe that we can and should do anything we like, so long as it does not harm or disturb others. Hence for millions of people today, the world is valueless, and humans are just another type of creature living in it: there is no good reason why the hapless machinations of nature should have brought us into existence, and there is no single ethical goal or mission we all share (except, perhaps, that all people should be able to freely determine what that goal is for themselves). Scientific and political developments have humbled us with respect to how we conceive of our place in the world, so we have become more reluctant to impose values upon it.

By destroying almost every inherent, binding value our ancestors perceived in the world, we have done ourselves many favors too. In general, behind us are the days when we would kill and torture our fellows for suspicion of witchcraft or demonic possession, when we believed that people of other religions and cultures are blasphemers and savages who can be subjugated or killed, and when we thought it necessary and right to enforce rigid notions of gender and sexual identity. Terrible things were committed in the past in the name of values, and we have rightly become suspicious of them. Today, more than ever, our only true value is, 'live and let live'.

But devaluing our world in this way does threaten something which seems necessary for our flourishing and well-being: ethics. Even if it is good that we believe in

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3 Indeed, I would argue that the events of the 20th century have made us almost irreversibly reluctant to impose values upon the world. For such terrible things as the trenches of the First World War, the Nazi Holocaust of the Second World War, Stalin’s purges and gulags, and the Rwandan Genocide all were perpetrated by people with strong values. Because of this, we have come to seriously doubt the notion that having firm convictions is a guarantee that a person will be good -- indeed, it may even be a guarantee that he will be quite evil. Such horrible events in the 20th century showed us the darker side of our nature, thereby suggesting that when we consider ourselves to be essentially finders and enforcers of values, the values we latch onto can often be quite misguided and terrible.
the words 'live and let live', we still impose value on the world (as I have just done!); we
still use words like 'should', 'best', 'evil', and so on. A valueless world threatens to turn
such language into nonsense. For when I say 'good' yet also believe that my values are no
better than anyone else's, the most I am doing is expressing my personal opinion about a
matter which is ultimately one of total indifference -- "I would like things to be this way,
but hey, to each his own". Things thus cease to be good or bad in the deep metaphysical
sense people used to believe they were.

This may sound like a trivial point, but it indicates that the increasingly common
valueless worldview threatens to destroy all of morality. For if we let our ascriptions of
'good' and 'bad' turn into mere expressions of personal preference, how are we even to
defend the few values we have left? It may be silly to believe that anyone who is of a
different religion or culture is evil, but does not the exact same reasoning preclude
considering anyone who is selfish, disrespectful, or predatory to be evil? How can we
even explain the good of not imposing values on others without implicitly appealing to
some system of values? Our increasingly valueless, scientific worldview therefore seems
to push us towards ethical relativism. Paradoxically, in trying to prevent evil by
becoming more and more vehement in our belief that no one person has all the answers
about morality, we may lose our ability to stop wrongdoing at all -- for how do we know
in the first place that what we wish to stop is wrong? We risk taking our new-found
endorsement of 'live and let live' to an absurd conclusion: anyone can do anything and it
will not be good or bad; there will merely be a diverse set of opinions some people
express about the act in question, but no officially 'right' or 'wrong' status we can give it.
Additionally, having little or no values makes each individual's own life especially directionless. 'Live and let live' may be a good piece of advice for how to treat others, but it tells us almost nothing about what we should do with our own lives. Because so many different lifestyles are compatible with this advice, it seems that anything we choose to do may as well be decided by the toss of a coin -- to a valueless way of thinking, no one path through life can ever be better than another. So not only does a valueless worldview keep us from regulating the behavior of those around us, it also hinders our own ability to have direction and purpose in life.

Hence we require a system of ethics tailored to fit a largely valueless, secular worldview. We would do well to continue to refrain from imposing our values on others (thus helping us avoid unsavory consequences like religious discrimination, racism, etc.), but we also need a mechanism whereby we can determine what is best for us to do, and to justify our (and everyone else’s) being able to do this as freely as possible.4

I.b Past Ethical Theories May Not Help

Unfortunately, today’s common scientific, valueless worldview has almost no historical precedent. Since previous ethical theories presupposed a value-loaded world, they are losing their ability to guide people today.

If we have Western philosophical leanings, we might first look to Christianity for moral guidance. However, a mostly value-free worldview makes such an appeal

4 As previously indicated, if no one set of values is better than any other, we cannot even enforce the claim, 'no one set of values is better than any other'. So if we are to live by this claim, it seems we doom ourselves to forever be harmed and controlled by others. If I tell the burglar in my house, "hey, don't steal from me; it's against the law!", he can simply reply, "well, I don't care about the law" and I will have no way of stopping him because I live by the claim that my values are no better than his. The point is that, should we truly take ethical relativism to heart, the opportunistic and ruthless will have all the more ability and reason to take advantage of us. Ethical relativism will surely make the world a worse place for all of us to live in.
difficult.\textsuperscript{5} As Christine Korsgaard points out, in Christianity, "we, humanity are what is wrong with the world. We are the reason why the world, being good, is... not good...".\textsuperscript{6} Yet if we agree with modern science's claims that the universe is unthinking and that we are the direct results of its purely mechanical workings, it is difficult to tell ourselves the story of original sin. We cannot possibly be what's wrong with a fundamentally good universe because our existence was brought about indifferently just as the very universe's was.\textsuperscript{7} So if a Christian tells us that Jesus died for our sins and that we should love him and love God for doing us that favor, many people today simply do not believe that there was a favor to be done in the first place. The world is not God's good creation and humans are not sinners; we simply are and the world simply is -- indifferently.

Korsgaard also claims that looking yet further back from Christianity to the Ancient Greeks for ethical wisdom will not help us. "...[T]he death of God did not put us back into Plato and Aristotle's world... We are no longer... puzzled about why the world, being good, is yet not good. Because for us... reality is something hard, something which resists reason and value...".\textsuperscript{8} Again, a valueless, scientific worldview proves to be a

\textsuperscript{5} I should qualify that this will only be true of someone who holds a secular, scientific view of the universe. Obviously, Christianity makes all the sense in the world to someone with an inherently Christian mindset, but I assert that fewer and fewer people today hold such a view. The fact that we teach schoolchildren that they are the product of evolution as opposed to God's intentional creations, that we have become more tolerant of diverse viewpoints on religion (e.g., paganism and atheism are considered viable options today whereas in the past people were killed for holding such views), and that we believe in a separation of church and state all suggest that fewer and fewer of us today are as fervently Christian as people in the past were. It is only for such 'valueless' moderns that I claim Christianity appears a poor choice of ethical theory.

\textsuperscript{6} Korsgaard, 4

\textsuperscript{7} Indeed, the theory of the Big Bang has become our modern, valueless equivalent of the Judeo-Christian Genesis creation story. Whereas in the religious account, the universe begins with value already in it -- we are specifically told that each thing God makes is good -- the secular Big Bang creation story produces a valueless universe -- the universe came about randomly and chaotically; no one oversaw its creation to make sure it was 'going right'. Thus, the metaphysical views suggested by modern science are deeply at odds with a Christian metaphysics. For Christians of the past (e.g., Augustine), goodness and badness were fundamental, real qualities of everything in existence. For the secular humanists of today, however, goodness and badness have nothing to do with the substance of reality.

\textsuperscript{8} Korsgaard, 4
serious obstacle in creating any system of morality. For most Ancient Greek ethical theories start from the assumption that "...the world we experience... [is] a world of things trying to be much better than they are...", so it makes sense that humans' singular purpose in life is to cultivate virtue, thereby becoming what they were always meant to be. But if, as modern science dictates, we deny that the world we experience ‘tries’ to be anything other than it already is, it is not clear why we should bother with virtue. It can no longer be 'good in itself' in that it represents how things ultimately are or how things strive to be; science has shown us that 'the way things ultimately are' is quite valueless and indifferent. Virtue must therefore be re-justified in light of our non-teleological worldview if Ancient Greek ethics are to be relevant to us.

In light of this, modern-day ethicists often work to revive older ethical theories by modifying them to be more compatible with a modern, secular worldview. At present, it is commonly thought that there are three major options which justify ethics in a valueless world: utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics. Importantly, all of these theories suggest we can be morally good even if we deny that goodness and badness are fundamental qualities of the universe and instead believe they are human inventions.

For example, according to Korsgaard’s neoKantian approach, “reason... isn't in the world, but is something that we impose upon it...". It is therefore okay if the universe is ultimately a valueless place, for it still stands that we do not experience it that way. We can (and do) create values, and so we can still have morality and ethics; we just now say that the Moral Law (which we freely choose to apply to our world) is what is
responsible for them instead of God or the Form of the Good (which, historically, were thought to control the world whether we believe in them or not).

Utilitarianism is also compatible with the idea that goodness and badness are not built into the fabric of our world, but rather it takes a consequentialist or pragmatic view of ethics. It "...derives the concept of the Right from that of the Good..."\(^\text{12}\), meaning that something is morally right only insofar as it promotes the Good, which in turn is defined as the maximization of happiness and well-being for as many people as possible. This is a theory which, again, seeks to define morality as something less than a deep metaphysical truth, yet still something we can endorse and live by -- just because 'human happiness' is not a fundamental quality of the universe does not negate the fact that it sounds like a good thing to promote.

Finally, virtue ethics tries to find a place for Greek ethics in our largely valueless worldview by divorcing itself from a lofty, value-loaded Platonic or Aristotelian metaphysics and instead appealing to ethical naturalism. Such thinking utilizes the value-loaded teleological judgments of philosophers like Aristotle and acknowledges that, while we no longer believe the universe is fundamentally ordered towards goodness, we still notice and pick out good aspects of the world around us. For example, we naturally think that a lion which is successful on most of its hunts is a good one.\(^\text{13}\) Virtue ethicists, in turn, claim that there is no fundamental difference between our calling a plant or an animal good, and calling a human good.\(^\text{14}\) Hence, just as surely as "...there is something

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\(^{12}\) Hursthouse, 28
\(^{13}\) For a thorough and detailed defense of this sort of ethical naturalism, see the first three chapters of Michael Thompson's *Life and Action*. Thompson, Michael. *Life and Action*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008.
wrong with a free-riding wolf, who eats but does not... hunt... [or] a member of the species of dancing bees who finds a source of nectar but does not [dance]... there is something wrong with a human... who lacks [virtue]." So we may no longer be able to claim that virtue enables us to conform to how the universe ultimately ‘tries’ to be, but we can still argue that the virtues benefit their possessor, making her better qua human being.

Importantly, almost all incarnations of these three modern ethical theories depend on the assumption that ethical inquiry does not start from a neutral, valueless viewpoint. Instead, these theories only make sense given that we are humans, raised in certain ways to sense moral goodness in certain things. They bank on it simply being a "...fact about human life that we have values", hence it is okay if good and bad do not actually exist out in the world. As long as we experience things from a ‘non-neutral’ human perspective, these moral qualities will always be present.

I.c Implications of ‘Non-Neutrality’

Suppose we assert, along with most modern-day moral philosophers, that good and bad are simply ‘non-neutral’ qualities which people subjectively perceive in their surroundings. From here on, we need only think of non-neutrality as referring to the non-logical, unpredictable side of human nature; the side which gives our lives such rich, non-rational textures as emotion, beauty, religious experience, 'gut feelings', and so on. Let us imagine embracing non-neutrality in the sphere of ethics and determining for ourselves

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15 Hursthouse, 196
16 Hursthouse, 167
17 Hursthouse, 37
18 Korsgaard, 1
what seems to be good and bad. Where will this take us? The answer is, everywhere and anywhere.\textsuperscript{19}

I argue that, upon attempting to decipher what is good and bad, a non-neutral approach to ethics brings those of us with a valueless worldview right back to the problem of ethical relativism – that is, 'non-neutral' merely becomes a euphemism for 'relativistic'. For example, Rosalind Hursthouse, a well-respected virtue ethicist, says at the outset of her \textit{On Virtue Ethics}, "I assume that ethical thought has to take place within an acquired ethical outlook".\textsuperscript{20} Because of this, she acknowledges that her theory will ultimately rest on the claim, 'virtue is good because it is good'.\textsuperscript{21} Such thinking admits that there are some people (even deeply moral ones) with whom virtue ethics simply can

\textsuperscript{19} G.E. Moore famously claimed (in support of the idea that ethics are determined non-neutrally) that "..."good" has no definition... it is simple and has no parts". (Moore, 17) He therefore thought of ‘goodness’ as being like the color yellow: there is no way to know what it is, outside of simply experiencing it. (Moore, 15-16) Initially, this seems to be a commonsensical way to think about goodness. However, just as surely as we can disagree whether the sunset before us is pink or purple, people can (and do) vehemently disagree about what things are good; in fact, disagreement about goodness is much more diverse and widespread than disagreement about color. So if we are to agree with Moore that goodness is indefinable and that it only exists insofar as people subjectively, non-neutrally experience it, anything can be good as long as someone genuinely sees goodness in it. Granted, we could take someone like a Nazi and ask him to genuinely, deeply examine his beliefs to see if they are \textit{actually} good (maybe he will admit his beliefs do not contain goodness after all), but if he still claims to sense goodness in them, it seems there is no way to know who is right and who is wrong about Nazism outside of simply writing him off as a maniac or a liar. Conceiving of morality non-neutrally therefore seems to doom us never to achieve consensus about what things are good and bad. Moreover, the stakes for this consensus are monumentally high, for peoples' welfare, happiness, and lives can (and often do) hang in the balance.

\textsuperscript{20} Hursthouse, 20

\textsuperscript{21} When we ask a non-neutral virtue ethicist why virtue is good, Hursthouse points out that it will ultimately have to be answered that it simply \textit{is} -- the word 'virtue' is explicitly evaluative, so if we are inclined towards virtue, it will \textit{obviously} seem good, and if we are inclined towards vice, virtue will \textit{obviously} seem useless. (Hursthouse, 36-37) However she also points out that this non-neutral, 'gut feeling' justification of virtue is also what drives the deontologist's and utilitarian's conceptions of goodness. A deontologist presupposes his rules are the right ones and a utilitarian presupposes that his preferred conception of human happiness is right, because they both use evaluative terms in laying out their conception of the good (Hursthouse, 37-38) -- that is, they both presuppose that what they are telling us to do is good. Thus, to Hursthouse's way of thinking, it is par for the course that a non-neutral ethical theory cannot tell us \textit{why} we should be good. A given conception of goodness either resonates with us or it does not.
never resonate,\textsuperscript{22} and that even enthusiastic adherents of the theory may ultimately "...have to accept that there isn't anything that counts as knowing that a particular action is right; all there is, is feeling convinced that it is because it is in accordance with a certain [ideal which we aspire to]."\textsuperscript{23} Hence, a non-neutral conception of ethics is also something of a relativistic one. With both relativism and non-neutrality, no one can know what is good, and some people -- even philosophical, conscientious ones -- will never understand what makes a preferred moral theory so worthwhile.

Moreover, if no one can know what is good, and there are people whom can never be convinced to be good, how can we ever hope to make the world a morally decent place to live? As indicated in Section I.a, many of the most terrible things ever to happen were perpetrated by people who believed they were doing good. ‘Goodness’, historically, has not pointed humanity towards a singular, agreeably beneficial goal, and so today people resist fervently ascribing good and bad to the world around them. Because of this, justifying morals non-neutrally will surely worsen people’s worries and suspicions about morality; it will only tempt us closer to all-out ethical relativism. If today we are, above

\textsuperscript{22} Hursthouse acknowledges that a major consequence of her non-neutral ethical outlook is that there are some people -- even rational, level-headed, seemingly happy ones -- whom she can never convince to behave morally. If she tells them that they need to be virtuous to be happy, they can always respond that it is always better and easier to merely seem virtuous. She, in turn, might respond that this will mean they are not eudaimon, but importantly, in responding in this fashion she acknowledges that she is "...not merely making an empirical remark...", but saying, "That's not the sort of life I count as eudaimon..." (Hursthouse, 179) She admits that such a claim is not empirical because her very concept of eudaimonia presupposes a virtue-based ethical outlook. The main reason she is concerned with eudaimonia and virtue at all is because she non-neutrally finds some intrinsic value in them. Hence, non-neutral ethical theories are, by definition, bound to seem unintelligible or unconvincing to some people. And before we write these people off as heedless immoralists, beneath the consideration of any respectable ethical theory, we must note that even deeply moral people may fail to non-neutrally see the worth of a given theory. Indeed, that is why there is a diverse set of non-neutral theories to choose from; some people simply non-neutrally sense goodness in different things. So non-neutral ethical theories have the curious property of being unintelligible without the help of 'gut feelings' in support of them. For any given non-neutral moral theory, we will either intuit that it is a good one or fail to do so, and it is possible that no amount of additional arguments will ever sway our non-neutral opinion.

\textsuperscript{23} Hursthouse, 33
all else, concerned with preventing evil being done in the name of goodness, it is
counterproductive to grant that there may be no concrete way of knowing what is right
and what is wrong. A non-neutral approach to ethics is therefore ill-fitted to an increasing
multitude of people who were raised with a value-free, scientific worldview.

I.d The Case for Neutrality, Epicureanism

For those of us with a valueless, science-based worldview and concerns that
morality does not actually help people do good, we will have more faith and confidence
in ethics if we conceive of them neutrally. Potentially, this will mean that any valueless,
rational person will not need special, morally-loaded 'gut feelings' in order to see why she
should be good, and that we can generate a fruitful list of qualities any moral theory must
conform to if it is to be considered good.24

Yet what sort of ethical theory might do this? How can one philosophy
simultaneously convince immoralists and skeptics that goodness is worthwhile, yet also
endorse such seemingly non-neutral, non-rational claims as 'be honest' and 'treat others
with respect'?25 Fortunately, there already exists quite a clever and plausible ethical
theory which aims to be entirely neutral and empirical: Epicureanism.

24 For example, suppose our agreed-upon, neutral conception of ethics stipulates that it is always evil to
advocate hatred. If this is the case, we will be able to much more definitively decide which moral theories
are good ones and which ones aren't. Say a Christian truly 'loves his neighbor as himself' and is prone to
'turn the other cheek' in confrontations: we now have concrete reasons to call his beliefs good. Now
suppose another Christian believes that all non-Christians are sinners who must be converted at all costs, or
that families should disown their children if they are gay or transgender: we immediately have good reason
to call his beliefs evil. Thus, a great advantage I foresee about a neutral justification of ethics is that it
drastically reduces people's ability to do evil things and call them good. We will be able to detect evil much
more easily because we will not have to worry whether a given person's morals have some non-neutral
component we simply are not sensing.

25 The very existence of immoralists suggests these claims are irrational. For there are wholly immoral
people who nonetheless reason, use logic, study philosophy, and may even be quite intelligent. If such
people can understand such complex things as calculus, but still disagree that it is important to be honest,
this should seriously decrease the likelihood that the latter claim is rational.
Epicureanism is a hedonist philosophy created by Epicurus, an Athenian citizen who lived during the late 4th and early 3rd centuries BC. He articulates a peculiar kind of ‘qualified’ (as opposed to 'simple') hedonism which acknowledges that pleasure is the good, yet also claims that the pleasures which make us happiest are those stemming from mental tranquility and freedom from desire. As such, the ideal Epicurean life is one of self-sufficiency and simplicity. Such a life ensures that we will rarely have desires we cannot easily satisfy, that we will enjoy good physical and mental health, and that we will have little reason to worry that circumstances in the future might sabotage our happiness.

In order to help us achieve pleasurable tranquility, Epicurean ethics rely heavily on a distinction between three kinds of desire: natural and necessary, natural and unnecessary, and unnatural and unnecessary. We are told to only truly heed our natural and necessary desires, to satisfy natural and unnecessary desires only when convenient, and to ignore and eliminate unnatural and unnecessary desires. If we follow this basic

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26 DeWitt, 39-40. Epicurus' school was an immediate reaction to, and rejection of, Skepticism and Platonism, and it contended with those two schools along with Aristotle's and Democritus' schools for the patronage of Athenian citizens (DeWitt, 9).

27 ‘Simple’ hedonism is what we think of when we imagine hedonists as "...unscrupulous, unbridled sensualists, busy stuffing themselves with dainties... before engaging in... dances and disgusting orgies" (O'Keefe, 117). An example of this are the Cyrenaics, a philosophical school contemporary with Epicurus' which denied that our good can amount to anything but the most immediate of pleasures. A 'qualified' hedonism, on the other hand, critically labels some pleasures as better and more worthy than others, so a 'qualified' hedonist will surely tell us, just as Epicurus does, that "...every pleasure is... good... but not every one is to be chosen". (Diogenes Laertius, 10.129) We therefore ought to keep in mind that only 'simple' hedonists tend to endorse sex, drugs, and rock and roll as the best way of life. There are other kinds of hedonists than these 'simple' ones who go about seeking pleasure quite differently. (Striker, 3)

28 Diogenes Laertius 10.128
29 Diogenes Laertius 10.130
30 Diogenes Laertius 10.131
31 Principal Doctrines, XXIX, XXX. Natural and necessary desires are those which are constitutive of tranquility, and, if left unsatisfied, will result in our intense discomfort or even death (e.g., the desire to eat, drink, sleep, etc.). Natural and unnecessary are the desires which are constitutive of tranquility, yet we can ignore them and still lead a perfectly happy life (e.g., the desire to eat meat, sexual desire, etc.). Lastly, unnatural and unnecessary desires are those which sabotage our tranquility and can be ignored with no consequence (e.g., the desire for glory and riches).
prescription, the Epicureans believe almost anyone can attain a god-like\textsuperscript{32} state of constant pleasure and satisfaction.\textsuperscript{33}

It is important to note, however, that in calling some things about us natural and others unnatural, Epicureanism is taking for granted certain basic claims about human psychology. While many of these claims seem fairly commonsensical (e.g., that it is natural for humans to form friendships and close relations to one another), it is true that new psychological data may come to light which could refute such a picture of human nature. Were this to happen, the Epicureans and I would have to revise our forthcoming claims about how we should act in light of what is natural. That being said, such a revision would have to take place outside of the scope of this paper. In the mean time, I merely wish to qualify that Epicurus' picture of human nature is not set in stone; it rests on certain assumptions about our psychology which could potentially be refuted by new data.

However, given that Epicureanism merely seeks to determine what is natural for humans and have it guide our ethical path through life, it is a philosophy which we can consider fully neutral. It denies, against Hursthouse and Korsgaard, that "[t]here is no possibility of [justifying] morality... by appealing to anything 'non-moral'..."\textsuperscript{34} because it

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\item Against a Homeric conception of the gods, Epicurus believed that the gods are unconcerned with human actions on Earth because they spend their time enjoying a blessed, indestructible state of tranquility. (Diogenes Laertius, 10.123-124) He viewed his philosophy, in turn, as a mechanism whereby mortal humans could experience a similar kind of divine, unending happiness. (Diogenes Laertius, 10.124, 10.135; Vatican Collection, #33)
\item The Epicurean sage can potentially enjoy constant pleasure: she is rarely in pain since her desires are so few and easy to satisfy, and in the rare cases when she is in pain, she can remain happy by remembering past pleasures and states of tranquility. For instance, Diogenes Laertius reports that on the last day of Epicurus' life when he was painfully dying of kidney stones, he wrote a letter to a friend in which he claimed that he was still happy despite his pain because he could reflect on and enjoy past philosophical conversations. (Diogenes Laertius, 10.22) Indeed, the Epicureans placed so much faith in this 'mind over matter' strategy of remembering past pleasures to offset present pains that they even went so far as to claim that the Epicurean sage will remain happy even when tortured. (Diogenes Laertius, 10.118)
\item Hursthouse, 179
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\end{footnotesize}
seeks to reduce talk of good and bad to non-moral feelings of pleasure and pain.\textsuperscript{35} I foresee two major advantages this can provide for people with a modern, valueless worldview.

Firstly, Epicureanism comes readily equipped to convince anyone and everyone to believe in moral goodness. Many of us already feel alienated from morality because we conceive of our world more 'valuelessly' than ever before, and this alienation only worsens when we view morality as a set of non-neutral values we must fit into such a world. Yet Epicurus is one of the few philosophers of the past who views the cosmos as indifferently as we do.\textsuperscript{36} He reduces morality to states of pleasure and pain, so that rather than making the value-loaded claim, "you should pursue virtue because it is good", he makes the value-free, empirically-provable claim, "you should pursue virtue because it will bring you pleasure". For value-free moderns, Epicurus helps take the mystery out of value-loaded moral rules by recasting them in empirical, scientific terms.

\textsuperscript{35} Epicurus believes it is simply an empirical, 'non-moral' fact that animals (including humans) are driven to seek out pleasure and avoid pain. (Diogenes Laertius, 10.128) His ethics are therefore neutral, since he explicitly claims that this biological fact is "...the starting-point and goal of living blessedly." (Diogenes Laertius, 10.128) Furthermore, Epicurus is a reductionist about morality; he believes anything which is genuinely good is ultimately just something that increases pleasure and decreases pain. For instance, he is rumored to have said, "I spit on the fine and those who emptily admire it, when it doesn't make any pleasure". (Athenaeus XII 547a as quoted by Annas, 340) His reductionist viewpoint therefore causes him to deny that anything can be 'good in itself', and instead claim that good essentially means pleasurable, and bad means painful.

\textsuperscript{36} Epicurus (borrowing from Democritus) believed the universe was solely composed of atoms and void. (Diogenes Laertius, 10.39) He also believed that there are infinite amounts of both (Diogenes Laertius, 10.41-42), and that the atoms simply fall through the void, bouncing off one another and forming different entanglements for all of eternity. (Diogenes Laertius, 10.43) Because of this, he believed that an unlimited number of different worlds exist (Diogenes Laertius, 10.45), and thus that our Earth is not particularly special or unique; it does not exist "on purpose". Although modern science has refuted components of this cosmological view (e.g., we do not think of all matter in the universe as eternally "falling"), it is worth noting that Epicurus' universe looks quite similar to the model scientists use today. Just like Epicurus, modern science assumes that our universe is merely a collection of inanimate 'stuff', unthinkingly following natural laws for all time. Also like Epicurus, modern science assumes that these natural laws do not direct things toward some purpose or end: the existence of our galaxy, our planet, and our species is highly contingent; no higher, divine force wills things to be this way. It is therefore unsurprising that Epicurus' ethics are so self-consciously valueless. His philosophy confronts the same problem I am raising with this paper: how do we create a system of morals if we presuppose that the universe is valueless and purposeless?
Secondly, this reduction of morality to pleasure and pain fully assuages the modern, relativistic worry that morality is simply a tool to justify evil actions. It is much more difficult for people to lie about whether they have brought themselves pleasure or pain than whether they are good or bad, so Epicureanism banishes the threat of moral relativism better than non-neutral ethical theories can. Moreover, much of what non-neutral ethical theorists tells us to do is already quite agreeable to Epicureanism, so the only moral theories Epicureanism will claim are empirically wrong are those the vast majority of us already agree are quite terrible.

Hence, a broader acceptance and practice of Epicureanism stands only to better the world for everyone. Valueless, disillusioned moderns get a value-free basis to justify moral claims, proponents of non-neutral ethics will at the very least appreciate that there are fewer ethical relativists in the world, and all people will have a better chance of being treated well and made happy.
II.a Objections to Hedonism

Perhaps Epicureanism fits nicely into a valueless, atheistic universe. It still sounds exceptionally doubtful that a moral theory which essentially says "seek pleasure, avoid pain" will cause its adherents to act in the altruistic, self-sacrificing ways that non-neutral ethical theories advocate. Epicureanism will first have to answer to some deep and pervasive problems moral philosophers have found within hedonism before we can say that it encourages behaviors the majority of us would consider good.

Russ Shafer-Landau's *Fundamentals of Ethics* thoroughly articulates the philosophical problems facing desire-based and hedonist theories of happiness. For the purposes of this inquiry, I will regard Epicureanism as a hybrid of both views, so significant criticisms leveled at either aspect of the school will merit a response on behalf of Epicureanism.

Shafer-Landau's problems with hedonism/Epicureanism boil down to two main claims: an argument from authenticity and an argument from virtue. The authenticity-based objection claims that, since Epicureanism makes happiness solely a matter of

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37 Epicurus suggests both that pleasure is the sole reason for which we act (Diogenes Laertius, 10.128), which would lead us to believe he is a hedonist, and that having all of our desires satisfied is when we are happiest (Diogenes Laertius, 10.131), which would indicate that he is a desire satisfaction theorist. He certainly does not distinguish these two aspects of his philosophy as separate, distinct approaches to happiness, and so it makes sense to consider him both a desire theorist and a hedonist. The two need not be mutually exclusive.

38 Indeed, this makes all the more sense given that many problems Shafer-Landau identifies with desire-based and hedonistic views are similar. A desire-based theory of happiness is ultimately just a more specific form of hedonism, for surely the reason satisfying desires is worthwhile at all is because doing so feels pleasant. Similarly, a hedonist theory of happiness is likely to concern itself with desire satisfaction, since satisfying desires is often the strongest, most immediate way to bring about pleasure. From here on, I believe the discussion will be made much clearer by simply lumping desire-based theories under the umbrella term, 'hedonism'.

39 Epicureanism is only subject to some of the common problems with hedonism because it is a 'qualified' hedonism. As previously mentioned, only simple hedonists (e.g., the Cyrenaics) ask us to obey any desire whatsoever; Epicurus' qualified hedonism asks us to ignore some desires if they bring more pain than pleasure in the long run. So when, for example, Shafer-Landau mentions that hedonist theories of happiness fail to provide "...objective standards that mark off some... desires as more deserving of attention than others" (Shafer-Landau, 54), such a claim can only plausibly refer to groups like the Cyrenaics rather than the Epicureans.
pleasure and pain, it will not matter *what* makes us happy or *how* -- Epicureanism might call the most meaningless and unenviable of lives the best. The virtue-based objection claims that since the Epicurean sage only seeks out pleasures and avoids pains, he will not be just, honest, courageous, and so on. It simply sounds wildly unlikely that "...the virtues are natural adjuncts of the pleasant life...", as Epicurus claims. In this section I will answer each of these objections in turn and show that the ways in which Epicureanism qualifies its hedonism make its ethics sound intuitively plausible to immoralists and 'value-free' moderns, and at the very least palatable to proponents of non-neutral ethics.

II.b Authenticity-based Objections

Shafer Landau lists many authenticity-based objections to hedonism, but I will treat just two. The first is the problem of "False Happiness":

"1. If hedonism is true, then happiness makes the same contribution to welfare whether it is based on true or false beliefs.

2. Happiness based on false beliefs contributes less to welfare than happiness based on true beliefs.

3. Therefore, hedonism is false."

Premise 2 seems to point us to something we intuitively believe about happiness but which a hedonist philosophy may be unable to accommodate -- that it would be bad for us to be happy out of ignorance. This objection is, at its core, epistemological: *authentic* happiness requires that we *know* about what is making us happy. We can

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40 Diogenes Laertius, 10.132
41 Shafer Landau, 31
42 Shafer Landau, 31
consider the real-world example of giving to a fraudulent charity.\textsuperscript{43} I give money to a charity with the belief that it will help those in need, but it turns out that the charity I have donated to is an elaborate scam -- the only people I have helped are the swindlers running it. Intuitively, we think that it would be best for me and my ultimate happiness to be informed about the true nature of this fraud, even though this would be a disturbing, unpleasant truth to confront. Epicureanism, in turn, seems to go against common sense and say the opposite: since pain is bad and pleasure is good, I should simply go about my life in blissful ignorance; finding out the true nature of the fake charity could only ever hurt, not help, me.

The second authenticity-based problem for Epicureanism does not get a specific name from Shafer Landau, so I will call it the problem of 'hollow happiness'. He asks us to "[c]onsider people whose main aim is to clean latrines, or to cut sheets of paper into sixty-four squares... if [hedonism/Epicureanism] is correct, then such people may be much better off than those whose lives strike us as much more desirable".\textsuperscript{44} Indeed, since Epicureanism says that it is best when we have few desires and can satisfy them easily, this can lead us to grizzly consequences: won't we all be better off and much more tranquil if we voluntarily get frontal lobotomies and take a steady regimen of soma? Insofar as this line of thinking sounds ludicrous, Epicureanism could be a deeply implausible theory of happiness. It seems to judge all forms of happiness, even incredibly hollow and unenviable ones, as equal.

\textsuperscript{44} Shafer-Landau, 53. This is in fact a problem people have raised against Epicureanism for millennia. Cicero, writing more than two thousand years ago, claims that Epicureanism reduces its followers to "...slow and lazy sheep, fit for grazing and the pleasures of procreation". (De Finibus, II.40)
II.b.1 False Happiness

Let us first turn to the problem of false happiness as embodied in unknowingly giving to a fraudulent charity. How can we reconcile Epicureanism with our intuition that it is better to knowingly be unhappy than blissfully ignorant?

Fortunately, Epicurus dealt quite directly with this problem in his career. He envisioned having true knowledge of things as a source of pleasure and tranquility because we are most often disturbed by things we do not understand. It is therefore important to have a good working knowledge of our surroundings to dispel that fear and superstition. Hence, in his Letter to Menoeceus he lays special stress on death and the gods, claiming of both that if we simply believed the truth about them -- that they are matters of indifference to us -- that we would be made much happier as a result. After all, the problem as Epicurus sees it is not so much that our ignorance of these things causes us to act poorly, but more that it causes us to spend undue amounts of psychic energy worrying about them; the problem is much more mental than physical.

Yet Epicurus mostly confronts harmful false beliefs in this letter. It is easy for a hedonist to claim that knowledge is better when it exposes us to happy truths (e.g., that

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45 Warren, "Removing Fear", 236
46 While it is true that there are some deeply disturbing things we understand quite well -- for example, deadly communicable diseases -- I submit that our understanding something well more often than not decreases our fear of it. For it may be disturbing to learn that a certain disease is more deadly or infectious than we might have originally thought, but consider all the disturbance that ignorance can cause us. In medieval Europe, for instance, the plague was deeply disturbing mostly because of the mystery surrounding it. Given that they only knew that there was a plague, its victims would panic and ask themselves, "Is God punishing us? Are witches responsible? Perhaps we should kill some cats!" Not only did these poor souls have to deal with the very real threat of a deadly infection, but out of their ignorance sprang yet more fantastical, imagined threats. Insofar as proper medical knowledge would have at least eliminated the imaginary threats, it seems that correct knowledge of a situation almost always reduces the amount of fear it causes us. Humans are, by virtue of our intellect, curious. It pains us over and above the particulars of a situation not to know what is causing it or how to fix it.
47 "...Proper understanding can... be itself a source of pleasure since it will generate and support a disturbance-free life." (Warren, "Removing Fear", 236)
48 Diogenes Laertius, 10.126
49 Diogenes Laertius, 10.122
we do not have to worry about angry, tempestuous gods punishing us) but what about when it exposes us to unsettling truths?\textsuperscript{50} Is it not true that a hedonist would compel us to remain in ignorance if doing so brings more pleasure? If we are to side with Epicurus' own words,\textsuperscript{51} the answer to this question is a resounding no. Facts have a troubling way of interrupting our preferred illusions and this trouble is not worth whatever extra pleasure we gain from ignorance.\textsuperscript{52}

Suppose my coworkers gather without my knowledge each day after work and make fun of me, and suppose that the hedonist in me thinks it better that I ignorantly assume I am well-liked by them. My life would go forward largely as usual, but I would experience less pleasure and greater distress from being amongst my colleagues. Admittedly, they might go through all the gestures of treating me as 'one of the gang', but their total lack of sincerity would eventually show through. I, in turn, would either have to face the unpleasant facts in front of me or keep working harder and harder to remain in

\textsuperscript{50}Admittedly, Epicurus already has partially addressed this concern due to his views on death. While the words 'death is nothing to us' have a pleasant ring to them, Epicurus believes this is so because our souls are destroyed when we die; we therefore ought not fear death since "we" simply will not be around to experience being dead. (Diogenes Laertius, 10.125) Such a claim would certainly have counted as an 'unsettling truth' in Classical Athens insofar as it was commonly believed that the soul continued to live after the body's death. Indeed, Epicurus was commonly labeled impious and atheistic for this viewpoint, (DeWitt, 284) so it is safe to assume that such talk was unpleasant to most Ancient Greeks. Thus, Epicurus clearly believed that even unpleasant, unsettling truths are worthwhile for a hedonist to acknowledge. That said, it seems we can go beyond Epicurus' writings and conjure up even more compelling situations in which being ignorant would seem to bring more pleasure. What if it turned out that all of my friends and loved ones were paid actors who do not care one bit about me? Can a hedonist really say I am better off knowing this?

\textsuperscript{51}Some Epicurean doctrines suggest a principled rejection of ignorance in favor of knowledge: "[i]t is impossible for someone ignorant about the nature of the universe... to dissolve his feelings of fear about the most important of matters" (Principal Doctrine XII). So perhaps Epicurus figured truths about the universe would be especially pleasant and tranquility-inducing, but at the very least his philosophy suggests it is better, on principle, to know them.

\textsuperscript{52}By 'ignorance' here I do not merely mean 'not knowing', but 'not knowing when some extra cognitive effort would bring about the truth' -- a sort of intellectual laziness. For if we take ignorance to mean a mere lack of knowledge, then all people everywhere are ignorant; no one person knows everything. Instead, in the context of ethical discussion, I wish to use 'ignorance' to refer to a voluntary unwillingness to pursue reasonable paths of investigation that would lead to a clearer, more actionable picture of the world.
ignorence -- "oh, clearly she did not say hello because she was busy"; "his sarcastic tone must have been just in my imagination", and so on. Contrast this approach with putting the pieces together and determining that my coworkers do not genuinely like me. At least with this unsettling truth in hand, I can move forward in proactive, helpful ways -- maybe I will quit my job and relocate to an environment more conducive to my personality; maybe I will learn that I got off on the wrong foot with my colleagues and could easily fix this by buying them a round of drinks after work, and so on.

Since it is better to undertake a small amount of pain in the present for greater amounts of pleasure in the future,\textsuperscript{53} Epicureanism can justify in purely hedonistic terms the moralist's claim ignorance never makes us happier. After all, although a hedonist, Epicurus importantly asserts that we must look after both the body and the mind if we are to be happy.\textsuperscript{54} We cannot please the body at the expense of paining the mind because that makes us imprudent and unhappy.\textsuperscript{55}

Ignorance is therefore undesirable in that it causes us undue mental stress. It takes serious effort to explain away evidence contrary to our ignorant beliefs -- part of our minds will constantly have to worry about maintaining the illusion. Moreover, this specific worry about remaining ignorant in a given situation sparks an even worse, broader worry about ignorance in general: if I am sometimes made happier by willfully remaining ignorant, what new unpleasing truths might I have to shield myself from? Since we cannot know in advance whether a given truth will be pleasing or displeasing to us, a policy of willful ignorance makes the world a minefield of potentially painful truths we must carefully navigate if we are to remain happy.

\textsuperscript{53} Diogenes Laertius, 10.129
\textsuperscript{54} Diogenes Laertius, 10.128
\textsuperscript{55} Diogenes Laertius, 10.132
Hence if we return to the example of whether we should learn the truth about the fraudulent charity, it seems Epicureanism does in fact side with our intuitions: it is better to really know what is going on. Since we cannot know in advance whether a given truth will be displeasing, willfully shielding ourselves from harsh truths at all makes us more likely to have to fear and avoid every truth -- who knows whether the next thing someone tells me might destroy my preferred delusion? A world in which we choose not to know whether our charity money actually helps those in need is also a world in which we would choose not to know whether our friends really love us, whether our neighbors are truly just to us, or whether our lives are actually going well. This leaves so much more room for worrying and helplessness than simply facing the facts and acting from them, and so Epicureanism can plausibly maintain that it is better to be told about the fraudulent charity than to continue donating in ignorance.

Additionally, Epicureanism provides even broader reasons for why learning new information should not disturb us. Because her creed employs such a "...radical internalization of happiness..."\textsuperscript{56}, the Epicurean sage will not let happiness be contingent on things outside of herself in the first place. This, in turn, means she has all the more reason to be told the truth about the fraudulent charity -- since her overall happiness and tranquility did not hinge on the charity's actually helping the needy, it is not particularly painful or distressing to learn the truth, and she will still gain all the practical benefits of having more knowledge.

After all, in support of the idea that freedom from mental disturbance matters much more for our happiness than we initially think, Epicurus points out that "...self-sufficiency is a great good, not in order that we might make do with few things under all

\textsuperscript{56} Annas, 349
circumstances, but so that if we do not have a lot we can make do with few...".\textsuperscript{57} Indeed, as stories like that of Croesus no doubt impressed upon Epicurus, luck or fate is often the biggest detriment to our continuous happiness and well-being. If happiness is our aim, it therefore seems undeniably better to have it under our own conscious control than under the control of indifferent, unthinking forces -- 'if you want it done right', they say, 'do it yourself'. Additionally, with a high degree of self-sufficiency, we are even less likely to brood and worry over the future, which in turn increases our overall levels of happiness and tranquility.

Thus, there are good, purely hedonistic reasons as to why we should avoid False Happiness. Since we cannot know whether a given truth stands to undermine such happiness, willfully remaining ignorant about some things will inevitably cause us to avoid learning any new information (and short of never going outside and never talking to other people, exposure to new information is unavoidable). Fearing new facts, in turn, makes us much less self-sufficient, which is a great good in Epicureanism -- the more we know, the more control we have over our lives, and a well-controlled life is one in which we can simply choose happiness for ourselves, rather than leaving it in the control of fate or fortune or a charity. An Epicurean therefore will not feel fear or gratification about facts, but will consider them useful waypoints in her personal pursuit of happiness. Because of this, no fact is worth avoiding in Epicureanism.

\textsuperscript{57} Diogenes Laertius, 10.131
II.b.2 Hollow Happiness

Now we must turn to the problem of hollow happiness, for this criticism follows logically from what was just said. Clearly, a skeptic might say, given that we have a curious mind which needs true knowledge of the world in order to avoid worrying, it is better to avoid False Happiness. But what if we could get rid of this need? Epicureanism teaches us to remove worry and fear from our minds, but the mind is the very seat of this problem in the first place! Perhaps we can dispel fear and worry once and for all: we should all get frontal lobotomies. Now, neither ignorance nor knowledge will affect us; we will be undisturbed almost all the time with little or no effort. Hence the problem of Hollow Happiness asks, why shouldn't all Epicureans get frontal lobotomies and spend the rest of their lives happily engrossed in raking leaves or cleaning toilets?

This raises a dire problem for Epicureanism since, as previously mentioned, its hedonism causes it to take such an instrumental view of the mind (and anything else we wish to call 'good') -- things are only worthwhile insofar as they brings us pleasure and inner peace, and bad if they bring pain and worry. And, since freedom from disturbance (especially mental disturbance) is lauded as our highest good, it sounds like we are made happiest when we get our minds 'out of the way', so to speak.

But this mischaracterizes how Epicureanism views the mind. Just because the intellect is only good insofar as it brings us more pleasure, it does not follow that it is more trouble than it is worth. As indicated in the previous section, there are real, purely hedonistic benefits the mind can give us by virtue of its enabling us to control our own welfare as much as possible. So the claim that Epicureanism views the mind in purely instrumental terms is true, but we should also be careful not to forget the important fact

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58 Principal Doctrine III
that the mind is a crucially useful tool for our effectively navigating the world -- this means it will almost always be 'worth the trouble' to have a mind rather than not.

Additionally, on top of giving us a better practical ability to go after what we want, the mind is also what enables an Epicurean to critically regulate her desires. Epicurean happiness would be impossible without the mind's help, because "[t]he flesh [takes] the limits of pleasure to be unlimited... [b]ut the intellect... [provides] us with the perfect way of life...". If we only had animal bodies and no minds, we would endlessly pine after more and more pleasures -- do our dogs or cats ever refuse an extra treat? Are they even capable of that? However if we have bodies and intelligent minds, we can deliberate carefully about the nature of pleasure and realize that we are made happiest not simply by getting everything we happen to want, but by also controlling the nature of our wants so that we will only pursue things that make us especially happy -- hence we can refuse eating an extra treat because we want to be healthy and long-lived more than we want the immediate pleasure of eating. So the very fact that Epicurus' hedonism is 'qualified' as opposed to 'simple' suggests that the mind is in fact the best, most useful tool we have for securing the proper kind of happiness. Any disturbance it causes us due to legitimate worries and fears is greatly offset by the tranquility and good way of life it also brings through eliminating happiness-compromising desires and helping discover means for satisfying the ones that remain.

59 Principal Doctrine XX

60 This is what Epicurus has in mind when he distinguishes between natural and necessary, natural and unnecessary, and unnatural and unnecessary desires. (Principal Doctrine XXVI, XXIX) For while it may feel good to satisfy any desire we have, certain objects of desire may cause us much more pain or pleasure in the long run. Hence it may feel good to abuse drugs and alcohol if we desire to, but these things' being unnatural and unnecessary causes them to needlessly disturb us later on -- being a drug addict or an alcoholic is much more painful than simply ignoring the desire to indulge in these things. So Epicureanism encourages us to listen to our second-order desires: over and above asking ourselves, "do I desire this?", we also should ask ourselves, "do I desire to desire this?". Upon answering the second question we may find that what we presently want will not make us happiest.
Moreover, Epicurus has a distinctly optimistic view about mental life -- should we use our minds properly, they cause us no disturbance whatsoever, for, as Epicurus claimed, mental disturbances have their source in false beliefs.\textsuperscript{61} If we believe the facts set forth by nature, we will come to such tranquility-conducive conclusions as, "...nothing terrible... is eternal or [even] long-lasting..."\textsuperscript{62}, "...everything natural is easy to obtain..."\textsuperscript{63}, and that it is possible for us to "...contend even with <Zeus> for happiness".\textsuperscript{64} So a disturbed mind is simply a misused mind. Epicurus' optimism suggests that the truths of the universe are pleasant and undisturbing, hence all mental disturbance is caused by believing the wrong things.

Importantly, however, the mind can also bring us great pleasures the body alone could not experience, for Epicureanism's account of pleasure is subtle.\textsuperscript{65} Such subtly suggests that mental pleasures and pains matter just as much as physical ones. Epicurus, after all, was a materialist who believed that "[t]he mind is an organ of the body no less

\textsuperscript{61} In the Letter to Menoeceus, Epicurus claims that we will be made happiest by "...[driving] out the [false] opinions which are the source of the greatest turmoil for men's souls" (Diogenes Laertius, 10.132). In the context of this letter, it is clear that the 'false opinions' Epicurus is concerned with are mostly the Classical Athenian conceptions of death, the afterlife, and the gods, but Epicurus also points out that anything which is unnatural and unnecessary will cause us great disturbance as well. (Diogenes Laertius, 10.130-131) Hence another Epicurean saying claims that "...disturbance of the soul will not be dissolved... by the presence of the greatest wealth, nor by honour... nor by anything which is a result of indefinite causes" (\textit{Vatican Saying}, 81). So we feel mental disturbance when we believe we need unnatural and unnecessary goods (like immortality, fame and riches), and this disturbance only worsens when we reach out for these goods because their status as unnatural and unnecessary means they are addicting and unhealthy sources of pleasure. Mental disturbances really do have their source in false beliefs.

\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Principal Doctrine} XXVIII
\textsuperscript{63} Diogenes Laertius, 10.130
\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Vatican Collection}, 33

\textsuperscript{65} Although it seems paradoxical to claim that pleasure is the good, yet freedom from disturbance is the highest good, (\textit{De Finibus}, II.16) the Epicureans make a distinction between 'static' and 'kinetic' pleasures. (\textit{De Finibus}, II.9) They believe that pleasure is fundamentally a movement from pained and desiring to painless and desireless, so for example, when we drink water we feel an initial 'kinetic' pleasure stemming from eliminating the pain of thirst, and we later feel a 'static' pleasure stemming from the general satisfaction of not needing anything. The Epicurean account of pleasure is therefore subtle in that it calls pleasurable things which may take reflection and effort to find pleasure in.
than the eyes or the ears..." so pleasures of the mind are pleasures of the body. This, in turn, means that when we think of pleasant or painful things, "[t]hese [thoughts]... have as much reality as the sensations incited by external things...". Indeed, we can readily experience the truth of such a claim if we try our best to dwell on a particularly good or bad memory. Do we not find that this can cause our heart rate to fluctuate, our hair to stand up, and our mood to change? Since conscious mental effort can have such a strong effect on our current affective state, the Epicureans therefore claim that the mind is "...truly the artisan of its own felicity... as it pleases, it is... happy or unhappy". And this mental happiness importantly figures into our overall level of hedonistic happiness, since mental pleasures and pains are worth as much as bodily pleasures and pains.

If we thus return to the optimistic, tranquility-conducive beliefs the Epicurean worldview gives us, we find that our minds can make much use of them. Whereas there is no food or drink we can enjoy continuously, our minds can seize upon Epicurean sayings to continuously cultivate a very real state of tranquility and contentment -- one so real that it can offset even the worst of physical pains. So for the Epicurean sage, the mind unlocks the possibility of continuous happiness. Over and above helping us navigate the world in a pleasant way, it can be its very own source of pleasure because mental pleasures and pains feel just as vivid as physical ones.

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66 DeWitt, 239
67 Brochard, 72
68 Brochard, 72
69 It is a well-known Epicurean assertion that the wise man's happiness will be so unaffected by external circumstances that he will remain happy even if tortured. (Diogenes Laertius, 10.118; Vatican Saying 56, 57).
70 Brochard, 74
71 Those who would deny this claim have much modern psychological evidence to refute. The very existence and effectiveness of psychological therapy suggests that our mere ways of thinking and the content of our memories do drastically affect our overall happiness. Today more than any other time in history, we disagree with the old adage, 'sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt..."
Thus, with the question of whether we would be better off with the hollow happiness of a lobotomy patient who gladly rakes leaves all day, Epicureanism agrees with our intuitions -- of course not! Such a way of life might be simple, easy, and possibly even deeply satisfying, but by virtue of not having much of a mind, such a person would clearly be much worse off.

A lobotomy patient will first off be more disturbed than us because he cannot use his mind to "...dissolve his feelings of fear...".\(^2\) Children, for example, are often desperately afraid of the dark, thunder storms, monsters under their beds, and so on. Yet, when they become adults and can see via clear-headed reasoning that these things all have rational, non-spooky explanations, these worries are eliminated. If we all underwent lobotomies, we would all lose this benefit. Our lives would be much simpler, but by virtue of our medically-induced ignorance, they would likely be much more scary and mysterious than they are now. Is it really worth not having to worry about my life goals, relationships, and personal convictions if I now have to be afraid of thunder storms and the dark? The things I fear as an adult may actually be much more dangerous and real than what a child fears, but at least when I go to bed at night I know that there is not a war or a plague hiding under my bed.

In addition to being afraid of things we are not, a lobotomy patient also loses all the practical advantages of having a mind. Like a child or animal, he will unreflectively use the flesh to "[take] the limits of pleasure to be unlimited".\(^3\) Just like the example of our pets being unable to refuse an extra treat, he will be unable to make second-order

\(^{72}\) Principal Doctrine, XII
\(^{73}\) Principal Doctrine XX
considerations about what will make him happiest in the long run. Having no mind means having no ability to reflectively and critically regulate desires, so a lobotomy patient, like a small child or animal, will not be able to reach the reasoned truth that "...every pleasure is a good thing... but not every one is to be chosen". Indeed, it is only because intellectually-capable adults have a more experienced, developed mind that they can see the truth of this statement -- it takes detached, critical reflection in order to see that eating steamed broccoli might, all things considered, actually be more pleasurable than eating seven brownies.

Finally, a lobotomy patient will have no ability to experience conscious enjoyment from his tranquil states. As mentioned above, Epicureanism posits that we can bring our overall level of hedonistic happiness to new, god-like heights through ruminating on the optimistic, tranquility-conducive truths of the universe. Such pleasure will be intense (since our psychological states have a strong effect on our current level of happiness, even in a hedonistic sense) and continuous, thereby ensuring that the happy Epicurean can use her mind to increase her happiness in any situation -- even that of torture. But a lobotomy patient clearly will not have access to such 'meta pleasures'; he cannot meditate on the happy truth that "[n]atural wealth is... easy to acquire", so continuous happiness and tranquility are much less attainable for him.

So, again, for Epicureanism the mind is too useful a tool to pass up. It might be true that it is only good insofar as it brings us more pleasure, but the preceding discussion shows that this will always be the case if we use our minds properly. Getting a lobotomy really would make us worse off as Epicurean hedonists, for we would lose all of the 

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\(^{74}\) Diogenes Laertius, 10.129  
\(^{75}\) Principal Doctrine, XV
mind's instrumental benefits: we could no longer consciously dispel fear and mental disturbance via rational thought, we could no longer perform 'sober calculation' about the overall most pleasurable courses of action, and we would lose the ability to take continuous joy in the tranquility-conducive truths of the universe. Thus, for Epicureanism, the mind may only be good as long as it brings us pleasure, but I have just shown that it is surely our best tool for accomplishing this end; it is the best thing in us for purely hedonistic reasons.

II.c Virtue-based Objections

Perhaps the Epicurean sage will be good at securing a plausibly fulfilling kind of happiness for himself. But how will he treat others if he believes his only purpose in life is to minimize his pain and maximize his pleasure? How can we expect him to behave honestly or generously when it might be painful to do so? Such virtue-based concerns about Epicurean ethics have been around ever since the philosophy was created,\(^{76}\) and they are quite understandable, for Epicurus' claim that virtue is ultimately a pleasurable thing to pursue sounds intuitively false. If we are to have value-free moderns practicing Epicureanism as a way of making morality intelligible and relevant to them, we must therefore see if it can respond to the objection that it leaves no room for virtue in its hedonistic ethics.

\(^{76}\) However, modern-day concerns about the place of virtue within Epicureanism come from an importantly different set of underlying ethical assumptions than do ancient concerns; the self-labeled virtue ethicists of today presuppose that their philosophy will not be identical to the virtue ethics of the Ancient Greeks. For the purposes of this current project, we therefore ought to conscientiously keep separate ancient arguments against Epicurean virtue from modern ones, for I wish to fit Epicureanism into a modern worldview, not an ancient one. For a discussion of whether Epicureanism can advocate for virtue in the ancient context, see the appendix of this project.
W.D. Ross lays out a clear, prima facie argument for the intrinsic value of virtue and its irreducibility to mere hedonic goods in his "Two Worlds" argument. In short, this argument says that if we imagine two worlds which are identical in all respects, except that in one world every person is vicious and in the other every person is virtuous, we unavoidably intuit that the virtuous world is better to live in. We might articulate the problem with the following syllogism:

"1. If hedonism is true, then any two situations containing identical amounts of happiness and unhappiness are equally good.

2. Some such situations are not equally good; some are better than others.

3. Therefore, hedonism is false."

The Two Worlds argument thus points out (just like authenticity-based objections to hedonism) that there simply are other things than pleasure or happiness which we intuit are necessary for a good life. This is bad for the plausibility of any form of hedonism because hedonism is defined by the claim that happiness and pleasure are the good life. So the Two Worlds argument suggests that hedonism is a mistaken ethical approach -- its very conception of our flourishing is impoverished and out of touch with genuine, irreducible human goods like virtue.

Epicureanism must account for the fact that many people intuit that a good life requires more than what the neutral hedonist claims; it needs non-neutral, value-loaded elements like the virtues. It must either show that these non-neutral elements of the good

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78 Shafer Landau, 30
life can in fact be expressed in terms of neutral hedonistic motives, or that most people are simply wrong in their intuitions about what makes a life good or choiceworthy.

Almost every Epicurean source takes both approaches, and so shall I. First, I will show that we have deep-seated intuitions which support the Epicureans' denial that virtue is irreducible and necessary for the good life. The Two Worlds Argument is therefore wrong to claim that situations with equal amounts of happiness are not equally good; virtue does not "add" anything substantive to the world that pleasure and happiness cannot. I will then articulate an Epicurean account of conscience in order to show that Epicurus was correct in thinking that the virtues are inseparable from pleasure. We naturally and necessarily have consciences (i.e., psychological predispositions to view certain things favorably and others with disgust) which pain and disturb us at the sight of things like injustice, greed, and selfishness, so we are driven by purely neutral, hedonistic motives to exhibit justice, charity, and compassion. This should cause us to doubt the Two Worlds Argument's assumption that virtuous people are the best at making the world a good place to live. People like the Epicureans who deny that virtue is a genuine good still have strong reasons to be morally upright and to make the world a better place.

II.c.1 Our Overvaluing of Virtue

As claimed in my introduction, people have believed throughout history that in order to be good, we must have strong moral values which deeply permeate all aspects of our lives and the world. This idea, in turn, has its modern analogue in non-neutral ethical theories like deontology, virtue ethics, and value-loaded versions of utilitarianism, all of which presuppose that "[t]here is no possibility of [justifying] morality... by appealing to
anything 'non-moral'...” These theories also coincide nicely with the second premise of the Two Worlds Argument which claims that two lives containing equal amounts of happiness need not be equally good; there is more to the good life than mere non-moral facts about levels of pleasure, pain, bodily health, and so on.

So we might say that our intuition that happiness must involve more than mere neutral facts about a person's life is a very old and commonplace one -- and perhaps such ubiquity suggests there is wisdom to this position. After all, to the way of thinking of both ancients and non-neutral moderns alike, a person motivated by non-neutral ethical values will do good much more reliably than a person motivated by neutral ethical values. It seems fairly commonsensical to think that a person will be much more consistently motivated to keep his promises if he believes God has made it his duty to do so, than if he believes his purpose in life is to maximize pleasure and minimize pain -- in the former case the person will always feel pressure to keep his promises, whereas in the latter case he will only sometimes feel such pressure if the pleasures and pains align properly. So why should we even entertain the idea that it is a mistake to believe that non-neutral factors like virtue are what separate good people from bad ones?

Part of the problem is that denying that the good life requires non-neutral, value-loaded elements is a subversive viewpoint which contradicts most previous philosophies and religions -- after all, such a value-free perspective has only been a viable option for less than a century. That said, we can begin to see that many of us are more valueless

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79 Hurthouse, 179
80 As argued in Section I.a, recent scientific, political, and historical developments have instilled in us more and more the idea that each person should be free to determine his own values, and that no person should ever have someone else's values forced upon him. Because of this, today, people are more disillusioned than ever with the idea that there is some objectively correct set of morals all people must follow. In the past, such a value-free worldview was considered incorrect and misguided, but we have had time to see what happens in a world where people do fervently impose their values on others -- there are genocides,
than we give ourselves credit for by examining how non-neutral theories of ethics conceive of virtue's importance in the world.

For example, Hursthouse makes a comparison between Aristotle and Kant to probe our intuitions about virtue.\(^{81}\) We can imagine two people, each going off to visit a sick friend at the hospital. One person goes on the visit out of regard for her friend -- "she is my friend and she brings be joy, so obviously I will visit her", she might say. The other person goes on the visit purely out of a sense of duty -- "she is my friend and it is my duty to look after my friends, so I will visit her", this other person might say. The question, then, is which visitor is more virtuous, and does the virtuous person also sound intuitively like the better friend?

Hursthouse points out that Aristotle, as he is commonly interpreted, tells us the former person is better. "...Aristotle... [distinguishes] between the 'continent' and 'self-controlled'... human being... Simply, the continent character is the one who... knowing what she should do, does it, contrary to her desires, and the fully virtuous character is the one who... does it, desiring to do it."\(^{82}\) Thus, as Aristotle conceives of virtue, we are clearly better people when we do what is right and desire to do so. The truly virtuous person has a much easier time exhibiting virtue than the merely continent person.

Hursthouse then goes on to Kant, who, as many people interpret him, believes the person who visits her friend solely out of a sense of duty is better. Kant writes that some people "...find an inner pleasure in spreading happiness around them... Yet [their
actions]... [have no genuine] moral worth",\textsuperscript{83} because the person who \textit{wants} to visit her friend does not have to work to do so; it is easy for her. On the other hand, the person who begrudgingly goes on the visit out of duty partakes in a valiant, virtue-testing struggle which is difficult. So, at least as he is commonly interpreted,\textsuperscript{84} Kant seems to hold the opposite position of Aristotle on virtue: true virtue does not manifest when it is easy for us to act well, but when it is difficult.

Importantly, Hursthouse (as I trust all of us do) believes that it is "...wildly implausible [to] claim [as Kant seems to do,] that the person who visits her [sick] friend... 'because she \textit{is} her friend' is morally inferior to the one who visits her 'out of a sense of duty'\textsuperscript{85}.

This, in turn, suggests that non-neutral, value-loaded motivations for good behaviors are not always intuitively the best. If we arrive at the hospital and say to our sick friend, "here I am, visiting you because you bring me great pleasure and I desire to be around you", she will be much happier with us than if we arrive and say, "here I am, visiting you begrudgingly out of a rational attachment to duty". The former justification for the visit relies on neutral, even hedonistic reasons for behavior which the Two Worlds argument tells us contribute to a morally inferior world, yet all of us would be much happier to have friends who care for us because we bring them joy than friends who care for us because they feel morality compels them to.

\textsuperscript{83} Hursthouse, 93

\textsuperscript{84} As previously mentioned, Hursthouse wishes to show that this interpretation of Kant is mistaken. That said, she does this by claiming that Kant only sees so much worth in doing what is right when it is difficult because he is presupposing that 'what makes it difficult' are circumstances which truly test one's virtue. (Hursthouse, 95-96) Since we do not conceive of the hospital visit as deeply testing a potentially good person's virtue -- it is, after all, a casual visit with a friend, not a dour, morally-loaded visit to the deathbed of someone we feel mixed emotions about -- Kant may actually agree with Aristotle and believe that it \textit{can} be good to do the right thing and want to do it. Hursthouse therefore wishes to bring Kant closer to Aristotle in claiming that he does not take up the clearly unreasonable position that an action can never be good if we want to do it. Kant will only claim that such actions are less worthy in certain circumstances, not all. (Hursthouse, 98)

\textsuperscript{85} Hursthouse, 94
Aristotle's, Hursthouse's, and our intuitions about visiting a sick friend in the hospital align with Epicurus'. Rather than imagining a virtuous Aristotelian making the trip because she wants to, we can imagine an Epicurean sage making the trip because she wants to, and the motivational story -- and our intuitions -- are unchanged: we are better friends when we care for others because we like them and prefer the pleasures they bring us than when we do so because we believe duty compels us to.

Indeed, Epicurus even does a better job of capturing Hursthouse's and our intuitions than Aristotle does. Aristotle believes it is good to visit our friends because we want to \textit{and} because it is virtuous, but Epicurus would only advocate the visit on the grounds that it is what we want to do. If we imagine, again, walking into the hospital room and saying to our friend, "here I am, visiting you because you bring me joy", she will be much happier with us than if we say, "here I am, visiting you because you bring me joy, \textit{and} it is the virtuous thing to do". It simply seems that we introduce something unpalatable and possibly even elitist when we justify our behavior to other people in terms of how much we are concerned with our own moral goodness.

This observation about what makes one's behaviors and motives more desirable should in turn give us reason to doubt the plausibility of the Two Worlds Argument. Specifically, it makes us reevaluate our swift agreement with the claim of its second premise that two situations with equal amounts of happiness are not equally good. For with the example of visiting a friend in the hospital, we find that the Two Worlds Argument tells us to think along the same lines as Kant: it is not enough \textit{that} our friend is made happier by our visit; it is also important that the visit be motivated by the proper non-neutral moral convictions. Yet we just saw that our intuitions do not work this way.
This suggests that the Two Worlds Argument's conception of goodness adds arbitrary and unnecessary complications to moral situations which intuitively seem cut and dry. If a world in which everyone acts out of purely hedonistic, utility-maximizing, non-moral inclinations is so awful, what do we gain from having everyone do the exact same things but with a morally-loaded justificatory tale? If we find ourselves bedridden in the hospital in Virtuous World or Vicious World, how is our friend's visit in Virtuous World so much better? Could we even determine which world we lived in just by observing how well people treat us? I suspect that what we really want is simply for our friends to care for us and be inclined to visit us in the hospital at all. It does not matter whether people act from non-neutral, value-loaded inclinations or from neutral, hedonistic inclinations because both can give people reason to behave well. Therefore, two situations with equal amounts of happiness really are equally good. The only reason the Two Worlds Argument seems so compelling to us in the first place is that we are still

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86 I actually doubt that we could ever know whether we live in Virtuous World or Vicious World unless we were told by God himself -- that is, we would need something like a supernatural ability to read people's thoughts and emotions in order to know if they ultimately acted from non-neutral moral reasons or neutral hedonistic reasons. This, in turn, suggests that there may not be much substance to the Two Worlds argument (and, in turn, the belief that we need virtue in addition to pleasure or happiness in order to live well). For in laying out the argument, Shafer-Landau mentions that a hedonist can immediately respond that "...the situation we are being asked to imagine is impossible. The virtuous world would contain a lot more happiness than the vicious one." (Shafer-Landau, 30) Yet those in favor of the argument "...will have none of this. There are nonhuman sources of happiness... such as disease. So imagine, in the virtuous world, that its extra happiness is offset by greater misery resulting from disease." (Shafer-Landau, 30) This is supposed to point us to the conclusion that we clearly would prefer to live in the virtuous world with more disease than the vicious world with less disease, but I doubt this. The very fact that the example has to be set up with the virtuous world having some extra misery in it presupposes that the virtues bring us more pleasure. This, in turn, suggests that the vicious world only sounded so bad to us initially because we envisioned ourselves getting cheated, robbed, and beaten in it. But this whole Two Worlds argument rests on the idea that each world contains identical levels of happiness, so we really should imagine the vicious world as one in which people do largely the same things, but instead for the sake of personal utility as opposed to non-neutral values like virtue. If this is the case, then the argument loses all of its potency. I might have initially preferred to live in the world with extra disease if it meant people would be nice to me, but if I can avoid the extra disease and still be treated well, then the virtuous world loses its appeal. Indeed, as I will argue later in this section, virtues and non-neutral moral values do not reliably cause people to treat others well anyway, and so it really is the case that extra virtue adds nothing substantive to how desirable the world is.
influenced today by the ancient (yet misguided) belief that people with non-neutral ethical convictions are somehow much better than people with neutral ethical convictions.

Indeed, it is worthwhile to return to the long-held belief that people with non-neutral moral convictions are better people, for I suspect we will find that it is untrue upon further inspection.

As it has commonly been thought, "[a]n agent of whom it can be truly said that she did what was [virtuous] 'because she thought it was right'... is, thereby, an agent who, by and large, will act in similar ways on similar occasions". If we instead imagine an agent who did what was virtuous just because such behavior provided greater pleasure, then with her future behavior, "...every act of... vice... will be given free rein just so long as it avoids punishment...". So age-old wisdom tells us that people with non-neutral moral codes will behave well much more reliably than people without them. Yet this intuition may not correspond to how people actually work.

In his *Lack of Character*, John Doris appeals to recent psychological research to show that it is systematically untrue that people with strong moral values act consistently better than people without them. Despite how fervently some people claim to be bound by their moral convictions, it turns out that when it comes to specific behaviors, fundamental aspects of our psychology easily overwrite any intellectual attachments we have to morality.

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87 Hurthhouse, 134
88 *De Finibus*, II.73
For example, Doris cites a study which looked at situational influences on altruistic behavior. In this study, theological seminary students -- people we would suppose are quite moral -- were given a questionnaire in one building, and then sent to another building to give a short verbal presentation. Upon leaving the first building, experimenters told participants either that they were running late for the next part of the test, that they were right on time, or that they were a little early. The experimenters had also placed a confederate on the path between the two buildings who slumped in a doorway as if to seem in distress and examined at what rate participants would stop to help. The result was that participants in the "high hurry" condition were significantly less likely to stop and help the person in distress than the participants who were told they were on time or early.

Doris writes, "[i]t's no surprise that haste can have people paying less regard to others. But the apparent disproportion between the seriousness of the situational pressures and the seriousness of the omission is surprising: The thought of being a few minutes late was enough to make subjects... disregard a person's suffering". We therefore ought to rethink out intuition that morally-inclined people tend to do good more reliably. Doris's data suggest that all people have the same general capacities for good and bad, and that the people who seem particularly good or evil to us may have done what they did for the most innocuous, unconscious of reasons. Against the Two Worlds Argument, this

80 Doris, 34. In some cases, experimenters even observed "...a hurried seminarian literally [stepping] over the stricken form of the victim as he hurried on his way!" (Doris, 34)
81 Doris, 58
82 Doris, 64
shows that a world in which everyone is virtuous can still contain evil things like genocides\textsuperscript{93}, wars, hatred, and so on.

Thus, a world full of virtue will not be much different than a world with none. We have seen that people with valueless, hedonistic reasons for behavior can be as good as people with non-neutral ethical theories, and may even sound intuitively better than them. We have also seen that attachment to non-neutral morals often does little to make people actually act better, for our underlying, shared psychology determines our behavior so much more than our morals. The Two Worlds Argument is therefore wrong to suggest that virtue adds some substantial, irreducible good to the world. Two situations with equal amounts of happiness really are equally good.

\textbf{II.c.2 The Epicurean 'Conscience'}

More needs to be said on behalf of Epicureanism, however. We may grant that virtue can often fail to make people act well, and even that a hedonist might do some good things like visiting a friend in the hospital, but it still sounds highly unlikely that acting from non-moral, hedonistic reasons could ever make people act as selflessly and courageously as people who derive their values non-neutrally. Common sense suggests

\textsuperscript{93} Doris writes of the Holocaust that "[i]t takes a lot of people to kill [6 million]... human beings, and there just aren't enough monsters to go around. Unfortunately, it does not take a monster to do monstrous things; if this were the case, our history and prospects would be much brighter. A plausible conjecture... is that a substantial percentage of perpetrators in the Holocaust had previously led lives characterized by ordinary levels of compassion." (Doris, 54) Indeed, in thinking about the Holocaust, we often fail to appreciate that people just like us carried it out -- that is, were we to transport them to another place and time in which Hitler was not in power, we would likely find that many of the Holocaust's perpetrators act just as kindly and compassionately as we do; some of them may even strike us as quite virtuous. Hence, were an advocate of the Two Worlds Argument to claim that the Holocaust could not have happened in a truly virtuous world, I argue that the inhabitants of such a world would not be recognizably human. The Holocaust did not occur because people pervasively lacked virtue, but because they were pervasively affected by problematic aspects of human psychology. Short of forging a new psychology for humans, I do not see how a more virtuous world would avoid great evils like the Holocaust.
that hedonists will never go above and beyond the demands of pleasure and act genuinely selflessly or altruistically.

Indeed, this is all the worse a problem for Epicureanism because it is specifically an egoistic hedonism. It suggests that we need only consider our own pleasures and pains in calculating what to do. This is problematic if we presuppose the common ethical intuition that a person cannot be good if he only regards himself. "Do not get involved in the suffering of others", we can imagine an Epicurean telling us, "It will only ever cause you needless pain". Epicureanism will therefore be a poor candidate for a modern-day ethical theory unless it turns out that it can, without ever appealing to 'goodness in itself', encourage the same altruistic behaviors which non-neutral ethical theories already encourage.

But I assert that it can do this. Epicurus clearly states that we are made happiest when we obey our natural, necessary desires. If, in turn, it can be shown that it is natural for humans to feel pain at the idea of someone suffering, and pleasure at the idea of him flourishing, Epicureanism can advocate for altruistic behavior even if each person only keeps his own happiness in mind. By virtue of being psychologically healthy, socially-inclined humans, Epicureans will have purely neutral, hedonistic reasons to exhibit compassion and altruism.

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94 As I have claimed elsewhere, it is of dire importance for valueless moderns that we can articulate a theory of ethics without ever appealing to 'goodness in itself'. After all, today we study history and learn that slavery, genocides, and war atrocities have all been committed by people who believed in 'goodness in itself'. This, in turn, makes us question the age-old wisdom that people must value goodness for its own sake in order to avoid acting badly. If anything, history suggests that the things people claim are 'good in themselves' are almost always conveniently aligned with things they selfishly and viciously want anyway. For instance, Europeans considered the colonization of Africa to be 'good in itself' because it was allegedly bestowing culture and enlightenment upon Africans, and it also conveniently meant Europeans could plunder the continent with a feeling of moral righteousness. I seriously doubt that their deciding colonialism was a good thing had nothing to do with their preexisting, selfish desires.
However, as mentioned in Section I.d, the arguments to come will take certain basic assertions about human psychology for granted -- for example, that we are deeply, unavoidably social creatures and that we generally prefer to see other people flourishing rather than suffering. It would simply be too great a task to undertake in this current project to comb through all the psychological data concerning these claims to argue for their truth. However, there may be psychological findings which cast doubt on such optimistic claims about human nature -- perhaps humans actually do, despite being so socially inclined, enjoy it when others suffer. All I can do, then, is make my arguments in earnest while recognizing that new psychological experiments and data might come to light which would cause me to have to revise my claims about how our psychology interfaces with morality. I believe this is the right path to take, for Epicurus himself was an empiricist. Although he endeavored to build his ethics from neutral facts about humans, empiricism builds into itself the idea that new observations and data can undermine and outmode previous conclusions. Hence, Epicurus and I would gladly revise our claims about ethics and psychology if new data showed them to be wrong. I just wish to make clear that this revision would have to happen later, outside the scope of this current project.

Epicurus' philosophy heavily relies on the idea that we are made happiest by doing what comes naturally to us. After all, as previously argued, Epicurus believes our world and the broader universe are constitutive of pleasure and tranquility; we may say he is an optimist when it comes to the question of whether happiness is attainable for all people. He thus believes that nature has given us certain desires, yet thankfully also
placed all the means to satisfy those desires well within our reach.\textsuperscript{95} So in order to live a good life, we need only deliberate about whether a given course of action is constitutive of our natural, healthy functioning, and whether it will make us freer from pain and desire.\textsuperscript{96}

Yet just which things fit this Epicurean description of being choiceworthy? From Epicurean sources, we can glean some specific answers: we should satisfy the desires for food, drink, and shelter,\textsuperscript{97} and the desire to have friends.\textsuperscript{98} Ostensibly, this is a description of life in an Epicurean Garden\textsuperscript{99} (which makes sense given that Epicurus created such places so he and his followers might live the ideal life). But the point about friendship being a natural, necessary desire is especially relevant to the argument that Epicureans have compassionate, altruistic tendencies.

It is likely that Epicurus, like Aristotle, considered humans to be social animals -- after all, he thought friendship was necessary for the good life, and the Gardens he created involved interactions and friendships between fellow Epicureans.\textsuperscript{100} Hence it makes sense that he claims humans feel a natural and necessary desire for friendship; few of us can imagine a genuinely happy, flourishing human who has no friends, loved ones, or companions. At the very least it is therefore true that an Epicurean, despite being an

\textsuperscript{95} Specifically, Epicurus claims that ",...everything natural is easy to obtain..." (Diogenes Laertius, 10.130) By this he means that, should we only care about satisfying our natural and necessary desires, we will almost never have a desire we cannot presently satisfy, and we will not have to worry about whether this will change in the future. After all, so many people only feel so much dissatisfaction with life because they desire truly difficult things to get. If, instead, they merely wanted to live healthily and peacefully, they could be so much more satisfied all the time. Indeed, today more than ever most of us have abundant access to food, shelter, clean water, and so on, and we know these things will likely be available to us for the entirety of our lives. We could therefore be much, much happier all the time if we reflected on how joyous a truth it is that most of us never have to worry about where our next meal will come from.

\textsuperscript{96} Diogenes Laertius, 10.132
\textsuperscript{97} Vatican Collection, #33
\textsuperscript{98} Vatican Collection, #52
\textsuperscript{99} Clay, 26
\textsuperscript{100} Clay, 26
egoistic hedonist, will not be concerned with just her own welfare. She will also concern herself with the welfare of her friends, family, and loved ones, for failing to do this would surely lead to an unpleasant, lonely life. In fact, Epicurus goes so far as to say that the sage will experience equally as much pain if she is tortured or her friend is tortured, and that she will even be willing to die for her friends.\footnote{Vatican Collection, 56-57} So it is reasonable to think that he envisioned empathy as a necessary component of the good life,\footnote{Indeed, it is this kind of empathetic thinking which apparently inspired a later Epicurean who is quoted as saying, "...the whole earth is just one country, the native land of all, and the whole world is just one household". (DeWitt, 32) DeWitt in fact thinks that the existence of Epicurean ideas like this should convince us not to call the Epicureans egoists at all. For "[w]hen a philosopher chooses the role of missionary and launches a campaign "to awake the world to the blessedness of the happy life," he may still be a hedonist, but he ceases to be egoistic". (Dewitt, 33) Indeed, DeWitt claims that we only call Epicurus an egoist because he recognized that people largely act with their own interests, pleasures, and happiness in mind. (DeWitt, 33) Yet while Epicurus acknowledged this, he did not envision our interests and pleasures as being inherently selfish; after all, he saw friendship as a necessary component of the good life. It therefore may be unnecessary to defend the idea that Epicureans have consciences and altruistic concerns. Depending on which scholars we ask, Epicurus is not an egoist but an altruist, so the worry that Epicureanism encourages us to be selfish or vicious is even less justifiable.} despite his egoistic position on happiness.

In order to claim that an Epicurean will naturally and necessarily be inclined to concern herself with the wellbeing of people in general, we need only expand the empathy which occurs in an Epicurean friendship. Admittedly, taking such a step will put us in the realm of speculation, away from Epicurus' actual doctrines, but I assert that this is a reasonable step to take due to Epicurus' implicit acknowledgement that humans are social creatures, the fact that Epicurean Gardens were such pleasant, supportive places for their inhabitants, and the fact that Epicureans were known for being courteous, decent people in general. Additionally, just as I am willing to revise certain assumptions about human psychology in light of new findings, I am willing to revise the forthcoming arguments about the Epicurean sage's inclinations toward altruistic behaviors if, say, new fragments of Epicurean texts were discovered which contradict my claims. All I wish to
say for now is that moving from the fact that an Epicurean naturally and necessarily has friends to the claim that she has benevolent, selfless inclinations towards the entire human race is not an unjustifiable step to take given what we do know about Epicureanism so far.

So let us suppose that we naturally and necessarily are social, interdependent creatures. Importantly, our status as social creatures inclines us to do more than just care for our close friends and family. It also requires us to empathize with any human whatsoever.\(^\text{103}\) Suppose we imagine a baby being tortured. Moralists and immoralists, believers and atheists, \textit{any} human of any background \textit{naturally cringes} at the very thought of such a thing; it does not even need to really happen for us to feel such a strong empathetic reaction. Or suppose we imagine a man being thrown from a tall building. Again, considering this pains and disturbs us. Even without appealing to something like virtue or 'goodness in itself', it is quite easy for us to arrive at the conclusion that the world would be better if people were not thrown from tall buildings -- I submit that even a moral relativist would agree with this. Conversely, imagine a family sitting down to a hearty dinner after a long day of work and schooling. Do we not all agree that such an idea makes us feel good, regardless of whether we would ever meet this family, or if they were even real?

\(^{103}\) Indeed, although never laid out in these exact terms, there are hints confirming such a position in surviving Epicurean sources. For example, one Epicurean saying claims that "[f]riendship dances around the world announci-ng to all of us that we must wake up to blessedness." (\textit{Vatican Collection}, #52) Clearly the thrust of this saying is that humans are naturally inclined to make friends with one another, and that they are made happier thereby. The stipulation that friendship dances 'around the world' further suggests that \textit{all} humans are at least capable of friendship with all others. So if any human can potentially befriend any other human, and friendship is common because it makes us happy, it stands to reason that \textit{any} human is in some sense our friend. After all, if I want what is best for my friend, I will care what happens to his friends, and those friends' friends, and on and on until we have arrived at strangers we will never meet. We thus must treat them well because we want what is best for our own friend, and he is socially linked to countless other people.
Both of the above lines of reasoning suggest all of us have "consciences", in the naturalist, Epicurean sense\textsuperscript{104} -- that is, we feel pleasure at the idea of another person's wellbeing and pain at the idea of his suffering. Conscience in this sense is truly natural in that we do not need to hold a certain code of ethics in order to empathize with our fellow humans, and necessary in that we cannot choose to ignore our consciences without great feelings of disturbance. Unless we have a psychological disorder which prevents us from normal, healthy social inclinations, all of us have instinctual urges to care for our fellow humans -- importantly, ones we cannot fully ignore even if our ethics encourage us to act contrary to it.\textsuperscript{105}

It therefore is the case that an Epicurean will concern himself with the wellbeing of others because of his natural, human sociality. The demands of his conscience will count as natural, necessary desires, so although he only looks after his own happiness, this will be inextricably linked with that of any person around him.

\textsuperscript{104} By 'conscience' I do not mean some arcane power within us that gives us access to an unseen realm of values. I am not claiming that an Epicurean's conscience ultimately senses the same kinds of values that non-neutral ethical theorists already operate with. Instead, I wish 'conscience' in the Epicurean sense to refer to a real, 'non-moral' component of our psychology that causes us to feel attraction to things conventionally considered good, and repulsion from things conventionally considered evil -- and it is no coincidence that convention and our psychology agree about good and bad. A species of highly social and interdependent creatures is unlikely to survive unless its members feel compelled to refrain from harming one another, to contribute to the overall welfare of the group, to care for each other's young, and so on, hence humans have evolved inborn inclinations towards compassion, kindness, and altruism. This, in turn, is why almost all moral theories tend to discourage things like murder and encourage things like compassion. So there is a sense in which the human conscience is merely a list of predispositions humans have evolved in light of being especially social creatures, and this is what I refer to when I claim an Epicurean naturally has a conscience. Conscience in this sense is fully neutral and value-free, for it is an empirical, scientific fact that humans have such predispositions; biologists and psychologists can show us data suggesting that nature has crafted humans to feel this way, and for good reason.

\textsuperscript{105} For example, it is reported that during the Holocaust, the Nazi soldiers tasked with killing Jews in firing squads felt great distress at what they did. They could only work in short shifts because it was apparently an especially draining task, and many of them had to consume large amounts of alcohol in order to bring themselves to carry it out. So even the Nazis, people whom we intuit today had one of the most perverse, evil ethical codes ever to exist, still could not override their inborn compassion towards their fellow humans. Although their ideology told them that it was morally righteous to kill Jews, this clearly had little effect on their underlying social, human nature. Even the worst of humans cannot escape feelings of empathy towards others, so if anything it seems we all have the same consciences despite our differing ethical theories.
The Epicurean's conscience also importantly does not rely on a non-neutral appeal to 'goodness in itself', but on an empirical appeal to biological and psychological facts about us. Even staunch immoralists and ethical relativists will feel disturbance at the sight of others' suffering, so Epicureanism can justify the need for people to have other-regarding, altruistic tendencies by appealing to the fact that all animals prefer to feel pleasure over pain. Moreover, because an Epicurean has few desires, all of which are easy to satisfy, she will have all the more reason to follow her conscience: she feels so little pain at any given time that the urgings of her conscience will be particularly noticeable; if she has a guilty conscience, satisfying its demands will therefore be a top priority for her.

Thus, Epicureanism *does* agree with the common ethical intuition that we should care about the welfare of all people. This is important, because it shows that a neutral ethical theory need not hold us to a lower ethical standard than a non-neutral one. Against the Two Worlds Argument, it turns out that it does not matter whether people are virtuous; all that truly matters is that they treat others conscientiously, in a way that promotes everyone's happiness. Epicureanism, in turn, gives us a value-free way of encouraging such behaviors: they are worthwhile because they are constitutive of natural, psychologically healthy human functioning, not because they are virtuous or 'good in themselves'.

Due to the above arguments, we may now have our cake and eat it too: we can be Epicureans and begin our ethical theory from the 'non-moral', neutral fact that all animals seek to maximize their own pleasure and minimize their own pain, yet since we are socially-inclined humans, we know that this pursuit of our own pleasure will necessarily
involve conscientiously caring for others. So while an Epicurean may not believe in virtue, it does not follow that she is vicious. Neutral Epicureans have good reasons to behave just as generously, justly, courageously, and compassionately as adherents of non-neutral ethical theories.
III.a Conclusion

There is an increasing multitude of people today who believe the world contains little or no value. They are told as children that the best ethic to live by is 'live and let live'. They grow up in a society that tells them each person is entitled to do just as he sees fit, provided it does not harm others. They learn from science that the universe is unthinking and directionless, that the human condition is not "on purpose". They study history and find that humans of the past have experimented with a vast range of different value systems, and that often times the most horrifying of evils have been perpetrated by the most ardent followers of such systems. In short, many of us are increasingly reluctant to see value in the world because, collectively, humanity has been steadily chipping away at every conventional source of binding, inherent value for the past few centuries.

Unfortunately, even such value-free, atheistic, progressive, scientific moderns agree that some sort of ethical code is necessary for human flourishing. Although becoming value-free has helped to us understand the universe better than we ever have, to pragmatically increase the quality of our lives, and to treat people with equality and dignity under the saying, 'live and let live', all of this has come at the cost of reducing talk of good and bad to a matter of opinion. Things are no longer good and bad in the deep metaphysical sense people once believed they were, but are instead good and bad in that they are desirable to some, undesirable to others. This is deeply problematic if we have not yet succumbed to all-out ethical relativism, and we still think the world would be better if people behaved well, made each other happy, stopped evil wherever it occurs, and so on.
Today's ethical philosophers, in turn, acknowledge that we must arm ourselves with updated ethical theories that are compatible with a valueless, atheistic worldview, yet which also encourage us to make the world a good place for ourselves and all people to live in. However, they (understandably) see morality as an unavoidably value-loaded thing. They therefore presuppose that a given person will have to already possess certain values if she is to understand the worth of their theory -- she will have to see it non-neutrally for it to truly resonate with her. And indeed, such a non-neutral approach to ethics will suffice for anybody who still has even the smallest piece of the deeply moral, value-loaded past within them.

Yet a non-neutral approach to ethics dooms far too many value-free moderns to become ethical relativists or even outright immoralists, for many have simply become so valueless that they will never intuitively understand such theories. They can only ever dispassionately go through the motions of such moral systems, and they will forever worry that morality is an arbitrary human imposition on the world, no more "correct" than labeling Antarctica as the southernmost continent, rather than the northernmost. It is for people so valueless as these that we should provide a fully neutral system of morality. Explaining goodness in terms of non-moral, empirical facts holds the potential to make morality feel intuitively worthwhile to them, and it would banish their relativistic worry that different conceptions good and bad are mere matters of opinion, one no more correct than another.

106 As we saw above with Shafer-Landau's objections to hedonism and the subsequent lengthy responses to those objections, there are deep, pervasive problems any neutral theory of ethics must overcome if it is to appear intuitively worthwhile. It therefore makes sense that many ethical philosophers approach their theories non-neutrally because this enables them to avoid such problems altogether, and they are not so valueless that doing this will bother them.
As shown above, the hedonistic philosophy of Epicurus enables us to make good on such a promise; Epicureanism is the best ethical system for the most valueless of moderns. Its reduction of good and bad to pleasure and pain provides a neutral, non-moral justification for the demands of morality, for it is simply an empirical fact that animals seek out pleasure and avoid pain. Even the most fervent of moral skeptics amongst us can agree that they prefer pleasure over pain, so Epicureanism can convince any and all people to be good, even if they have absolutely no values. Additionally, justifying morality in this way banishes the threat of ethical relativism. Someone with few or no values is unlikely to sense that something is bad because it is a sin or a vice, but will easily agree that it is bad if it causes pain. So a valueless modern who takes up Epicureanism can gain all the practical benefits non-neutral ethical systems give their adherents: she will have value-free reasons to regulate her own behavior in line with moral goodness, and she will know when others have done something evil and deserve censure.

Moreover, the valueless Epicurean's intuitions, inclinations to act, and actual behaviors hold her to a high enough standard that even proponents of non-neutral ethics can see that Epicureanism cultivates goodness in its followers. In responding to authenticity-based objections, we saw that, although hedonists, Epicureans will not choose to remain in blissful ignorance of the world, nor will they choose to meaninglessly waste their lives as lobotomized husks. Epicurus wisely points out that an active, inquisitive mind is the best tool we have for attaining long-lasting pleasure and tranquility. Then, in responding to virtue-based objections, we saw that, although solely motivated by pleasure and pain, Epicureans will not be generally vicious, nor callous.
towards the suffering of others. Epicurus tells us to do what comes naturally, and humans are thankfully constituted in such a way that they do not need non-neutral attachments to virtue or 'goodness in itself' in order to empathize with their fellow man or to be disgusted by evildoing. We can articulate the worth of altruistic, virtuous behaviors just by appealing to the fact that such actions enable us to enjoy good psychological health and a sense of inner peace.

Epicureanism therefore brings meaning and intuitive worth to ethics for even the most valueless of moderns, and this benefits all of us. Firstly, it brings people who want to be good yet are too value-free to accept non-neutral ethical theories into the fold of earnest moralists. Secondly, an increase in people with strong faith in morals will only come as welcome news to non-neutral moralists who already want there to be fewer ethical relativists, yet whose theories are unlikely to ever resonate with valueless moderns anyway. Thirdly, because Epicureanism asks its followers to lead sustainable, healthy, happy lives, this instrumentally benefits all people everywhere -- with more Epicureans in the world, any given person is more likely to be treated with compassion, tolerance, and kindness.
Appendix - The Lost Key to Eudaimonia: Epicureanism in the Ancient Context

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**Introduction**

In this project I have been developing an account of Epicureanism which seeks to revitalize interest in the philosophy for people today. After all, many moderns see little inherent value in the world and they generally believe each person should do whatever he pleases, provided it does not harm or disturb others. Since Epicurus more or less shares this worldview and builds his philosophy around it, people today can gain much from studying Epicurean teachings.

However, this is only a small piece of the puzzle when it comes to Epicureanism. Epicurus lived and wrote more than two millennia ago, so his concerns, motives, and aims in philosophizing were surely quite different than those we moderns may detect when reading his works. As such, this appendix will endeavor to fill out the rest of the story behind Epicureanism by exploring how it functions and how it was viewed in its ancient context.

Indeed, it is something of a miracle that we know anything at all of ancient Greek philosophy today. Although our two most extensive reports from that period are Aristotle and Plato, even that could easily have not been the case -- after all, the only work of Aristotle's surviving today are his lecture notes which were discovered moldering in a basement. And Aristotle and Plato are just two names; the majority of philosophical texts from this period have been lost to the ages. So we must cherish the few texts which survive today and do our best to preserve any and all philosophical knowledge from the past.

Epicureanism, moreover, seems to require such careful preservation and study more than any other surviving ancient philosophy. For at least some texts from this
school survive (so we are not entirely guessing at what its teachings were), yet at the same time much more of its doctrines come to us through texts composed by non-Epicureans with motives other than preserving the school's teachings. Indeed, Epicureanism was controversial in its heyday, and once there were no longer devoted members to defend its theories, dissenting and critical voices took over the discourse about it.\(^{107}\) Thus, we get different pictures of Epicureanism depending on which source we study: the few texts composed by practicing Epicureans and Epicurus himself suggest a clever philosophy which uniquely blends conventional Greek eudaimonism and hedonism, while the much more numerous and lengthy second-hand accounts of Epicureanism suggest an incoherent, immoral, quasi-philosophy which should rightly be disregarded as a topic of serious inquiry.

So is Epicurus' philosophy nothing more than a failed experiment on our collective path to knowledge of the good life? Or is it a diamond in the rough, just waiting to enlighten us and help us realize our true potential? It at least seems difficult to attribute such unflattering views to "...a philosopher who exercised so great an influence, and who collected around him such a large number of enthusiastic disciples... which numbered so many subtle minds, minds so ingenious and quick to criticize".\(^{108}\) We will be much more prudent in assuming that intelligent, educated people were behind Epicureanism's creation and perpetuation, and that its doctrines had legitimate

\(^{107}\) Norman DeWitt notes that, "[Epicurus'] character and his doctrines became the special target of abuse for... Platonists... Stoics, and finally for Christians. His name became an abomination to orthodox Jews" (DeWitt, 6). Catherine Wilson also points out that, during the Enlightenment, "Epicureanism... was regarded in Italy, France and England, as a corrupting force, dragging men into a condition of degradation..." (Wilson, 268). There have thus been few if any groups during the last few thousand years willing to advocate for Epicureanism (let alone practice it) and many more with negative attitudes towards it.

\(^{108}\) Brochard, 49
philosophical value. Thus, we ought to determine just how far our modern notions of Epicureanism have strayed from what it originally taught, for it is always better to accurately preserve ancient knowledge than to indifferently let it fade away -- indeed, it is already a miracle that any of it survives today.

The best place to begin this reevaluation is with Cicero's *On Moral Ends* (from here on, referred to as *De Finibus*), because this text was written at a time when committed Epicureans were still writing and teaching -- around 45 BCE -- and it contains one of the longest discussions of Epicurean ethics available today. However, as mentioned above, since it is a second-hand account of Epicureanism written by a non-Epicurean, it has no pretenses about diligently preserving Epicurean doctrines for later generations -- in fact, Cicero is quite hostile and dismissive towards the school and the text leaves the reader with the impression that Epicureanism is deeply misguided and implausible. We thus have the problem that *De Finibus* tells us much about Epicureanism, but it is unclear which points are true Epicurean doctrines and which ones are misrepresentations stemming from Cicero's indifference towards recreating and preserving the school's teachings. Fortunately, we can solve this problem by comparing the claims of *De Finibus* with those of actual Epicureans. This will enable us to benefit

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109 After all, Epicureanism's popularity and influence in the Ancient Greek and broader Hellenistic world is undeniable. By the third century BCE, Epicurus' school was firmly established in Athens (Clay, 14). Then Cicero, writing two centuries after Epicurus' death, confirms that the philosophy was popular enough that there was a committed Epicurean 'family', members of which placed Epicurus' likeness in paintings, on cups, and in jewelry. (*De Finibus*, V.3). Diskin Clay also points out that even "Diogenes writing in the third century ad [sic] speaks of the survival of [Epicurus'] school after almost all others had died out" (Clay, 12). So albeit divisive, Epicureanism was an important intellectual issue for people around the Mediterranean for six hundred years.

110 It does this by way of a broader discussion about the pros and cons of three major Greek philosophies: Epicureanism, Stoicism, and the 'Old Academy' (i.e., a philosohical movement of Cicero's lifetime which sought to synthesize Platonism, Aristotelianism, and Stoicism into a single doctrine tracing its roots to Socrates).

111 Instead, Cicero most likely composed the text as a means of educating young aristocratic Romans on the major points of Greek eudaimonism (*De Finibus*, ix).

112 Striker, 4; *De Finibus*, xvi; Essler, 148; Fish, 94; Armstrong, 112; DeWitt, 35; Sedley, 44
from Cicero's lengthy discussion of the school without falling prey to misunderstandings which he also unfortunately perpetuates.

To accomplish this task of repairing and sharpening our understanding of Epicureanism, I will first examine Cicero's treatment of it in *De Finibus* in order to take note of all the ways in which that text sabotages our understanding of Epicureanism. I will then determine the legitimate problems for Epicureanism which Cicero points us to, problems that real, practicing Epicureans of Cicero's day were no doubt also considering. Next, I will articulate solutions to these problems, thereby showing that the philosophy is plausible and coherent. Lastly, I will show that Epicureanism in fact has distinct advantages over the other ethical theories mentioned in *De Finibus*, thus making it the most -- as opposed to least -- plausible ethical theory Cicero considers, and indeed, the most plausible ethical theory even for us today.

Stripped of *De Finibus*' misrepresentation and misunderstanding, we will find Epicureanism to be a philosophy which uniquely (and successfully) integrates the two disparate Greek ideas of hedonism and eudaimonism, giving it the advantages of both with few of the disadvantages. Thus it acknowledges that *eudaimonia* is our final end (ensuring that our happiness will be fulfilling and complete), but it defines *eudaimonia* in hedonistic terms (ensuring that our happiness starts from straightforward biological facts,¹¹³ rather than the more ambiguous idea of virtue).¹¹⁴ This provides us, in turn, with much more concrete instructions for attaining *eudaimonia*: it is a simple matter of living

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¹¹³ i.e., the fact that all animals are naturally inclined to seek out pleasure and avoid pain  
¹¹⁴ An ethical theory of virtue, at its core, will tell us to act in the same ways as a virtuous person would act. This quickly becomes ambiguous, however, if we ask how it is that the virtuous person acts. The only answer available to us is, 'in accordance with the virtues'. *De Finibus* itself is proof of the idea that virtue is quite a broad term, since it shows that there is complexity and nuance even between views which easily agree that virtue is our highest good, like Stoicism and the Old Academy.
modestly and cultivating a tranquil state of mind. Therefore, if more widely accepted, Epicureanism could bring our greatest good much closer to us. Instead of having to spend a lifetime diligently working at *eudaimonia* and still possibly failing to achieve it, if we all became more Epicurean, we could all plausibly "...contend... with <Zeus> [sic] for happiness."\(^{115}\)

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\(^{115}\) Vatican Collection, #33
I. How Cicero Uncharitably Portrays Epicureanism

To better understand Epicureanism, we will first have to take note of all the ways in which Cicero misrepresents and misunderstands it in *De Finibus*.

After first reading this text, two things are clear to the reader, even if she has no prior experience in ancient philosophy: Cicero greatly disapproves of Epicureanism, and it sounds like the least plausible theory discussed in the book.

While this harshness towards Epicureanism may seem tolerable if not somewhat unexpected, to the more experienced scholar it is decidedly unfair. For example, in her notes on the text, editor Julia Annas constantly warns us that Cicero may be deliberately misrepresenting Epicurean doctrines. She also worries that he manages to distort Epicurean positions even more subtly through inept descriptions of the school by his Epicurean spokesperson, Torquatus. On the other hand, with Cicero's discussions of Stoicism and the Old Academy she sees no such deliberate weakening of arguments.

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116 For example, Epicureanism is the only school for which Cicero finds it necessary to level personal attacks against its founder. He is outraged by almost all aspects of Epicurus' life, variously mocking him for considering himself wise (*De Finibus*, II.7), shunning dialectic in philosophical discourse (*De Finibus*, II.7), and even for writing a will and testament before his own death (*De Finibus*, II.100). Epicureanism is also the only school towards which Cicero's tone ever gets overtly dismissive. At one point, he asserts that Epicurean ethics reduce humans to "...slow and lazy sheep, fit for grazing and the pleasures of procreation. What could be more absurd?" (*De Finibus*, II.40). On the other hand, the worst he has to say regarding the Old Academy is that "...no one is happier than happy" (*De Finibus*, V.81), and as for Stoicism, that their "...approach is too much nit-picking" (*De Finibus*, IV.7). Admittedly, Cicero does push fairly hard on Stoic doctrines, questioning whether they are merely a copy of Aristotelianism with slightly changed terminology, but even then he is still endorsing the Stoic/Aristotelian assumption that virtue must be our final end. The only school he ever rants and raves at for being morally perverse and vicious is Epicureanism.

117 *De Finibus*, xii

118 In Book I these are footnotes 19, 20, 22, 44, 45, 46, and 48. In Book II these are footnotes 8, 16, and 47. Annas worries that Cicero deliberately misrepresents, variously, Epicurean friendship, empiricism, atomism, and ethics.

119 Annas cautions us about this strategy in footnotes 44, 46, and 48 of Book I. In her introduction she also mentions that Torquatus is exceptionally bad compared to the Stoic and Peripatetic spokespeople at presenting his school's doctrines (*De Finibus*, xvi).
Additionally, Cicero's choice of characters\textsuperscript{120} to represent the various ethical theories of \textit{De Finibus} attempts to malign Epicureanism. His Epicurean spokesperson, Lucius Manlius Torquatus, was a successful statesman and military leader who, shortly before \textit{De Finibus} was written, had died a hero's death fighting against Caesar in Africa.\textsuperscript{121} Additionally, he was descended from Manlius Torquatus Imperiosus, consul in 354 BCE, who famously had his own son executed for disobeying orders.\textsuperscript{122} Take these facts along with the consideration that Lucius Manlius Torquatus was an avowed Epicurean and we find that Cicero is suggesting we ask ourselves, how could a person lead a life of such hard work and sacrifice, and yet still believe that pleasure is the good?\textsuperscript{123} Thus, 'Torquatus the virtuous Epicurean' is, in Cicero's mind, a joke and a contradiction which he includes to further discredit the philosophy.\textsuperscript{124}

Finally, if we examine the intellectual traditions which Cicero lays claim to -- Academic Skepticism and the Old Academy -- we see that he was already highly disposed to view Epicureanism dismissively before ever composing \textit{De Finibus}.\textsuperscript{125} His self-labeling as an Academic Skeptic is problematic firstly because Academic Skepticism...
is just about the closest thing there is to a 'polar opposite' of Epicureanism\textsuperscript{126} -- after all, Epicurus was both anti-Academic\textsuperscript{127} and anti-Skeptical\textsuperscript{128}, and so many of his doctrines would sound like direct insults to an Academic Skeptic. Additionally, as an Academic Skeptic, Cicero takes for granted Carneades' divisions of philosophy, which, for unconventional brands of eudaimonism, "[rule] out quite a lot"\textsuperscript{129} His affiliation with Antiochus' Old Academy is similarly problematic, because Antiochus, too, considered Epiucreanism to be deeply flawed.\textsuperscript{130} Thus, given Cicero's own philosophical education and preferences, he simply could not have given Epicureanism a fair, neutral treatment in \textit{De Finibus}.

\textsuperscript{126} As DeWitt notes, "Platonism and skepticism were among [Epicurus'] chief abominations... The philosophy of Epicurus was an immediate reaction to the skepticism of Pyrrho" (DeWitt, 8). James Warren also mentions that "the Epicurean view of things is opposed to [the Academic] tradition in nearly all matters of substantive philosophical importance" (Warren, "Introduction", 5). Epicurus' main purpose in philosophizing was thus to repair the damage Academic and Skeptical thinking had done to people's minds. As a result, Epicurus opposed Plato and Pyrrho on nearly every point: dialectic is a bad way to conduct philosophy; non-corporeal forms do not exist; we should not skeptically withhold judgment about all matters; geometry is a useless subject we should not teach philosophy students, and so on.

\textsuperscript{127} DeWitt observes that Epicurus was a moral reformer who sought to reform almost every aspect of ancient Greek society (DeWitt, 9). Given just how influential and central Platonism was to Greek society, it was Epicurus' de facto target of critique and reform.

\textsuperscript{128} Epicurus detested skepticism and imputed its promulgation to Platonism (DeWitt, 10). He simply did not believe that one could be wise merely by doubting; one must affirm beliefs positively as well (DeWitt, 22).

\textsuperscript{129} De Finibus, xxiii. Annas indicates that Carneades' assumption that ethical theories must appeal to the intellect (as opposed to the senses) already puts Epicureanism in a bad position. For since Epicurus is an empiricist, the truth of his philosophy can only ever be discovered through sensation. Indeed, she then mentions that Cicero appeals specifically to this assumption of Carneades' when criticizing Epicureanism in sections 36 and 37 of Book II. Carneades' divisions show further disenfranchisement of Epicureanism by making it appear a "clumsy attempt to combine two different approaches" towards the good (i.e., Epicureanism appears to affirm both that pleasure is the good and that being free from pain is the good) (\textit{De Finibus}, xxvi).

\textsuperscript{130} Annas' introduction notes that Cicero was sympathetic to Antiochus' project of synthesizing a positive, coherent doctrine from Plato, Aristotle, and the subsequent philosophers of those traditions (\textit{De Finibus}, xiv). Worse still for Epicureanism is that Antiochus figured, between Stoicism, Platonism, and Aristotelianism, "[a]ll they are really doing... is [introducing]... new terms; the basic underlying ideas are the same... [These schools] stand together. They stand united against the Epicureans" (\textit{De Finibus}, xiv). Given that Cicero's own arguments in Books IV and V agree with Antiochus that the core substance of Stoic and Peripatetic moral theory are the same and that the true difference is in the terminology they employ, it is at least probable that he also agreed with Antiochus that Epicureanism, being radically divergent from Platonism, Stoicism, and Aristotelianism, could not possibly be correct.
Since, upon closer inspection, Cicero so clearly weakens the arguments in support of Epicureanism in *De Finibus*, we must reject the notion that Epicureanism is the least plausible of the theories he discusses. Epicurus puts forth a philosophy that is in fact just as plausible and legitimate as any other tradition mentioned in *De Finibus*.

1.b Cicero's Insightful Criticisms of Epicureanism

However, while *De Finibus* is certainly uncharitable towards Epicureanism, it still asks questions which real, practicing Epicureans of the time were likely also contemplating. It is now important to consider the more legitimate, principled criticisms of Epicureanism Cicero employs, because understanding these flaws well will enable us to determine if Epicureanism has any responses to them, which will in turn help us assess (free of Cicero's biases) the ultimate plausibility of the doctrine.

There are two major themes which Cicero's legitimate arguments against Epicureanism in *De Finibus* appeal to. One is a reaction to the radical Epicurean view that goodness and badness are ultimately reducible to pleasure and pain, and the other is a concern over the apparent mismatch in Epicurus' claims that pleasure is the good, but that the *highest* good is freedom from pain.

Thus, given that the Epicureans believe that pleasure is the good -- and more radically, that morality is reducible to pleasure and pain\(^{131}\) -- Cicero worries that "[i]t is

\(^{131}\) Epicurus himself says in his *Letter to Menoeceus* that "every pleasure is a good thing... but not every one is to be chosen. Just as every pain too is a bad thing, but not every one [should be] avoided" (Diogenes Laertius, 10.129). This is a statement qualifying his hedonism, pointing out that future pains and pleasures caused by an action ought to be considered in addition to the ones that will follow immediately from that action. That being said, implicit in his argument is the idea that pleasure and pain are the fundamental building blocks of what is choiceworthy, so even though he asks us to consider the present *and* also future outcomes of a decision, it is clear that what determines the goodness or badness of a given decision is still *only* the amounts of pleasure or pain is causes.
impossible... to defend or uphold virtue if everything is to be regulated by pleasure".\textsuperscript{132}

Indeed, this is a truly forceful criticism, since if we really do believe that pleasure is the only criterion upon which something can be called choiceworthy, then a horrific act -- no matter how violent or unjust -- must be done if it brings more pleasure than pain.

Epicureanism's best defense to this criticism in De Finibus constitutes optimistic claims about the relationship between virtue and pleasure. The Epicureans essentially affirm that the path of the greatest virtue and the path of the most pleasure are the same -- seeking out pleasure also causes us to become virtuous.\textsuperscript{133} In response to this claim, the reader and Cicero are quite justified in wondering how virtue can ultimately be a pleasurable thing to pursue. Intuition certainly seems to indicate that people have suffered intense pain and disturbance on behalf of such virtues as courage, justice, wisdom, and so forth.

Cicero's other substantial concern about Epicureanism in De Finibus is that it does not have a coherent account of pleasure. Thus, he begins Book II by asking what the Epicureans believe is the nature of pleasure. Epicurus' own answer, as Cicero understands it, is that pleasure is "an agreeable stimulus that gladdens the senses".\textsuperscript{134} This definition of pleasure becomes problematic, however, when Torquatus admits that, for Epicureanism, the highest good is the removal of all pain. "[Y]ou must surely concede", Cicero then argues, "that 'pleasure' has a different meaning from 'not being in pain'".\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{132} *De Finibus*, II.71

\textsuperscript{133} *De Finibus*, I.57. This Epicurean linking of virtue to pleasure is not unique to De Finibus. Epicurus himself writes, "...the virtues are natural adjuncts of the pleasant life and the pleasant life is inseparable from them" (Diogenes Laertius, 10.132). We thus know that defending virtue's importance in this way is a position Epicureanism is heavily committed to; it is not Cicero's invention.

\textsuperscript{134} *De Finibus*, II.8

\textsuperscript{135} *De Finibus*, II.9
Cicero thus worries that Epicureanism equivocates on the meaning of the term 'pleasure' due to its conception of the highest good.\textsuperscript{136}

Epicureanism's logical defense to this concern is to give pleasure a dual nature to accommodate for the highest good being such a seemingly pleasureless state. Some pleasures are static and are others kinetic, Torquatus thus argues, so 'not being in pain' \textit{is} a pleasure; it is a static one.\textsuperscript{137} Still, Cicero's argument remains forceful: common sense suggests that these sound much more like neutral states without stimulus than they do pleasures. We are thus tempted to ask along with Cicero how the states between pleasures and pains can in fact be pleasurable, let alone somehow amount to our highest good within a hedonist philosophy.

Hence, Cicero's biggest and most pressing criticisms of Epicureanism in \textit{De Finibus} are that its endorsement of pleasure as the good will lead its followers to act viciously and immorally, and that it does not have a coherent or intuitive account of pleasure. Importantly, these criticisms of Cicero's stand to deepen our insight into Epicureanism, for they point out internal conflicts which require a response from the school.

\textsuperscript{136} As Cicero sees it, if Epicurus wants to call pleasure the good, then the highest good should be some kind of 'agreeable stimulus that gladdens the senses'. But if Epicurus wants freedom from pain to be the highest good, then he should call 'not being in pain' the good (\textit{De Finibus}, II.16). Cicero is therefore claiming that Epicurus cannot have his cake and eat it too -- he cannot have pleasure be the good and freedom from pain be the highest good, since freedom from pain hardly sounds like an 'agreeable stimulus'.

\textsuperscript{137} \textit{De Finibus}, II.9
Epicurean Responses to Cicero

We must now see if Epicureanism can defend itself against Cicero's two piercing criticisms: how will an Epicurean act virtuously if he believes that pleasure is the sole good, and how can Epicureanism claim it has a coherent account of pleasure if our highest good is located in the seemingly-neutral states between pleasure and pain?

II.a Defense of the Epicurean Account of Pleasure

Let us first turn to Cicero's concerns over the Epicurean conception of pleasure. Why believe, he asks, that a lack of pain is a pleasurable and not a neutral feeling? We can begin to answer this question by examining Epicurus' *Letter to Menoeceus*. At one point, when making the broader claim that simple rather than extravagant ways of life make us happiest, Epicurus mentions that "barley cakes and water provide the highest pleasure when someone in want takes them."\(^{138}\) The main thrust of this claim is quite commonsensical; obviously the satisfaction of a desire feels much better if one's need for that thing is great, as opposed to insignificant. Food is better when one is hungry, company is better when one is lonely, rest is better when one is tired, and so on. But more importantly, these words also indicate that it is impossible to experience the 'highest pleasures' without being in a state of privation or need: a meal at the French Laundry has the potential of being the most pleasurable eating experience I have ever had, but if I am not hungry in the first place then eating such a meal will feel forced and painful. So

\(^{138}\) Diogenes Laertius, 10.131
Epicurus speaks to our experiences when he claims that it is fundamentally our need for a thing which determines whether getting it will provide the 'highest pleasures'.

However once we grant Epicurus the point that needing a thing is necessary to experience the 'highest pleasures' from it, we are already far down the path of agreeing with his seemingly unintuitive claim that 'not being in pain' is in fact a pleasurable thing. For by making the previous comment about how pleasant barley cakes become when one is hungry, Epicurus shows us that what truly matters in the satisfaction of desires is not how the desire is satisfied, but that it is satisfied. With the example of eating, then, pleasure primarily comes from the fact that the pain of hunger is removed. Given two equally hungry people, they will experience roughly the same amount of pleasure even if one eats barley cakes and the other eats steak. After all, Epicurus elsewhere makes the claim that once we remove the pain associated with an unfulfilled desire, pleasure has reached its upper limit and can only be varied but not increased. At most, we can thus say that eating steak provides a more diverse set of stimulations than barley cakes, but it does not bring more pleasure because it satisfies the exact same amount of hunger as the barley cakes. Additionally, if the one who eats barley cakes is hungrier than the one

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139 Ultimately, Epicurus tells us that our highest good is not the experience of such pleasures as these, but the freedom from pain and disturbance which comes from not desiring. However, we are unlikely to ever become free from pain for long stretches of time unless we first recognize that it is the removal of pain which truly matters in the satisfaction of desires.

140 As Raphael Woolf observes, "when one is suffering brute hunger and thirst.. the difference between simple and more elaborate fare... is perhaps nullified or even reversed in some cases" (Woolf, 166). Indeed, the best meals many people can recall having are ones in which they satisfied a particularly large hunger -- e.g., sitting down to a hot dinner after a long day of backpacking. This should lend credibility to Epicurus' claim that it does not matter how we satisfy desires but that we satisfy them, for how else could reheated canned soup bring us as much pleasure as eating at a five star restaurant? And even in the case of the five star restaurant, as previously mentioned, the meal would be unappetizing and even painful to eat if one were not hungry in the first place.

141 Diogenes Laertius, 10.139

142 Woolf is not as sure as the Epicureans about the truth of such a claim because, "[i]t is one thing to say that there is more pleasure to be got from a state of tranquility than anything else; quite another to say that there is no more pleasure to be got from anything else once tranquility is attained" (Woolf, 177-8). Woolf's
who eats steak, the pleasure from those barley cakes will far exceed that of the steak. Therefore if we agree that one's needs and privations going into an act of desire satisfaction affect the experienced pleasure more than anything else, then we are ostensibly endorsing Epicurus' claim that it is the removal of desire that truly matters in instances of pleasure, not the specific objects which remove that desire.143

As a result, 'not being in pain' may be seen as the goal of our pleasure-seeking behavior, for we only bother to satisfy desires at all because they bring pain if left unsatisfied. The good feelings stemming from pleasure on this view therefore have their source in our bodies being moved from pained and desiring to painless and satisfied (hence it does not matter how we satisfy our needs but that we satisfy them). Importantly, such a view of pleasure is in fact shared by many Greek philosophies -- it was commonly

intuitions therefore suggest -- against Epicurus -- that while it is true that barley cakes are more pleasurable to a hungry person than steak is to a full person, eating steak and being hungry must be better still. I disagree that this is a problem for Epicureanism, since it posits a "relation between pleasure and the restoration... of the natural state of the organism" (Nikolsky, 445). Thus static pleasures are states in which our bodies are functioning optimally at all levels, whereas the kinetic ones are merely the experience of moving into such a state. So given a set amount of hunger, steak and barley cakes provide exactly the same amount of pleasure. They both move the body the same 'distance' from hungry to not hungry. The only thing the steak can possibly 'add' to such an experience is merely extra stimulation on the trip back to painlessness. If we want to call that added stimulation 'pleasure', we may, but importantly such a thing's being pleasurable is contingent on our beliefs. After all, that is why Epicurus is even able to claim that we can accustom ourselves to different ways of life; we change the structure of our desires simply by changing our attitudes towards them. The example of eating steak is in fact quite indicative of this, since there really are people who have become vegetarians after decades of eating meat. Such people may have even enjoyed steak in the past, but they certainly do not forever lament its absence. Their bodies and minds actually change the terms on which food provides pleasure and satiety. Thus, we control whether the added stimulation of eating steak will improve the pleasure we get from satisfying hunger. We can disagree with the Epicureans that a simple way of life provides the most pleasure, but were we to change our minds about this and begin living simply, such a way of life would, indeed, provide the most pleasure.143 Although this claim may still sound controversial and unintuitive to some, there are yet many more examples from our everyday experiences which confirm it. It does not matter whether one drives a luxury SUV to work or a compact economy car, for what truly matters is that one get to work. It does not matter whether one drink expensive imported bottled water or tap water, for both perform the exact same job of hydrating the body. It does not matter whether one wear the latest winter fashions or a hand-me-down jacket, for both perform the function of keeping one warm, and so on. It thus seems that, for us to disagree with Epicurus that what truly matters in desire satisfaction is not how it gets done but that it gets done, we are placing a vain and excessive premium on luxury. Moreover, upon further reflection, it is clear that such valuation of luxury is illogical and vicious -- do we not intuit that those who constantly lust after luxury objects and status symbols lead a deeply misguided and unhappy life?
thought that pain occurs when an organism's proper functioning is impeded and pleasure when it can function naturally and unhindered.\textsuperscript{144} However, most Greek philosophies also assert that states of painlessness are not therefore pleasurable, for they believe pleasure only inheres in the experience of changing from pain to painlessness. Epicurus, by contrast, believes pleasure occurs both in the change from pain to painlessness, and in inhabiting a state of painlessness\textsuperscript{145} -- hence the Epicurean distinction between static and kinetic pleasures.

Moreover, Epicurus was right to disagree that states of painlessness are neutral; there are everyday examples in which we feel pleasure simply from being free of pain. It may feel good to get a professional massage, but does it not also feel good (and in an importantly different way) to notice, afterwards, all the ways in which we are now free of small, often unnoticeable pains and tensions? Or if we exercise intensely and then feel the kinetic pleasure of sitting down and having a long drink of water, do we not also notice, for the rest of the day, "a relaxed freshness... that feels wonderful"?\textsuperscript{146} If we agree that subtle pleasures like these exist, then Epicurus is quite entitled to the claim that painlessness is a pleasurable thing.

So being free from pain is a pleasurable thing, but noticing how good it feels will be another issue entirely for Epicurean ethics. Although we may not continually focus on the static pleasure of, say, not being thirsty, if we remind ourselves how fortunate it is that we have abundant access to clean drinking water, we will always be able to tap into an awareness of our own present static pleasure. And it is understandable if we do not initially notice pleasure in our painless states anyway, since Epicurus explicitly mentions

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{144} Nikolsky, 445  
\textsuperscript{145} Nikolsky, 446  
\textsuperscript{146} Woolf, 174
\end{flushright}
that we live well through "becoming accustomed to simple, not extravagant, ways of life". The idea of 'becoming accustomed' strongly suggests that we can actively modify what things bring us pleasure and how much. An Epicurean therefore develops into a better person by moving the correct desires into the correct categories.

Thus, regarding states of painlessness, a good Epicurean truly will experience them as continuously pleasurable because they will be a constant reminder of the joyous truth that "everything natural is easy to obtain". The reason states of painlessness appear neutral to the average person today, Epicurus would argue, is that such people hold many false opinions concerning the nature of pleasure, and their desires are improperly ordered. Clearly, if a person does not believe that it is a good thing to be thankful for all the ways she is not in need of things, she will not easily experience pleasure from such a state. But on the other hand, if that same person realizes and focuses on how good it is that she is alive, healthy, and free to be happy, then she will constantly

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147 Diogenes Laertius, 10.131
148 As Christopher Gill notes, "The Epicurean theory... assumes a close linkage between beliefs or reasoning and emotions or desires..." (Gill, 132). This means that for Epicurus, desires and emotions are, in part, judgments: we feel fear when we judge that something might harm us, we desire an object when we believe attaining it will make us happier, etc. Because of this, Epicurus believes -- and builds into his ethics -- that we can modify what desires we have using sheer mental exertion (O'Keefe, "Action", 149). The only desires which are not changeable in this way are the natural and necessary ones, which no human, regardless of his view of pleasure or virtue can live without -- e.g., eating, sleeping, drinking, and so on.
149 Principle Doctrine XX attests to this conception of moral development, stating that "[t]he flesh took [pleasure]... to be unlimited, and [only] an unlimited time would have provided it. But the intellect... provided us with the perfect way of life and... no need of unlimited time" (Diogenes Laertius, 10.139). This means that Epicurus recognizes that our 'gut feelings' about pleasure may be quite different than how his ethics advises us to view pleasure. Moreover, the Epicurean way of life will likely not be possible unless we have reflected extensively on why pleasure is a good thing. It is therefore okay if a new initiate to Epicureanism does not experience painless states as continuously pleasurable, because she has not yet extensively used her intellect to 'provide the perfect way of life'. Importantly, Epicurus really does believe it is possible to experience states of painlessness as continuously pleasurable simply by mental habituation. The possibility of enjoying them is always there -- the problem is that most of us are not in the practice of noticing and appreciating these more subtly pleasurable states.
150 Diogenes Laertius, 10.130
151 Indeed, as mentioned in footnote 37, our modern intuitions agree that many people around us have drastically misguided desires. Very few of us look upon braggarts who flaunt the latest gadgets, name-brand fashions, cars, and so on as happy, virtuous people, since we (implicitly) agree with Epicurus that true happiness must involve being satisfied with what one already has, instead of constantly grasping for newer and flashier objects of desire.
experience pleasure when free of pain. Therefore, Epicurus is quite justified in claiming that the supposedly-neutral state the average person assumes lies between pleasure and pain can be a continuously pleasurable one.

Importantly, such a conclusion makes it much more reasonable to think that we can become *eudaimon* merely by living a simple life. Whereas non-Epicureans like Cicero are tempted to call such a path lazy, timid, and dull, the truth of the matter is that these detractors' ideas of our path to happiness are overcomplicated and inefficient. The Epicurean conception of pleasure explained above points us to the truth that we can significantly increase our enjoyment of life at any given time by focusing on all the ways in which we are not in need. Indeed, many of us spend so much time worrying about our loftiest goals and aspirations that we never actually enjoy the goods presently in our grasp.

**II.b Defense of the Epicurean Account of Virtue**

The next deep problem Epicureanism must overcome is Cicero's concerns over how it can advocate for virtue. He worries that if we truly believe pleasure -- not virtue -- is the good, "then every [vicious act]... will be given free rein just so long as it... avoids punishment".\(^{152}\) Worse, if pleasure is the ultimate criterion of something's being choiceworthy, an Epicurean will be *morally compelled* to choose the vicious path of greater pleasure.\(^{153}\) In what follows, I will show that even if pleasure is the sole good, virtuous behavior is still necessary for Epicurean happiness.

\(^{152}\) *De Finibus*, II.73

\(^{153}\) After all, we saw that Epicurus strongly suggests in the *Letter to Menoeceus* that moral goodness and badness reduce to feelings of pleasure and pain (Diogenes Laertius, 10.129).
As mentioned in Section I.5, Epicurus' immediate reaction to this potential flaw in his ethics is to claim that virtue and pleasure are tightly linked. In support of this claim, he mentions that prudence is crucially important in living a good life and that all the other virtues have their source in prudence. Leaving the issue of the other virtues aside, it at least seems quite reasonable to say that prudence figures significantly into Epicurus' ethics. For unlike the Cyrenaics (whom we might consider 'stereotypical' hedonists), Epicurus is a hedonist and a eudaimonist. Because of this, he cannot locate our final end in any sort of pleasure but one that is self-sufficient and for the sake of no other thing. Thus he locates our final end specifically in the pleasure of being free from troubles and pains. On this view, we cannot simply consider the immediate pleasures resulting from a given choice, but all the pains and pleasures which will happen in the future as a result of that choice. It therefore makes sense that an Epicurean must reason the right way with the right attitudes about any decision, thereby practicing prudence.

But what about all the other virtues? In Book I of *De Finibus*, we fortunately get some discussion of how other sorts of virtues are ultimately for the sake of pleasure on the Epicurean view. Broadly, they are all good because they all serve to bring us more

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154 "[T]he virtues are natural adjuncts of the pleasant life and... inseparable from [it]" (Diogenes Laertius, 10.132).
155 Diogenes Laertius, 10.132
156 The Cyrenaics are 'stereotypical' hedonists in that they endorse the view that the most immediate, intense, and bodily pleasures are the best things for us (O'Keefe, *Epicureanism*, 119). When we think of hedonists as "unscrupulous, unbridled sensualists, busy stuffing themselves with dainties... before engaging in... dances and disgusting orgies" (O'Keefe, *Epicureanism*, 117), the Cyrenaics embody this stereotype. They deny that our good can amount to anything more than the most immediate pleasures.
157 *De Finibus*, xxi
158 *De Finibus*, I.29; O'Keefe, *Epicureanism*, 111
159 Diogenes Laertius, 10.129; Striker, 10
160 Wisdom, for example, is for the sake of pleasure because it "teaches us to bear the slings of fortune lightly, and shows us all the paths that lead to tranquility"(*De Finibus*, I.46). Justice is for the sake of pleasure too, because "it calms the spirits; and it also offers hope that none of [life's necessities]... will be lacking"(*De Finibus*, I.50.). Even courage makes our lives more pleasant, since "[f]ear of death can shake
pleasure and less pain. Importantly, this pragmatism is taken along with the hedonist assertion that "[n]either hard effort nor the endurance of pain is enticing in its own right".\textsuperscript{161} So Epicureanism only places value on virtue insofar as it pays off with dividends of pleasure; it has no value in itself.\textsuperscript{162} However, given that Epicurus still ultimately asserted that virtue is required for a happy life, it must really be the case that virtuous action and pleasure coincide.

Moreover, just as surely as virtue is tightly linked to pleasure, the Epicureans point out that vice is tightly linked to pain.\textsuperscript{163} Any vicious or illegal action may directly cause us pain, and will certainly bring with it a whole new set of worries for the future about avoiding punishment or retaliation, and so, according to Epicureanism, "no one can harm others without thereby harming himself".\textsuperscript{164} Thus, living virtuously and doing the right thing will always make our lives easier and more enjoyable than living selfishly and taking advantage of others.\textsuperscript{165} The Epicureans can justify the goodness of virtue and the evil of vice even though they believe goodness and badness ultimately are matters of pleasure and pain.

Unfortunately, this hedonistic pragmatism directly contradicts eudaimonism's conception of virtue. As Rosalind Hursthouse points out in her \textit{On Virtue Ethics}, the virtues "involve so much more than mere tendencies to act in certain ways... [S]uch to the roots an otherwise tranquil life; and succumbing to pain... with a frail and feeble spirit, is pitiable" (\textit{De Finibus}, I.49).

\textsuperscript{161} \textit{De Finibus}, I.49

\textsuperscript{162} Epicurus is in fact rumored to have gone so far as to say, "I spit on the fine and those who emptily admire it, when it doesn't make any pleasure" (Athenaeus XII 547a as quoted by Annas, 340). He really would recommend that we not care about virtue if it did not pay off with pleasure.

\textsuperscript{163} "Foolhardiness, lust and cowardice unfailingly... disturb the spirits and cause trouble" (\textit{De Finibus}, I.50).

\textsuperscript{164} Brown, "Politics", 193

\textsuperscript{165} Indeed, because of this fact, the Epicureans explain "[c]ases of evildoing... by saying that the malefactor has incorrect beliefs about what will bring him pleasure" (O'Keefe, "Action", 149). So good Epicureans "differ from the rest... not in that they have a different goal but in that they make the correct choices to achieve that goal" (Woolf, XXX 313). Importantly, these 'correct choices' will always steer them away from vice because being vicious is clearly harmful to oneself.
character traits... [go], as we say, 'all the way down'". So according to a virtue-focused observer, the Epicureans already fail at virtue. Their insistence that virtue needs to bring pleasure shows that they will only ever view it as a 'tendency to act in certain ways'. It is not an unalterable character trait which 'goes all the way down', since the only trait of ours which runs so deep is the desire to seek our pleasures and avoid pains.

The Epicurean defense of virtue is therefore at an impasse: the Epicureans can keep explaining ways in which virtue is necessary to experience the best kinds of pleasures, and a more conventionally-minded eudaimonist like Cicero is already incredulous because they have dethroned virtue as the sole thing good in itself. Indeed, this is why he repeatedly makes the same argument against the Epicurean conception of virtue in Book II: "[i]t is impossible... to defend or uphold virtue if everything is to be regulated by pleasure". It simply seems that, given Cicero's virtue-based worldview, he and the Epicureans will always talk past each other in any discussion of virtue. I believe it will therefore be more productive at this point to analyze Epicurus' words and

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166 Hursthouse, 12
167 Thus, "[Epicurean] eudaimonism is a kind of consequentialism" (Brown, "Contemplative", 88). It incorporates the virtue-based aspects of eudaimonia only because they serve to bring us better, more complete pleasures.
168 After all, Epicurean psychology, and in turn its ethics, posit that pleasure and pain motivate all action (O'Keefe, "Action", 149).
169 As mentioned in Section I, although Cicero calls himself an Academic Skeptic, he does not remain neutral at all about the issues discussed in De Finibus. Although we may not be able to exactly pin him down as a 'follower' of a given philosophy, it should at least be clear at this point that Cicero has quite a personal stake in rejecting Epicureanism and favoring a more conventional version of eudaimonism.
170 They threw out the possibility of their being genuinely virtuous when Epicurus claimed that morality reduces to pleasure and pain.
171 Cicero was not a Pyrrhonian Skeptic, but an Academic Skeptic. Because of this, he "...does not pretend to be neutral..." (De Finibus, xv) in presenting ethical theories in De Finibus, and he follows the Academic (and anti- Pyrrhonian) model of "[going] with the most convincing option available so far" (De Finibus, xv). Additionally, due to his taking for granted of (the Academic) Carneades' divisions of philosophy, he is all the more influenced to look askance at a philosophy that would call something other than virtue the good (De Finibus, xxvii), so clearly, 'the most convincing option so far' for him would never be Epicureanism.
our own intuitions -- not the text of *De Finibus* -- in order to show that Epicureanism places enough importance on virtue for a happy Epicurean to behave virtuously.\footnote{I cannot claim that a happy Epicurean would ever actually \textit{be} virtuous; the very definition of virtue is inhospitable to the idea that it can be for the sake of something other than virtue. However, even if the Epicurean sage only ever \textit{behaves} as the virtuous do, I assert that this will satisfy Cicero's worry that Epicureanism permits and maybe even \textit{requires} us to be vicious. Although merely \textit{acting} like a virtuous person leaves us far afield from true virtue, it is still the case that we will abstain from doing all the evil things Cicero worries the Epicureans will do, like committing adultery, stealing, lying, and so on.}

Let us return to the very Epicurean claim that we do not value pain and hard work in themselves, but instead for the rewards of pleasure they can give us.\footnote{*De Finibus*, I.49} Suppose a skeptical non-Epicurean brings up the example of fighting and dying for one's country in a war.\footnote{And for the sake of argument, let us assume it is a just and absolutely necessary war -- fighting in it would serve to stop something truly evil, like a genocide.} Surely, he would say, this constitutes an example in which we intuitively know that someone is doing a deeply virtuous and morally correct thing which also comes at the price of intense physical pain and harm. Thus, he might argue that while the Epicureans \textit{claim} to prize virtue, they would advocate acting viciously (i.e., fleeing the war) in this real-world scenario. Interestingly, an Epicurean would agree with the skeptic on most of these points: such an act is morally good, deeply virtuous, and also physically painful -- yet he could still show that such a course of action is constitutive of Epicurean happiness.

The Epicureans can maintain that it is virtuous and constitutive of happiness to fight and die in a war mostly because they have such a flexible and subtle conception of pleasure.\footnote{Striker notes that the statement, 'pleasure is the good' is "notoriously open to different interpretations" (Striker, 3). Thus, whereas the Cyrenaic school's interpretation of 'pleasure is the good' takes the most immediate, least subtle pleasures to be best, Epicurus takes 'pleasure is the good' in a very ascetic and desire-limiting direction (Warren, "Introduction", 5). We must not make the mistaken assumption that just because Epicureanism claims that pleasure is the good, it must also mean that the proper kinds of pleasures are simple and bodily. The same goes for its conception of pain; we cannot assume that 'pain is evil' necessarily refers to bodily pains.} Firstly, being atomists, they declare that pleasures of the mind are ultimately

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\textit{\footnotesize 173} I cannot claim that a happy Epicurean would ever actually \textit{be} virtuous; the very definition of virtue is inhospitable to the idea that it can be for the sake of something other than virtue. However, even if the Epicurean sage only ever \textit{behaves} as the virtuous do, I assert that this will satisfy Cicero's worry that Epicureanism permits and maybe even \textit{requires} us to be vicious. Although merely \textit{acting} like a virtuous person leaves us far afield from true virtue, it is still the case that we will abstain from doing all the evil things Cicero worries the Epicureans will do, like committing adultery, stealing, lying, and so on.\footnote{*De Finibus*, I.49} \textit{\footnotesize 174} And for the sake of argument, let us assume it is a just and absolutely necessary war -- fighting in it would serve to stop something truly evil, like a genocide.\footnote{Striker notes that the statement, 'pleasure is the good' is "notoriously open to different interpretations" (Striker, 3). Thus, whereas the Cyrenaic school's interpretation of 'pleasure is the good' takes the most immediate, least subtle pleasures to be best, Epicurus takes 'pleasure is the good' in a very ascetic and desire-limiting direction (Warren, "Introduction", 5). We must not make the mistaken assumption that just because Epicureanism claims that pleasure is the good, it must also mean that the proper kinds of pleasures are simple and bodily. The same goes for its conception of pain; we cannot assume that 'pain is evil' necessarily refers to bodily pains.}
reducible to pleasures of the body. Yet they also commit themselves to the claim that pleasures of the mind are better than those of the body, and that it is possible for the wise man to increase his current pleasure simply by remembering past ones. So it would be quite reasonable to call Epicurus' ethical system one of 'mind over matter' -- indeed, this is why it claims that the wise Epicurean will remain happy even if tortured.

With regards to fighting and dying in war, then, Epicureanism can consistently claim that such actions are good on purely hedonistic terms. For if we consider the motivations of someone who would selflessly enlist, we notice that there is a desire to be brave, honorable, and patriotic. Moreover, not enlisting and viciously dodging the draft would involve painful feelings of guilt and shame. The Epicureans are perfectly entitled to the claim that it would be better to live for a shorter time with a sense of honor and bravery than to live longer with a deep sense of shame and worry, and so they could consistently advocate virtuously enlisting. Additionally, due to the Epicurean account of courage, our Epicurean soldier could strengthen his mind against the fear of death and

177 De Finibus, I.55. After all, the Epicureans believe the mind is simply another internal organ in the body (Gill, 131). It is completely physical.
178 De Finibus, I.56. The heightened importance of mental pleasures and pains as opposed to bodily ones originates with Epicurus himself. After all, so much of his Letter to Menoeceus is spent articulating ways in which we can overcome various painful patterns of thought, from fear of the gods (Diogenes Laertius, 10.122), to fear of death (Diogenes Laertius, 10.125), to superstitious belief in luck and fate (Diogenes Laertius, 10.134-5). Epicurus' ethics thus seem to start from the assumption that much of what keeps us from being happy is our ideas and our attitudes, not necessarily our physical surroundings.
179 De Finibus, I.62; Brochard, 72; Brown, "Politics", 185
180 As Annas notes, Epicureanism employs a "radical internalization of happiness" (Annas, 349) in order for external circumstances to have little effect on one's happiness.
181 Diogenes Laertius, 10.118. "When on the rack, however, [an Epicurean] will give vent to cries and groans" (Diogenes Laertius, 10.118). This further strengthens the idea that an Epicurean is especially good at 'radically internalizing' happiness, because Diogenes indicates that he will certainly be in physical pain -- due to his cries and groans -- yet his happiness can still remain intact.
182 Even if we suppose this person is selfish and simply chooses not to feel ashamed of himself, the censure from friends, family, and society would certainly go a long way in making his life away from the war unpleasant.
183 In Epicureanism, living well for a short time is better than living poorly for a longer time: "the wise man neither rejects life nor fears death... [He] savours not the longest time but the most pleasant" (Diogenes Laertius, 10.126). It is also quite telling that Epicurus himself served a mandatory two years in the Athenian military as a young man (Clay, 11).
bodily harm, thereby further reducing the amount of distress dying in war causes him. Thus, even in the case of selflessly (and painfully) dying in war, Epicurean ethics can justify virtuous actions purely on the basis of pleasure and pain.\textsuperscript{184}

If we return to the question of whether Epicureanism provides a plausible defense of virtue, it seems a conventional eudaimonist will always think not. As we saw, Epicureanism provides extensive justifications of conventional Greek virtues on hedonist grounds, but such an endeavor fails \textit{a priori} for the eudaimonists because Epicureanism is even \textit{proposing} that virtue could be for the sake of something else. Epicureanism is therefore doomed to never satisfy such detractors. Their eudaimonism is simply too rigid to accommodate in the slightest Epicurus' efforts to involve virtue in his hedonistic conception of happiness.\textsuperscript{185} However, if we are not strict eudaimonists and we do not cringe at the very thought of virtue being for the sake of something else, then the above arguments should convince us that Epicureanism defends its conception of virtue admirably: the Epicurean sage believes that pleasure is the good, and also acts as virtuously as any other eudaimonist.\textsuperscript{186}

\textsuperscript{184} Although virtue may be physically painful sometimes, one can always congratulate oneself afterwards with a feeling of 'this was a job well done'. Indeed, the very essence of virtue is to do one's job or duties well, and so even a non-hedonist would agree that the virtuous person will take mental satisfaction from his being virtuous instead of vicious. Epicurus merely focuses on this subtle mental satisfaction and claims that it is the true purpose of virtue, not the virtue itself.

\textsuperscript{185} Indeed, as Annas notes, in Epicureanism, "virtue alone is inseparable from pleasure, while other things, for example food, are separable" (Annas, 340). So Epicurus might not have reserved the \textit{highest} place in his ethics for virtue, but it is clearly still a crucially important component of our happiness. Moreover, Epicurus' claim of the 'inseparability' of the two suggests that virtue is a close second to pleasure. Epicurus' ethics thus \textit{barely} demote virtue in comparison to other eudaimonist theories, but even this minor tweaking of the relationship between virtue and pleasure is too much for rigid eudaimonists like Cicero. Epicurus has done all he can to meet their demands with regard to virtue, and they are still unable to accommodate his efforts. It seems the only thing that Epicurus could do to satisfy them would be to simply give up hedonism and parrot the more conventional eudaimonist philosophies around him.

\textsuperscript{186} I would go too far in claiming that an Epicurean would act \textit{exactly} the same ways as any other eudaimonist, but I hope I have at least shown that Epicureanism really does encourage its followers to value and practice virtue. So Cicero's worry that the Epicureans \textit{claim} to love virtue, but secretly laugh those of us who take them seriously (\textit{De Finibus}, II.76), is an exaggeration.
Moreover, such a claim is crucial for Epicureanism's broader mission of making eudaimonia significantly easier to attain. In Section II.a we saw that there is much pleasure to be found in living simply and appreciating what we already have, but such pleasure and satisfaction will count for little if it is the kind typically experienced by 'slow and lazy sheep'. Virtue must also figure into the Epicurean theory of happiness so that the pleasures we feel will be fully human and a reward for our living up to our true potential. Yet, as I have shown, Epicureanism confronts this issue head-on; the Epicurean sage's happiness is anything but base or animalistic.
III.a Epicureanism Provides the Best Path to Happiness

So far we have seen that the peculiarity\textsuperscript{187} of Epicureanism causes Cicero's *De Finibus* to present it as by far the weakest option of the three ethical theories it engages with. However, we also saw in Section I that Cicero severely misrepresents Epicureanism in the text, and in Section II that Epicureanism is well equipped to respond to principled objections to its ethical theory.

In this final section I will take the case for Epicureanism one step further: not only should we doubt that Epicureanism is deeply implausible, but there are actually good reasons to believe that it is the best ethical theory discussed in *De Finibus*. As mentioned in the introduction, Epicureanism stands out amongst all other Ancient Greek philosophies by claiming that \textit{eudaimonia} is relatively easy to achieve and maintain. Therefore, if Epicureanism can provide good reasons for the belief that happiness comes easily, and the belief that such happiness will involve our virtuous flourishing, then it simply provides us with a more efficient path to the same \textit{eudaimonia} all other Greek philosophies seek. According to other philosophies, it is entirely possible that we will spend a lifetime cultivating \textit{eudaimonia} and yet still fail to attain it; with Epicureanism, all of us have good chances of becoming \textit{eudaimon}.

Most of Epicurus' ability to claim that happiness is easily attainable comes from a reformative approach to ethics.\textsuperscript{188} To him, the average person struggles to be happy

\textsuperscript{187} Epicureanism is peculiar in that it straddles the two worlds of hedonism and eudaimonism. Other more 'basic' hedonists like the Cyrenaics simply denied that \textit{eudaimonia} was important, while the conventional eudaimonists (e.g., the Stoics) denied that pleasure had a particularly high priority within happiness. This places Epicureanism in the odd position of having to justify its hedonist claims in light of other hedonist philosophies, while also having to justify its eudaimonism against other eudaimonists' criticisms. Thus conventional eudaimonists are tempted to view it as a 'cheap' form of eudaimonism, while conventional hedonists want to consider it a 'cheap' form of hedonism.

\textsuperscript{188} DeWitt notes that "[h]istorians [judge Epicurus] only as a philosopher, but to be rightly understood he must be recognized also as a moral reformer" (DeWitt, 8). Moreover, much of the reforms Epicurus
simply because she searches for happiness in the wrong places -- this is why Epicurus is so concerned with 'false opinions' that keep us from happiness. For example, much of his ethical advice in his *Letter to Menoeceus* takes the form of outlining specific beliefs we should and should not hold, the point being that simply eliminating false opinions would do much for our happiness. Moreover, as a reformer, Epicurus believed such foolish approaches to happiness mostly came from the dominant philosophical traditions of his day. Thus, Platonism and skepticism were his chief targets.\(^\text{189}\) Accordingly, Epicurus' ethics want us to avoid the skeptical claim that no one path to happiness is better than any other, yet also avoid the lofty Platonic conceptions of wisdom, happiness, and virtue, whereby not even Socrates is wise, and instead strive for a more practical, realistic paradigm by which we can *all* call ourselves happy and wise.\(^\text{190}\)

Yet why believe that it is easy to become happy at all? As we saw in Section II.a, there is the point that "everything natural is easy to obtain and whatever is groundless is hard to obtain."\(^\text{191}\) So unless we live in dire, tragic circumstances, all of us can easily maintain a simple way of life. Such a way of life happens to also provide the 'highest pleasures' because Epicureanism points out that it only matters *that* our desires get satisfied and not *how*. Our experiencing pleasure in this way in turn motivates the claim that pleasure occurs when the body returns to an optimally-balanced state. A simple life is therefore best at maintaining this optimal state because it requires us to fulfill only

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\(^{\text{189}}\) DeWitt, 8  
\(^{\text{190}}\) "Platonism... was the creed of highbrows" (DeWitt, 314), whereas Epicurus' philosophy was designed to spread beyond the intellectual and political elite of Athens (DeWitt, 10). As a result, Epicurus had to offer a more practical, "everyman's" ethics which would have appeal over and above Platonism's lofty contemplation of virtue and truth. Accordingly, Epicurean texts were not intended solely for practicing Epicureans, but were designed to help anyone who could read them become happier (Tsouna, 254).  
\(^{\text{191}}\) Diogenes Laertius, 10.130
natural, necessary desires. In fact, it is so good at maintaining this state that our being satisfied becomes near-continuous: we rarely feel the pain of being in need and we never feel the pain of worrying whether what we need will be easy to come by.

However, our belief in the simple life's goodness is also key. We also saw in Section II.a that Epicureanism has to build into its conception of moral development our accustoming ourselves to a simple way of life. So it is a given that someone who has not undergone Epicurean training will not experience happiness as easily or continuously as Epicurus envisions; she may still be subdued by the belief that luxury is required in a good life, or that acting viciously can bring oneself extra advantages.

Despite this, if our intuitions still disagree with Epicurus that the simple life is best at making us happy, then we are likely influenced by false opinions which keep us from happiness. Although this may sound like begging the question, it is actually true that much of what Epicurus labels as 'false opinions' sound like commonsensical things to avoid. Epicurus variously claimed that it is foolish to be superstitious, to value material wealth, to focus on 'what could have been', to envy others, to want to live

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192 Epicurus tells us that there are three kinds of desire: natural and necessary, natural and unnecessary, and unnatural and unnecessary (Principle Doctrine XXIX). A desire is natural to the extent that we have no choice about having it, and it is necessary to the extent that we will die if we do not satisfy it. Thus, hunger is a natural and necessary desire, sexual attraction is a natural and unnecessary desire, and the desire for riches or fame is an unnatural and unnecessary desire. Importantly, Epicurus thinks the natural and necessary desires are in fact exceptionally easy to satisfy, since "everything natural is easy to obtain" (Diogenes Laertius, 10.130).

193 Unfortunately, answers like this to concerns about Epicureanism being unintuitive are built into any discussion of its ethics. As we have seen, Epicurus was a moral reformer who wanted to fix what he considered a sick society. Because of this, Annas points out that he always "has an account ready of how and why our intuitions... are untrustworthy" (Annas, 344) -- he will always point to false beliefs and poor moral development if we consider his views unintuitive. However, many other philosophies do the exact same thing: if I told a Stoic that virtue seems to be something intuitively not worth striving for, he would simply reply that I hold false beliefs about virtue and will not be able to change my mind unless I become more of a Stoic. So the unintuitive aspects of almost any philosophy are often explained by pointing to poor moral development and false beliefs on the detractor's part.

194 Diogenes Laertius, 10.134
195 Vatican Collection, #25
196 Vatican Collection, #14
forever,\textsuperscript{198} and so forth. These are beliefs that even today we agree are foolish, and so by telling us not to harbor 'false opinions' about happiness, Epicurus is merely requiring that we display common sense if we are to intuitively understand his ethics. Thus, I ask, does common sense not also agree with Epicurus that our living simply and being satisfied with what we have is best? That it makes us stable and happy?

Moreover, as De Witt argues, "[t]he fact that the name of pleasure [is] not customarily applied to [painless states]... [does] not alter the fact that [it should]... nor that human beings would be happier [thereby]."\textsuperscript{199} So it would be a mistake to reject Epicureanism purely on the basis of its being most plausible to committed Epicureans. After all, I have shown (in Section II.a) that it really is possible to experience pleasures where there once were none, and that (in the above paragraph) the kinds of beliefs Epicurus wants us to eliminate are indeed quite foolish. This should give us good reason to believe that Epicureanism really does stand to make happier anyone who tries it.

\textbf{III.b Epicurean Happiness is Fully Authentic}

There is still the concern, however, that if Epicurean happiness is easy to attain, it must be 'cheapened' or compromised in its authenticity. After all, since the Epicureans are so focused on tranquility and desire satisfaction, is not also true that the happiness they envision will be unworthy of us, reducing us to 'slow and lazy sheep'? The Epicureans argue that this is not the case. Epicurean happiness is in fact complete because it acknowledges and satisfies all the requirements of happiness -- both in the eudaimonist sense and in the modern sense.

\textsuperscript{197} \textit{Vatican Collection}, #53  
\textsuperscript{198} Diogenes Laertius, 10.124  
\textsuperscript{199} DeWitt, 242
As shown in Section II.b, to satisfy the eudaimonists, Epicurus provides a plausible defense of virtue in light of hedonism. Those like Cicero, who pass up no opportunity to decry the immorality, selfishness, and excess of the Epicureans are, as we saw, exaggerating an issue that Epicurus himself recognizes and makes every effort to accommodate. Examples like the virtuous Epicurean going to war should convince us that Epicureanism sufficiently accounts for the eudaimonist requirement that happiness involve virtue; an Epicurean will act with prudence, honesty, justice, and so forth to the same extent as an adherent of any other philosophy.

Suppose then that it is objected that the Epicurean final end is far too passive. As Annas puts it, we might wonder whether "Epicurean happiness is bought at the price of adjusting the agent too thoroughly to the world, that it is too passive a conception of human life". However, we clearly need not worry about this because, as Annas herself later admits, "the natural state for humans is not one of inertness, but of varied activity. We achieve our final end... by doing whatever we are doing in a way which is not hindered or made miserable by pains". So to worry that Epicurean happiness is too

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200 After all, the Letter to Menoeceus is short and touches on relatively few topics, but Epicurus still saw fit to include his defense of virtue in light of hedonism (Diogenes Laertius, 10.132). We may thus disagree with Epicurus that virtue is ultimately a thing we pursue for the sake of pleasure, but it is unfair to accuse Epicurus of spreading a philosophy which encourages us to be selfish, vicious, and immoral. He clearly was just as appalled by vicious and immoral people as any other philosopher -- why else would he claim that virtue is necessary for us to live well?

201 Note also that it is not only hypothetical Epicureans which go to war. We also saw that Torquatus and Epicurus both served in the military when called upon (Armstrong, 111; Clay, 11).

202 As far as Cicero is concerned, Epicurus conceives of our final end such that we become "slow and lazy sheep, fit for grazing and the pleasures of procreation" (De Finibus, II.40), whereas virtue-based conceptions of our final end actually treat us like humans. However, much of this concern was already dealt with by the Epicurean defense of virtue in Section IIb. For given that a good Epicurean will exhibit wisdom, courage, prudence, and the like, her life will not amount to mere wallowing in pleasure. She will still act with regard to virtue in mostly the same ways as any other eudaimonist, thereby accomplishing impressive things, growing intellectually, flourishing, and so on.

203 Annas, 198

204 Annas, 337
passive is to forget the important stipulation that, while painlessness is the upper limit of pleasure, pleasures still can (and will) vary past that point.\textsuperscript{205}

The plausibility of this idea is further evidenced by the claim that we feel the best pleasures when our bodies are in an optimally-functioning state\textsuperscript{206}, and as just indicated, such a state is one of 'varied activity'. So we do not cease to act when we have achieved Epicurean happiness; instead all of our actions and endeavors take on an unbridled vigor and clarity because we are in the best mental and physical state we can be in. Such happiness therefore equips us to do whatever we had wanted to do anyway (provided it was not overtly evil or corrupting), and also enjoy it as much as possible along the way. As an example, let us imagine an Epicurean novelist. If she is unhappy in the Epicurean sense, she will be stressed out, distracted from her work, and altogether unable to function properly. If happy in the Epicurean sense, she will be calm, focused, and optimally situated to get good work done. Moreover, she will not simply cease caring about writing once she is happy, since her desire to write is natural and unnecessary.\textsuperscript{207}

So her happiness merely situates her better to do what she had wanted to do all along. And while it is true that some great novels have been written by deeply disturbed writers in bad circumstances, it would be absurd for a novelist to purposefully make her life bad.

\textsuperscript{205} Diogenes Laertius, Maxim XVIII. After all, Epicureanism permits us to do just about anything as long as such actions do not disturb or pain us significantly (Brown, "Contemplative", 84). So the only actions which are prohibited by Epicureanism are ones we probably would not want to do anyway because they are clearly quite bad for us -- like becoming an alcoholic or a criminal. Conversely, much of what we already enjoy -- hiking, photography, mystery novels, cooking, or whatever else -- gets approval from Epicureanism since we likely chose those things as hobbies in the first place because they provided us with pleasure and tranquility.

\textsuperscript{206} Nikolsky, 445

\textsuperscript{207} The natural and unnecessary constitutes a category of indifference for Epicurean ethics. Something's being unnecessary means we can live without it, yet something's being natural means indulging in it will not corrupt or harm us. Thus, we can enjoy all natural and unnecessary things as much as we like, provided we do not make the mistake of fooling ourselves into thinking they are necessary. So for a novelist, writing novels would surely be natural and unnecessary: it provides a meaningful, engaging outlet of activity which does not corrupt or harm. Its indifference within Epicurean ethics does not necessarily demote its worth; it simply shows that our Epicurean novelist should be able to live without writing if she had to.
in order to make her writing better. All of us rightly intuit that being healthier, calmer, and less distracted will make us better at anything we put our minds to, and so Epicurean happiness is far from passive. Since it permits us to do anything that is not self-destructive or corrupting, it will situate us optimally to live our lives well, whatever specific activities that may entail.

Indeed, this variety of options available to the happy Epicurean explains why some Epicureans took up a philosophical life and lived in Epicurean Gardens, while others led professional lives in mainstream society, and yet others became politicians and military officers.\(^208\) Although different, these lives can in fact all be considered happy in the Epicurean sense as long as the people that led them had the right kinds of desires and satisfied them in the right ways. Therefore, far from being passive, the Epicurean final end leaves open a wide range of activity.

Such a wide range of activity is indeed important, because this also makes the Epicurean conception of happiness much more in line with our modern conception of happiness than any other Greek philosophy. For instance, in Book II of De Finibus, Cicero claims that, "[i]t is not frolicking and merrymaking that makes people happy... People are happy often even when sad, if they are steadfast and true".\(^209\) Although a conventional eudaimonist would readily agree with this claim, our modern intuitions show us to be much more in agreement with Epicurus.\(^210\) I submit that today we intuit that happiness does involve merrymaking and frolicking, and such a whimsical but

\(^208\) Annas, 338
\(^209\) De Finibus, II.65
\(^210\) Epicurus would probably have been more open to the idea than we are that one can be happy even while sad, if by 'sad' we mean experiencing physical pain -- indeed, this is what the example of the Epicurean on the rack is meant to show. However, he would certainly agree with our modern intuitions about happiness that it does involve frolicking and merrymaking. He is, after all, quite concerned with ensuring that we enjoy life's present delights (Vatican Collection, #14).
important aspect of happiness is easily furnished by the Epicurean stipulation that we can always vary pleasures as we see fit just so long as we do not indulge in unnatural, unnecessary desires. Stricter eudaimonist philosophies, on the other hand, would permit such behavior *only* if it were constitutive of virtue; fun or enjoyment are simply unimportant or even harmful to our overall happiness on these views. Admittedly, today we do not believe that happiness *solely* consists of such passing amusements, but clearly we also intuit -- in agreement with Epicurus -- that happiness should not be austere, serious, and possibly even painful.\(^ {211}\)

In that sense, Epicurus' ethical system has better insight into happiness than other eudaimonist systems because it recognizes that, not only does it matter that one act in certain ways to be happy, but one must also *feel* good along the way. If I told a conventional eudaemonist that my virtuous life was stressing me out and that I did not much enjoy it, he would not worry that I am becoming unhappy -- under his theory, my present enjoyment of life simply is not constitutive of my happiness.\(^ {212}\) However, if I told an Epicurean the same thing, he would at least see my stress as a possible detriment to my happiness\(^ {213}\) and would consider ways that I could modify my beliefs and desires to get more enjoyment from my life. Epicurus thus recognizes that happiness must draw us

\(^{211}\) Although eudaimonist conceptions of happiness may not have been constructed from the same intuitions we hold today about what it is to be 'happy' (hence one can be eudaimon even when sad), I argue that a theory of happiness which requires that happiness be fun and pleasant is much more realistic and true to our experience. So while Epicureanism in this aspect departs from rigid eudaimonism, this is a good thing because it shows itself to satisfy more of our modern intuitions about happiness. Epicurus deliberately rebelled against certain aspects of Ancient Greek culture, and so his intuitions about happiness are much more in line with our modern intuitions; he reads very much like a person from the 21st century sent back in time to Ancient Greece.

\(^{212}\) The conventional eudaimonist really must deny that one's enjoyment of life matters for one's happiness because strict eudaimonism views the desire to feel good over and above being virtuous as a weakness and a vice. So it is already a mistake within conventional eudaimonism to insist that happiness involve enjoyment, because such an attitude presupposes vice.

\(^{213}\) As we saw in Section IIB, Epicurus believes that mental worries and false beliefs are much more detrimental to our happiness than what happens in the physical world around us.
in at every turn by making our lives feel much better, and I argue that this is something which we require of happiness today.

Thus, Epicureanism is the best ethical theory mentioned in *De Finibus*, and indeed the best ethical theory for us today, because it has the advantages of both eudaimonism and hedonism without the disadvantages. Its eudaimonist streaks ensure that our happiness will be complete and fulfilling (since the Epicurean sage will exhibit the virtues), yet it also importantly avoids the austere, self-sacrificing aspect of eudaimonism whereby our current enjoyment of life is not factored into whether we are happy. On the other hand, its hedonist streaks provide us with a happiness that is bold, direct, and pleasant, but its insistence on painlessness as the highest good ensures that we will pursue pleasure only in ways that make us healthy, temperate, and tranquil. So by virtue of its hedonism, Epicureanism makes happiness easy to achieve and maintain, and by virtue of its eudaimonism, the happiness it envisions is the same highest good all eudaimonist philosophies seek. Therefore, Epicurus' philosophy simply forges the most efficient, plausible path to *eudaimonia*, and anyone who wants good chances of becoming *eudaimon* should take it.
Conclusion

Because most of its primary texts have been lost, Epicureanism has become an obscure philosophy. Worse, since much of our knowledge of it comes from the testimony of non-Epicureans with motives other than preserving the school's doctrines, we get different pictures of it depending on which source we turn to. Hence, if we read Epicurus' *Letter to Menoeceus* we see a philosophy which is clever, unique, and engaging, and if we read Cicero's *De Finibus* we see a botched, depraved set of teachings hardly worthy of being called 'a philosophy'.

Yet upon closer inspection we also find that *De Finibus* systematically misrepresents Epicureanism -- not only in the arguments it attributes to Epicureans, but even in the biographies of its interlocutors and in the philosophical traditions which it lays claim to. We therefore cannot accept Cicero's implication that Epicureanism is a deeply misguided philosophy.

Moreover, when we consider the legitimate philosophical arguments Cicero makes against the school, there are good responses to be had from the Epicureans. Hence, Epicureanism can defend its account of pleasure, plausibly claiming that pleasure is the good *and* that the highest good is painlessness. It can also justify its account of virtue, claiming that goodness and badness are ultimately mere matters of pleasures and pains *and* that virtue is necessary for a happy, good life. This boosts the overall plausibility of Epicureanism, giving us good reason to think that the picture the *Letter to Menoeceus* paints of it is accurate, and that *De Finibus*' picture is almost completely fabricated.

Finally, over and above being much more plausible and insightful than *De Finibus* gives it credit for, we see that Epicureanism is in fact the best theory mentioned
in that text, and the best ethical theory available to us today, for it successfully combines the divergent ethical approaches of hedonism and eudaimonism. Hence, our happiness is easy to achieve (since pleasures are easy to achieve), yet such happiness is meaningful and causes our flourishing (since the Epicurean sage acts in accordance with the virtues). This gives us a much better, more efficient path to eudaimonia, and so Epicureanism really does hold a key to happiness which no other philosophy provides.

Indeed, Epicureanism very much provides a 'key' to our happiness, since it unlocks a potential in us that was always there. For many of us assume that we will have to work hard towards happiness, and only then will we reap the rewards it brings, but this is looking at the issue backwards. Epicurus wisely points out that we should reap the rewards of happiness first and foremost (hence he asks us to cultivate a tranquil state of mind and believe that little will suffice even if we are far from being an Epicurean sage), and then we can get hard work done. After all, our 'true potential' is not some lofty state we may find ourselves in decades from now, but a latent vigor and confidence so many of us are totally unaware of. If we simply cultivated an Epicurean mindset and lifestyle, we would find that such vigor would easily come to us, which would in turn make any hard work we do much more enjoyable, and any misfortunes we face much more tolerable. So rather than expecting our work and strivings to bring us some exceptional state of being at a later time, we should instead follow Epicurus' path and cultivate an exceptional state right now so that our work and strivings become effortless. If we all did this, we would find that Epicureanism does for our happiness what no other philosophy can: it brings it much closer to our grasp without compromising any of its benefits.
Bibliography


