

**PHILOSOPHY OF CONSOLATION:
THE EPICUREAN *TETRAPHARMAKOS***

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

ABSTRACT

Epicureanism, one of several major Hellenistic philosophical schools, complemented its materialist, non-teleological ontology with a set of spiritual exercises (*askesis*) intended to prepare its disciples to live a happy life within a clearly defined moral context. The emblem of Epicurean ethics was the *tetrapharmakos*, or fourfold remedy, consisting in the dictum: Nothing to fear in god; Nothing to feel in death; Good is easy to attain; Evil is easy to endure. A question that arises concerns how the *tetrapharmakos*, in conjunction with the wide variety of spiritual exercises which flowed from it, was capable of offering to Epicurean disciples *consolatio* in the face of life's uncertainties and guiding them to the supreme pleasure of the gods, tranquillity (*ataraxia*), which, together with absence of bodily pain (*aponia*), brings to man the flourishing life (*eudaimonia*). Yet, *a fortiori*, how is it possible, in the absence of belief in divine providence, to retain a sense of equanimity throughout a finite life in an often harsh world? How can one avoid capitulating to despair and anxiety? Such questions are relevant to the ancient Epicureans, and are central to this thesis.

Epicurean materialism is presupposed throughout the thesis, and the arguments and exercises which emerged from the Epicurean materialist ontology are examined critically in order to assess the coherence and effectiveness of the Epicurean mode of living. An examination of the role of Epicurean spiritual exercises is therefore undertaken, in order to reveal the Epicureans' relationship with the natural and social worlds, as well as with each other and with the gods, and thus to explain how these exercises were capable of providing consolation, and further, to consider whether such exercises, in some form or other, are still able to do so in the twenty-first century.

The ancient conception of philosophy as a *way of life* is discussed fully, most particularly the specific nature of Epicurean philosophy in this respect. The four strands or remedies of the *tetrapharmakos* are then examined, in order, at length. The nature of Epicurean gods and their relation to man are given detailed consideration, as are the arguments and exercises used by Epicureans to dispel fear of the gods. A similar treatment is accorded the Epicurean view of death as a natural dissolution of man *qua* material being, and to the arguments and exercises aimed at overcoming fear of death, the second of the two great causes of human anxiety. Epicurean hedonism, within which pleasure assumes the role of man's goal, or *telos*, is examined thoroughly, as are major issues of contention -- in particular, the Epicurean bifurcation of the *telos* into *katastematic* pleasure and *kinetic* pleasure, and the relation between these two kinds of pleasure. A concluding chapter summarises the findings of the thesis and suggests the relevance of Epicureanism and its associated spiritual exercises for citizens of the twenty-first century.

OPSOMMING

Die Epikurisme, een van verskeie belangrike Hellenistiese filosofiese skole, het sy materialistiese, nie-teleologiese ontologie aangevul deur 'n versameling geestelike oefeninge (*askesis*) wat ten doel gehad het om dissipels voor te berei om 'n gelukkige lewe binne 'n duidelik gedefinieerde morele konteks te lei. Die embleem van die Epikuriese etiek was die *tetrafarmakos*, of viervoudige geneesmiddel, wat bestaan het uit die *dictum*: Om niks te vrees oor god nie; Om niks te voel oor die dood nie; Die goeie is maklik om te verkry; Die kwaad is maklik om te verduur. Die vraag ontstaan hoe die *tetrafarmakos*, tesame met die wye verskeidenheid geestelike oefeninge wat daaruit voortspruit, in staat was om aan die Epikuriese dissipels *consolatio* ten aanskoue van die onsekerhede van die lewe te bied en om hulle tot die hoogste genot van die gode, gemoedsrus (*ataraxia*), te voer, wat, gepaardgaande met die afwesigheid van fisiese pyn (*aporia*), die mens by 'n gelukkige lewe (*eudaimonia*) uitbring. Hoe is dit egter *a fortiori* moontlik om in die afwesigheid van 'n geloof in 'n goddelike voorsienigheid 'n gevoel van gelykmatigheid reg deur 'n eindige lewe in 'n dikwels harde wêreld te behou?

Die Epikuriese materialisme word deurlopend in die tesis voorveronderstel, en die argumente en oefeninge wat uit die Epikuriese materialistiese ontologie na vore kom, word krities ondersoek ten einde die samehang en doeltreffendheid van die Epikuriese leefwyse te evalueer. Die rol van die Epikuriese geestelike oefeninge word dus ondersoek om die Epikureërs se verhouding met die natuurlike en die sosiale wêreld, sowel as met mekaar en met die gode, na vore te bring, om sodoende te verduidelik hoe hierdie oefeninge in staat was om vertroosting te bied, en om voorts te kyk of sulke oefeninge in die een of ander formaat nog steeds in staat is om dit in die een-en-twintigste eeu te doen.

Die antieke siening van die filosofie as 'n *leefwyse* word ten volle bespreek, veral die eie-aard van die Epikuriese filosofie in hierdie opsig. Die vier aspekte of geneesmiddels van die *tetrafarmakos* word agtereenvolgens uitvoerig bespreek. Die aard van die Epikuriese gode en hulle verhouding tot die mens word in besonderhede ondersoek, asook die argumente en oefeninge wat die Epikureërs gebruik het om vrees vir die gode die nek in te slaan. Die Epikuriese siening van die dood as 'n natuurlike ontbinding van die mens *qua* materiële wese word op soortgelyke wyse behandel, soos ook die argumente en oefeninge wat daarop gerig is om die vrees vir die dood, die tweede van die twee groot oorsake van die mens se angs, te oorkom. Epirurese hedonisme, waarin genot die mens se lewensdoel of *telos* word, word grondig ondersoek, sowel as belangrike verskilpunte – in besonder die Epikuriese tweedeling van die *telos* in *katastematice* en *kinetiese* genot, en die verband tussen hierdie twee vorme van genot. Die slohoofstuk vat die bevindinge van die tesis saam en suggereer dat die Epikurisme en die geestelike oefeninge wat daarmee gepaard gaan, nog steeds relevant is vir mense van die een-en-twintigste eeu.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- IG Inwood, B. and Gerson, L. P. 1998. *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- KRS Kirk, G. S., Raven, J. E., and Schofield, M. 1983. *The Presocratic Philosophers*. Second Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- LS Long, A. A. and Sedley, D. N. (eds.). 1987. *The Hellenistic Philosophers*. Vol. 1: *Translations of the Principal Sources, with Philosophical Commentary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Strange indeed are those Epicureans, who lead a frugal life, practicing a total equality between the men and women inside their philosophical circle -- and even between married women and courtesans....Strange indeed all those philosophers whose behavior, without being inspired by religion, nonetheless completely breaks with the customs and habits of most mortals.
(Hadot 1995:57)

The title of the present thesis, "Philosophy of Consolation", can be perceived as an obvious reversal of Boethius' "Consolation of Philosophy". The intent here is to particularize the general idea that philosophy is capable of offering consolation -- as, indeed, it did to Boethius in his cell¹ -- by attempting to show how a specific Hellenistic philosophy, Epicureanism, complemented its materialist, non-teleological ontology with a set of spiritual exercises intended to prepare its disciples to live a happy life within a clearly defined moral context.

1.1 Rationale

In modern times philosophers and writers have questioned the very fact of human existence. Schopenhauer described life as "an episode unprofitably disturbing the blessed calm of nothingness" (*Essays and Aphorisms*; trans. Hollingdale 1970:47); for Camus, the fundamental philosophical question is suicide; one may also recall Tolstoy's characterisation of life as a "stupid fraud", or Clarence Darrow's as an "awful joke". The absence of a god who has a purpose for man is evidently sufficient to cause a philosophical and psychological crisis.

It was a perceived overwhelming unhappiness of the world that inspired Schopenhauer's pessimistic tone. One could scarcely imagine Epicurus expressing such sentiments. Yet the Epicureans, who saw the universe as matter and void -- even the human mind, soul, and imagination -- and the gods as material beings, blissfully indifferent to humanity and, in any case, unable to exert power over natural processes, had only their own resources as humans out of which to attain the tranquillity (*ataraxia*) they viewed as the

¹As Watts (1969:19) notes in the introduction to his translation of Boethius' work, "In form the *Consolation* belongs to the ancient genre of *consolatio*, a branch of the diatribe which in pagan Greece and Rome was especially the province of philosophy. It was cultivated by all the schools of philosophy".

supreme pleasure and the goal (*telos*) of life.² In spite of this, more than two millennia ago Epicurus declared the possibility of a happy existence in the absence of both divine teleology and an afterlife, and there is much evidence to suggest that the Epicureans enjoyed considerable success in their chosen philosophy, or way of life, and furthermore, that in some form or other, such a philosophy may be relevant to our own time.

At the centre of discussion throughout the following chapters will be the Epicurean *tetrapharmakos*: Nothing to fear in god; Nothing to feel in death; Good is easy to attain; Evil is easy to endure. If the "celebrated Epicurean 'fourfold remedy' summarizes the ultimate lessons of Epicurean philosophy" (Long and Sedley 1987:156), then a detailed discussion of the *tetrapharmakos* will help reveal those lessons, which can then be appreciated and evaluated with respect to both the ancient and modern world. The *tetrapharmakos* is at once an emblem of a way of life and a multi-faceted spiritual exercise, suggesting a myriad of other such exercises by means of which the followers of Epicurus strove to overcome existential and circumstantial anguish in order to attain happiness (*eudaimonia*) through peace of mind (*ataraxia*), the highest form of pleasure. The exercises that flow from the *tetrapharmakos* are not wholly without relevance to the citizens of the present century. A consideration of such relevance will conclude the thesis.

1.2 Review of the Literature

As Mansfeld (1999a:5) notes regarding Hellenistic philosophy, the "extant primary works are very few. Epicureanism has fared comparatively well, because we still have three didactic letters written by Epicurus himself as well as a collection of aphorisms, the so-called *Key Doctrines* (*KD*) – the first four of which correspond to the four remedies of the *tetrapharmakos* -- all preserved by Diogenes Laertius book x".³ The reference here is to Epicurus' letters *To Herodotus* (outlining Epicurean physics), *To Pythocles* (on meteorology), and *To Menoeceus* (the shortest of the three letters, but our most important primary source on Epicurean ethics), and to the forty Epicurean ethical precepts making up the *Kyriai Doxai*. These latter, in conjunction with the *Letter to Menoeceus*, constitute almost all we possess in

²Even the Stoics had at least the notion of providence inherent in the unfolding of the cosmos.

³For an explanation of why so little survives of Hellenistic philosophical writings, see Mansfeld (1999a:3-4).

the way of primary material on Epicurean ethics. Nonetheless, the *Letter to Menoeceus*, in particular, will prove to be the most valuable source on which to draw throughout the following chapters, for its dense style contains the nucleus of an entire ethical philosophy.

In addition to these primary sources, we are able to draw on a considerable number of fragments and testimonia from other ancient works possessing varying degrees of certitude (some of which were written by decidedly anti-Epicurean authors, such as Cicero and Plutarch).⁴ Of particular value in reconstructing Epicurus' views on pleasure and the pleasant life, including the Epicurean division of pleasure into kinetic and katastematic, is Cicero's *De finibus*. There are also important works of later Epicureans: Lucretius' *De rerum natura*, the recovered writings at Herculaneum of Philodemus -- especially, with respect to the *tetrapharmakos* and its associated spiritual exercises, *On Frank Criticism* and *De pietate* -- and Diogenes of Oenoanda's inscription, carved in a stoa in Lycia in south-western Asia Minor, probably early in the second century. These later Epicurean works are of great value in corroborating, and expanding our understanding of, Epicurus' writings, as well as in aiding clarification of obscure passages, etc.

As mentioned above, the central focus of this thesis is the Epicurean *tetrapharmakos*, specifically in its role of providing the *therapeia* which brings *consolatio*, and in leading the disciple to *eudaimonia* through *ataraxia*. Fortunately, there is a large body of secondary sources relating to these aspects of our central theme.

1.2.1 Works on Hellenistic philosophy as a whole

There are several introductions to the philosophy of the Hellenistic period which discuss the *tetrapharmakos* either in general or with some degree of detailed examination of the separate strands of which it is composed. Rist (1972), Long (1986a), and Sharples (1996) are all valuable general introductions. Rist is concerned only with Epicurean philosophy and devotes entire chapters to gods and religion, as well as to pleasure (and its corollary, pain). With respect to pleasure, he raises several issues which remain contentious: the nature and provenance of the Epicurean concept of pleasure, the limit of pleasure, the Epicurean notion of "varied" pleasure, and the relation between kinetic and katastematic pleasure (he discusses

⁴Farrington (1967:136), referring to Reid's *Academica*, notes that "Cicero, as his greatest English editor tells us, 'hated and despised Epicureanism most sincerely and one of his chief aims in undertaking his philosophical works was to stem the tide of its popularity in Italy'".

this latter issue further in an appendix). The works by Long and Sharples, respectively, cover much the same ground: an introduction to Hellenistic philosophy as a whole, with significant discussion on all aspects of Epicureanism, including the separate strands of the *tetrapharmakos*, though death is dealt with more fully in Sharples' book.

A recent addition to the list of introductions is Hadot's (2002) *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* Although this book deals with ancient philosophy in general, there is much of value on Epicureanism, situated by Hadot in an understanding of ancient philosophy as first and foremost a choice of a *way of life*, later justified by rational techniques. The strength and uniqueness of Hadot's introduction is that it integrates into an understanding of ancient philosophy the idea of *askesis*, or spiritual exercises, performed by the disciple as a transformative aid, as indeed they were by Epicureans, among others.

Another recent addition to comprehensive introductions is *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* (1999), edited by Algra et al. This is an excellent anthology of articles written by a team of major scholars. Of significant value with respect to a general understanding of Epicurean ethics and, in particular, the *tetrapharmakos*, are Chapters 13 (Mansfeld 1999b) and 20 (Erler and Schofield 1999). As is to be expected in a comprehensive text such as this, the issues of contention are elucidated, but usually without extensive argument. Like Rist (1972), Erler and Schofield point out the obscurity of the distinction between kinetic and katastematic pleasure, and they refer to the existing general disagreement on the "range of pleasures which fall within the kinetic class, and over the philosophical provenance of the actual idea of a kinetic pleasure" (654). Mentioned also as contentious issues are the "variation" of pleasure, the notion of "deprivation" of goods as a possibly legitimate reason for fearing death (663), and the Epicurean conception of a "complete" life (664).

Two major works should be mentioned at this point, both of which deal broadly with Hellenistic ethics: Nussbaum (1994), *The Therapy of Desire* and Annas (1993), *The Morality of Happiness*. Both contain valuable insights into aspects of the Epicurean *tetrapharmakos*. Focussing most of her Epicurean discussion on Lucretius, including lengthy sections on gods and death, Nussbaum shows a sympathy for the general "therapeutic" orientation of Epicureanism, though she is ultimately bound, like deprivation theorists, to a wider conception of the good life than that of Epicureans. Annas describes her own work as "a book about the form and structure of ancient ethical theory" (3). She gives consideration to the

Epicurean *telos* as pleasure, and indicates her own understanding of kinetic and katastematic pleasures, respectively, as "the pleasure you feel as lack or need is being removed" and "what you get when pain has been removed". This is very much like the "restoration" view of pleasure, which has roots in Plato's *Philebus* and is also supported by Mitsis (1988:45), with Purinton (1993:315) expressing a contrary view. With respect to the *tetrapharmakos*, Annas indicates the difficulty with the distinction between necessary and natural desires, on the one hand, and natural and non-necessary, on the other (193 n.29), which is of import for a proper understanding of Epicurean pleasure and, hence, of the third and fourth remedies of the *tetrapharmakos*.

1.2.2 Anthologies of primary and secondary ancient sources

Invaluable as research tools are two collections of English translations of ancient primary and secondary works: Long and Sedley (1987), *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, Volume 1: *Translations of the Principal Sources, with Philosophical Commentary* and Inwood and Gerson (1998), *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*. The commentary in Long and Sedley is particularly valuable (unfortunately, there is no corresponding commentary in Inwood and Gerson), many of the contentious issues and obscure passages being indicated. For example, Long and Sedley ask whether pleasure is to be thought of as "restoration" of an initially congenial condition which allows the individual experiencing pleasure to once again "function fully in all his faculties" (123). Is this the only way, they ask, in which we can make sense of Epicurus' contention that "the greatest pleasure is the removal of all pain" (123)? Furthermore, with regard to the first remedy, Long and Sedley do more than merely indicate the structure of the issues surrounding *KD* 1: they propose the theory that the Epicurean gods are intended by Epicurus as "mere thought-objects" or mental constructs (148-9). They also raise the question of whether such a theory implies that Epicurus must have been an atheist. Both these anthologies contain essential primary sources of the kind required for a detailed consideration of the *tetrapharmakos*.

Several works about later Epicureans are also relevant sources insofar as they include discussion of issues surrounding the *tetrapharmakos* and its related spiritual exercises, or shed light on difficult or contentious passages in Epicurus' writings. Among these are Asmis (1990), "Philodemus' Epicureanism"; Clay (1983), *Epicurus and Lucretius* and (1998b), "Diogenes and his Gods"; and Gordon's (1996) study of Diogenes of Oenoanda, *Epicurus in*

Lycia.

1.2.3 Works dealing specifically with Epicurean ethics

A valuable collection of papers on a wide-ranging set of topics is the two-volume *Epicureismo Greco e Romano* edited by Giannantoni and Gigante (1996). This anthology contains several essays dealing specifically with strands of the *tetrapharmakos*: for example, Sedley (1996), "The Inferential Foundations of Epicurean Ethics", questions Brunschwig's (1986) conclusions regarding Epicurus' so-called "cradle argument" on pleasure as man's *telos*, re-emphasising the need to look closely at the nature of Epicurus' refusal to *argue* for his designation of pleasure as the *telos*; Erler (1996), "*Philologia medicans. La lettura delle opere di Epicuro nella sua scuola*", an essay based on the analogous relationship between medicine and therapeutic (Epicurean) philosophy; and Mitsis (1996), "Epicureans on Death and the Deprivations of Death", in which the author counters the deprivationist assertion that death robs the individual of goods he might have enjoyed had he continued to live, faulting such theorists with not fully accounting for "how it is really *us* who suffer these possible losses" (1996:812).

Schofield and Striker's (1986) anthology, *The Norms of Nature*, contains, among other essays, the important "Nothing to Us?" by Furley (1986), in which the author concedes the validity of *KD 2*, the second remedy of the *tetrapharmakos*, to a consistent Epicurean, but insists that such an individual has a misconception about what human desires necessarily are. Also germane to *KD 3* and *4* is Brunschwig (1986), mentioned above.

In a relevant essay in Brunschwig and Nussbaum (1993), "Epicurean Hedonism", Striker raises the important question regarding *KD 3* and *4* of just what kind of hedonist Epicurus is. She ultimately regards as "implausible" the kinds of pleasure enunciated by Epicurus, as well as the imputed Epicurean relation of kinetic to katastematic pleasure, and suggests that "an impoverished account of pleasure may have been the price Epicurus was willing to pay in order to fit hedonism into the framework of Hellenistic ethics" (17).

Two texts which deal specifically and exclusively with Epicurean ethics are Mitsis (1988), *Epicurus' Ethical Theory: The Pleasures of Invulnerability* and Preuss (1994), *Epicurean Ethics: Katastematic Hedonism*. Both are sympathetic to Epicurus and defend the integrity of Epicureanism. As mentioned above, Mitsis tends to associate pleasure and pain very closely with satisfaction and frustration of desires; the question is whether this is all

there is to the essence of pleasure and pain, whether it is possible to define Epicurean pleasure and pain in this way. Preuss (1994) does not think so, and argues for a broader conception of Epicurean pleasure. His book is particularly valuable in demarcating the contending positions on a number of issues concerning the *tetrapharmakos*; in fact, the book is essentially a study of the *tetrapharmakos*, but without the benefit of consideration of its relation to the wide variety of spiritual exercises performed by Epicureans as a means of facilitating their goal.⁵

1.2.4 Works on the tetrapharmakos and its strands

Most scholarly research on the *tetrapharmakos* and its separate strands has been presented in the form of journal articles. With respect to the first remedy, Nothing to fear in god, Purinton (2001) gives an excellent overview of the debate centring on the nature of Epicurean gods, particularly the Long and Sedley (1987) view of the gods as mental constructs versus Mansfeld's (1993) upholding of the traditional view of the gods as material, biological entities. Obbink (1989) tends toward the Long and Sedley view in his discussion of Epicurus' alleged atheism. Festugière (1955) provides useful historical background on the ancient Greek perception of gods.

The literature on the second remedy, encapsulated in the famous Epicurean phrase "Death is nothing to us", is enormous. The very useful anthology edited by Fischer (1993), *The Metaphysics of Death*, contains articles from both sides of the line separating "deprivation theorists" (who hold that death robs the deceased of "goods" that might have been enjoyed) from defenders of the Epicurean dictum on death: Murphy (1976), Nagel (1979), Silverstein (1980), Feinberg (1984), Pitcher (1984), Luper-Foy (1987), McMahan (1988), and Feldman (1991) -- add also Furley (1986), mentioned above -- support, in varying ways and degrees, a deprivationist position, whereas Rosenbaum (1986, 1989), Preuss (1994), Mitsis (1989, 1996), Braddock (2000), and Warren (2000) defend the Epicurean position. Li (2002) considers in detail various deprivationist positions and concludes against Epicurus.

The third and fourth remedies -- Good is easy to attain, and Evil is easy to endure (summarised at *KD* 3 and 4) -- are also the subject of a large literature, which has grown out of a number of problematic issues. Rist (1972) identifies several of the most important

⁵This work was published shortly before several books dealing with psychagogy and spiritual exercises, both Epicurean and other, appeared: Glad (1995), Hadot (1995), Thom (1995), and Sorabji (2000).

controversies surrounding Epicurean pleasure: the absence of a "neutral" state between pleasure and pain; the notion of the limit of pleasure as the absence of pain; the root of all good as pleasure of the belly; the "cradle argument" as demonstrating our first good; the relation between kinetic and katastematic pleasure; variation of pleasure beyond the limit; and the "quietist" versus the "sensualist" passage in Epicurus. With respect to this latter issue, Erler and Schofield (1999) point to the contrary nature of these passages in Epicurus, which render a precise understanding of pleasure problematic. However, Purinton (1993) and Preuss (1994) confront these passages, ultimately agreeing with Rist's resolution of the problem.

Purinton (1993) also provides a useful survey of contending views on the Epicurean *telos*; contention boils down to differences in precise understanding of Epicurean pleasure itself, and the problematic distinction between kinetic and katastematic pleasure, which modern scholarship finds "obscure" (Erler and Schofield 1999:654). Gosling and Taylor (1982) see Epicurean pleasure as defined generally by absence of pain, but Preuss (1994) rejects the idea that Epicurus *defined* pleasure in this way. Merlan (1960) finds the difference between the two kinds of pleasure in their respective sources: one external, the other internal; Preuss (1994) sympathizes with this view. Mitsis (1988), on the other hand, sees the difference between kinetic and katastematic pleasure in their relation to the process of restoration of a natural state; Purinton (1993), however, questions Mitsis' mode of application of the terms "kinetic" and "katastematic" and posits that pleasure is simply "an object of joy", a characterisation he suggests applies equally well to both kinetic and katastematic pleasure.

Two related problems concern whether there is such a thing as localized katastematic pleasure, and whether kinetic pleasures always supervene on katastematic ones. Preuss (1994) argues at length against the first idea, favoured by Rist (1972) and Diano (1974); and while Purinton (1993), Diano, and Rist agree that kinetic pleasures always supervene on katastematic ones, Preuss argues that kinetic pleasures vary other kinetic pleasures.

1.2.5 Works on Epicurean spiritual exercises and psychagogy

The major texts of importance with regard to our discussion of Epicurean *psychagogy* (the leading of souls) and *askesis*, or spiritual exercises, are the following: Glad (1995), *Paul and Philodemus: Adaptability in Epicurean and Early Christian Psychagogy*; Thom (1995), *The Pythagorean Golden Verses*; Hadot (1995), *Philosophy as a Way of Life*; and Sorabji (2000), *Emotion and Peace of Mind: from Stoic Agitation to Christian Emotion*. Concerning

Epicureanism, Glad's book draws on Philodemus' *On Frank Criticism* for much of its psychagogic content; Thom does not discuss Epicurean psychagogy *per se*, but describes the psychagogic function of the *Golden Verses*, as well as spiritual exercises, many of which are typical of the *kind* of practice Epicurean disciples engaged in; Sorabji (212) discusses spiritual exercises of both Stoics and Epicureans, dividing them into *prospective* (preventing emotions) and *retrospective* (dissipating emotions); most relevant of all is Hadot's book, for he devotes much space to elucidating the specific kinds of practices Epicureans engaged in, giving a clear rationale for the function of each spiritual exercise. Also useful is Malherbe (1986), *Moral Exhortation: a Greco-Roman Sourcebook*, a valuable collection of ancient writings, including Epicurean ones, on exhortation and consolation.

1.2.6 Contentious issues surrounding the tetrapharmakos

Thus, from the literature arise the various unresolved issues which surround the Epicurean *tetrapharmakos*. With respect to the first remedy, summarised at *KD 1*, there are the following: the nature of Epicurean gods; the reasons for their immortality, in spite of their material nature (if, indeed, they are envisioned as material, though this question is more easily resolved if the gods are viewed as thought constructs); difficulty with certain passages, particularly the scholion on *KD 1*, and Cicero, *ND* 1.49. (Difficult questions arise: Are gods bodies? If so, what kind? What is *quasi-body*? etc.) Disagreement on the Epicurean gods is widespread, as Purinton (2001), Preuss (1994), Long and Sedley (1987), and Mansfeld (1993) all attest. Amid such contention, one must tread carefully and be prepared to defend vigorously any position adopted.

Concerning the second remedy (summarised at *KD 2*), that death is nothing to us, the single overriding contentious issue concerns the nature of death's loss, *if*, indeed, death is a loss at all to the one who dies. Associated with this issue are other related ones such as, for example, the Epicurean assertion that living a "complete" life in a finite time is possible for man.

The third and fourth remedies constitute two complementary halves: good is easy to attain, and evil is easy to endure. At the centre of controversy are concerns regarding, for example, the mode of justification of Epicurus' designation of pleasure as the *telos*, the nature of the kinetic-katastematic distinction, and Epicurus' notion of the "varying" of pleasure beyond its limit.

These unresolved issues will be examined in their relation to the Epicurean *tetrapharmakos* as we consider, in turn, the four remedies of which it is composed. They will constitute an integral part of the central focus of discussion in the thesis.

1.3 Outline of the Thesis

"How can we avoid giving in to despair if we no longer believe, like Marcus Aurelius, in a divine providence, consubstantial with ourselves, which arranges everything for the best...?" This question is asked of Pierre Hadot by his translator, Michael Chase, who is referring to our own time (Hadot 1995:282). A similar question could be asked with respect to the Epicureans in their time. The question, which is central to this thesis, will be dealt with throughout the following chapters, the last of which will draw conclusions and offer observations relevant to this focus.

Throughout the thesis, Epicurean materialism will be presupposed and the arguments and exercises which have emerged from that materialist basis will be examined critically in order to assess the coherence and effectiveness of the Epicurean way of life, especially with respect to the *tetrapharmakos* and related spiritual exercises in their role of providing *consolatio*. In particular, Epicurean spiritual exercises will be considered in order to shed light on the Epicureans' relationship with the natural and social worlds, as well as with each other and with the gods, and thus to explain how these exercises were capable of providing consolation to followers of a materialistic, non-teleological philosophy, and further to consider whether such exercises, in some form or other, are still able to do so in the twenty-first century.

Chapter 2, "Philosophy as a Way of Life: Consolation through Conversion", will be concerned with the *tetrapharmakos* as a "cure-all for unhappiness" and a summary of "the ultimate lessons of Epicureanism" (Long 1986b:283). In setting the context for the following chapters, Chapter 2 will also consider the ancient conception of *philosophia*, definitions of key concepts -- for example, *hedone*, *ataraxia*, *phronesis*, and *eudaimonia* -- and the role and kinds of spiritual exercises involved in a) enhancing *authenticity*, b) affording *therapeia*, and c) providing *consolatio* in the broadest sense. Particularly relevant to these concerns is Pierre Hadot's (1995) important book *Philosophy as a Way of Life*.

In Chapter 3, "First Remedy: Nothing to Fear in God", we shall critically examine the arguments in the surviving writings of Epicurus, as well as in those of later Epicureans --

especially in Lucretius' *De rerum natura* -- and other ancient commentators such as Cicero and Plutarch, concerning man's fear of gods, the nature of the gods and their relationship to man (e.g., are they mental constructs or biological entities?), and the supplanting of fear with *consolatio*, specifically insofar as such arguments lead to the first remedy of the *tetrapharmakos* as summarised in *KD* 1. Also considered will be relevant arguments advanced in modern secondary sources. We shall examine critically the contentious issues surrounding men and gods, including Epicurus' reasoning with respect to the existence and immortal status of gods, the view that Epicurus was an atheist, the ethical relevance of the gods, and Epicurean spiritual exercises on piety.

Chapter 4, "Second Remedy: that Death Is Nothing to Us", will be devoted to scrutiny of the other major fear mankind faces: fear of death. We shall examine Epicurean arguments concerning the nature of the human body and soul, and their status upon the death of an individual, particularly insofar as such arguments lead to the second remedy of the *tetrapharmakos*, summarised in *KD* 2. We shall consider the causes of man's fear of death, the possible evils associated with death, deprivation theory and Epicurean counter-arguments, the Epicurean notion of the complete life in its relation to duration, and Epicurean spiritual exercises on death.

In Chapter 5, "Third and Fourth Remedies: Good Can Be Attained; Evil Can Be Endured", the hedonistic basis of Epicurean ethics will be examined -- in particular, the kind of pleasure which constitutes man's *telos*. In other words, we shall ask the question, "What kind of hedonist is Epicurus?" In doing so, we shall be led to consider various issues of contention among modern scholars, including the lack of a neutral state between pleasure and pain, the limits of pleasure and pain, the epistemological foundation of Epicurus' hedonism, the dual character of Epicurean pleasure, variations on the limit of pleasure, and the instrumental role of the virtues, justice, and friendship. In addition, we shall look at the way in which *kinetic* and *katastematic* pleasures function ethically within Epicureanism and the crucial role of prudence in guiding moral action. Finally, we shall consider Epicurean spiritual exercises in their relation to the attaining of good (pleasure) and the averting or enduring of evil (pain).

The sixth and last chapter, "Philosophy of Consolation?", will contain final observations and conclusions regarding a) the ultimate lessons of Epicurean philosophy as embodied in the *tetrapharmakos* or "celebrated Epicurean 'fourfold remedy'" (Long and

Sedley 1987:156); b) the effectiveness of Epicurean *askesis*, or spiritual exercises, within the Epicurean community in providing consolation to followers of a materialistic, non-teleological philosophy, in order to enable them to supplant existential and circumstantial anguish with happiness (*eudaimonia*) through tranquillity (*ataraxia*); and c) the relevance of Epicurean philosophy and spiritual exercises for citizens of the twenty-first century. We shall then be in a position to state a general conclusion concerning the status of Epicureanism *qua* philosophy of consolation.

CHAPTER 2

PHILOSOPHY AS A WAY OF LIFE: CONSOLATION THROUGH CONVERSION

Philosophy was a way of life, both in its exercise and effort to achieve wisdom, and in its goal, wisdom itself. For real wisdom does not merely cause us to know: it makes us "be" in a different way. (Hadot 1995:265)

In order to establish a context for a detailed consideration of the *tetrapharmakos* and its associated spiritual exercises, we shall begin by discussing the following set of related issues: a) the fundamental principle of Epicurean ethics, pleasure (*hedone*); b) the goal of life as happiness (*eudaimonia*) through tranquillity (*ataraxia*) and freedom from pain in the body (*aporia*); c) Epicurean philosophy as a mode of *existing-in-the-world* which involves a transformation of the individual's entire being; d) Epicureanism as a therapy of anguish -- existential and situational -- capable of providing *consolatio* leading to *ataraxia* and *eudaimonia*; e) spiritual exercises as therapeutic means of bringing about conversion of the disciple to a philosophical way of being; and f) the *tetrapharmakos* as emblem of the most important lessons of Epicureanism and of the implied spiritual exercises which lead to a good life.

In the last section of the present chapter, we begin to explicate the *tetrapharmakos*. The following chapters consider it more closely, testing its cogency while showing how it works as a spiritual exercise in itself, and how other spiritual exercises flow from it and provide *consolatio* in the face of existential and situational anguish. We shall begin our discussion, however, at what seems an appropriate starting point: the fundamental principle of Epicurean ethics.

2.1 The Fundamental Ethical Principle: *Hedone*

Epicureanism preaches the deliberate, continually renewed choice of relaxation and serenity, combined with a profound gratitude toward nature and life, which constantly offer us joy and pleasure, if only we know how to find them. (Hadot 1995:88)

Much as in the realm of Newtonian physics, where bodies naturally seek a state of rest, in Epicurean ethics humans, like all other animals, naturally seek to enhance pleasure and diminish pain, to secure a state of undisturbed bliss. In the absence of teleological ends, and in the face of the question concerning how it is possible to live a good and happy life in a cosmos devoid of teleology and an afterlife, this is seen to be the goal (*telos*) of life -- that is, the happiness (*eudaimonia*) gained through the highest pleasure, the ideal state of being for

man, tranquillity or peace of mind (*ataraxia*), as well as through freedom from bodily pain (*aponia*).

Epicurus places his elevation of pleasure to moral principle on an empirical basis: "Sense perception...confirms the truth of the commonplace claim...that all living creatures pursue pleasure and avoid pain, thereby demonstrating the naturalness of judging pleasure to be good and pain bad" (Long and Sedley 1987:122). This Epicurean view is expounded more fully by Cicero: "As soon as each animal is born, it seeks pleasure and rejoices in it as the highest good, and rejects pain as the greatest bad thing, driving it away from itself as effectively as it can..." (*Fin.* 1.30=IG I-21). Furthermore, the subjective experience of each individual demonstrates most vividly that pleasure is desirable whereas pain is not. However, while all pleasures are intrinsically good and all pains intrinsically bad, not all pleasures are worth choosing nor all pain worth avoiding, for "the things which produce certain pleasures bring troubles many times greater than the pleasures" (Epicurus *KD* 8=IG I-5).

Morality thus becomes concerned primarily with correct choosing among various options of pleasure and pain. This involves developing an awareness of the nature of our desires. Some are natural; others are not natural, merely vain. Of our natural desires, some are necessary -- for our own survival, comfort, happiness -- and others are not. More than anything else, for Epicurus, it is the satisfaction of those desires which are both natural and necessary that enhances our moral freedom. Thus one can make moral decisions "by comparative measurement and an examination of the advantages and disadvantages. For at some times we treat the good thing as bad and, conversely, the bad thing as good" (Epicurus *Ep. Men.* 130=IG I-4). It is therefore knowledge, experience, and understanding that are required as a basis for discrimination of such advantages and disadvantages, that will enable us, in Epicurus' words, "to refer every choice and avoidance to the health of the body and the freedom of the soul from disturbance, since this is the goal of a blessed life" (*Ep. Men.* 128=IG I-4).¹

And so Epicurus is able to state unequivocally the essence of the blessed -- that is, pleasurable -- life, which "is not drinking bouts and continuous partying and enjoying boys and women, or consuming fish and the other dainties of an extravagant table...but sober

¹ Annas (1993:189) notes the nature of Epicurean pleasure: "Our final end is pleasure -- the kind of pleasure that is natural, in accordance with human nature. This will we achieve if we fulfill our natural desires; and the widespread failure to achieve it (and thus to be happy) results from people fulfilling, or trying to fulfill, desires that are not natural".

calculation which searches out the reasons for every choice and avoidance and drives out the opinions which are the source of the greatest turmoil for men's souls" (*Ep. Men.* 132=IG I-4). Nor is Epicurus' pleasure -- the absence of pain in the body and of turmoil in the mind -- merely of a negative sort, for life itself is very much worth living once we have learned how to live well.

In fact, it is relatively easy to enhance our moral freedom and to live well, since "everything natural is easy to obtain", only the superfluous being difficult to get (Epicurus *Ep. Men.* 130=IG I-4). Furthermore, we may recognize "that self-sufficiency is a great good" and therefore "that those who least need extravagance enjoy it most" (Epicurus *Ep. Men.* 130=IG I-4). Thus one is never faced with the task of seeking ever greater magnitudes of pleasure, for pleasure has its limit simply in "the removal of all feeling of pain" (Epicurus *KD* 3=IG I-5) -- that is, in the absence of pain in the body and of turmoil in the mind. But, more than anything else, living a good life is largely a function of *phronesis* (prudence, practical wisdom). This is what Epicurus regards as the greatest good, "a more valuable thing than philosophy. For prudence is the source of all the other virtues, teaching that it is impossible to live pleasantly without living prudently, honourably, and justly, and impossible to live prudently, honourably, and justly without living pleasantly" (*Ep. Men.* 132=IG I-4).

In such a manner is the Epicurean disciple led to philosophy as a way of living, a *mode of being in the world*, which constitutes, in the grandest sense, the way to *eudaimonia* through *ataraxia*.

2.2 The Ancient Conception of Philosophy

During this period, philosophy was a *way of life*...a mode of existing-in-the-world, which had to be practiced at each instant...an exercise of the thought, will, and the totality of one's being, the goal of which was to achieve a state practically inaccessible to mankind: wisdom. Philosophy was a method of spiritual progress which demanded a radical conversion and transformation of the individual's way of being. (Hadot 1995:265)

A distinguishing feature of Hellenistic philosophy in general, and of Epicureanism in particular, is its preoccupation with "the infinite, incommensurable value of existence"; in this period, philosophy was essentially "a way of life, an art of living, and a way of being" (Hadot 1995:268). Nor was this a specifically Hellenistic phenomenon, for it was characteristic of ancient philosophy "as far back as Socrates" (Hadot 1995:269). Philosophy was not so much a discourse as a way of living; it did not *inform* so much as *form* the individual. But, we may ask, what did it actually mean to "live philosophically"?

For the most part, "living philosophically" meant living according to a conception of oneself transformed. Transformed into what? Ultimately, into one advancing towards sagehood, for it is the sage alone who has attained to at least a measure of wisdom and who, by virtue of his orientation and constant striving towards wisdom -- in spite of a feeling of certainty that he has not achieved it -- emulates the gods. In short, the sage lives philosophically. Yet wisdom is the birthright of all, for it is "nothing more than the vision of things as they are, the vision of the cosmos as it is in the light of reason, and...the mode of being and living that should correspond to this vision" (Hadot 1995:58). An important aspect of this mode of being, for Epicureanism, then, is that wisdom is a life lived in a certain way: philosophically.

Thus, the ancient Hellenistic philosophers were more interested in helping their students to "orient themselves in thought, in the life of the city, or in the world" (Hadot 1995:21) than with conveying a body of knowledge or carrying on a philosophical discourse. The role of reason was significant, but not as an end in itself -- rather, as one of many spiritual exercises conducive to living well, which, as we shall see, meant acceding to a state of utter tranquillity (*ataraxia*) and therefore attaining happiness (*eudaimonia*).

The centrality of philosophy to life is suggested by Epicurus' advice to Menoeceus in his famous letter. He exhorts Menoeceus to refrain from delay in applying himself to philosophy, emphasising that age is no barrier to looking after one's soul: "He who says either that the time for philosophy has not yet come or that it has passed is like someone who says that the time for happiness has not yet come or that it has passed" (*Ep. Men.* 122=IG I-4). But *why* philosophise? Epicurus explains that an old man must philosophise "so that although old he may stay young in good things owing to gratitude for what has occurred"; a young man, on the other hand, must philosophise "so that although young he too may be like an old man owing to his lack of fear of what is to come" (*Ep. Men.* 122=IG I-4).

Furthermore, Epicurus informs his disciples that natural philosophy would be of no consequence to us "were we not upset by the worries that celestial phenomena and death might matter to us, and also by failure to appreciate the limits of pains and desires" (*KD* 11=IG I-5). The fact is, though, that these are precisely the issues that concern us most; hence, philosophy is of genuine consequence to us. As for the exercise of judgement in choosing only the most worthy pleasures, Epicurus notes that "without natural philosophy there is no way of securing the purity of our pleasures" (*KD* 12=IG I-5). Philosophy,

therefore, is a *sine qua non* of a eudaimonistic life.²

Thus, Hellenistic philosophy in general, and Epicureanism in particular, adopts an *interested* position within the world, contrasting sharply with modern analytic philosophy which, for the most part, attempts to step outside the world in order to consider problems abstractly and *disinterestedly*. Yet life and, in particular, the properly lived life are what is precisely of deepest *interest* to humans. The philosophers of antiquity recognised this, and the art of living at the heart of ancient philosophy becomes counterpoised to the abstract, technical jargon of modern "philosophers". Modern philosophy is reserved primarily for those moments when a problem is under consideration, whereas ancient philosophy was an exercise practised at every moment.

Yet the modern philosophical mind often strives to distance itself from such a conception of philosophy. Sorabji (2000:159) cites Bernard Williams' questioning of the therapeutic role of philosophy: "[C]an we really believe that philosophy, properly understood in terms of rigorous argument, could be so directly related to curing real human misery, the kind of suffering that priests and doctors and -- indeed -- therapists address?". Here Williams vividly demonstrates the gulf between ancient and modern conceptions of philosophy. We know, however, what Epicurus would say of "philosophy, properly understood in terms of rigorous argument", for we have the response attributed to him: "Empty is the argument of the philosopher by which no human disease is healed; for just as there is no benefit in medicine if it does not drive out bodily diseases, so there is no benefit in philosophy if it does not drive out the disease of the soul" (Porphyry, *Ad Marc.* 31=IG I-124). Rigorous argument, in other words, is not the end of philosophy but a means (among many others) to a well-lived life. To put it another way, ancient philosophy -- and Epicureanism in particular -- is neither refuge nor disinterested encounter with abstract problems; it is utter engagement with life.³

What is this way of being-in-the-world which characterizes Epicureanism? *In nuce*, it is accepting that happiness through pleasure is the goal of life, and it is the practice of a given set of spiritual exercises aimed at attaining such pleasure and happiness. What awaits us

²Philosophy "moulds and builds the personality, orders one's life, regulates one's conduct, shows one what one should do and what one should leave undone, sits at the helm and keeps one on the correct course as one is tossed about in perilous seas" (Seneca, *Ep. mor.* 16.3; trans. Campbell 1969:64).

³Sorabji (2000:160-1) responds to Williams' question as follows: "I have argued that the Stoic analysis of emotion was more rigorous than similar modern analyses, and yet that it has therapeutic value". He goes on to elucidate four ways in which Stoic philosophical analysis contributes to therapy.

otherwise is anguish; Epicureanism, as a lived philosophy, is both preventive and therapy.

But there is a price to pay for dedication to the philosophical way of life. Heraclitus hinted at this when he chastised the mob for its ignorance: "[W]hat sense or thought do they have? They follow the popular singers and they take the crowd as their teacher, not knowing that most men are bad and few good" (fr. 104; trans. Barnes 1987:110). Thus there is always a gulf between the philosopher and his fellow citizens. There is a rupture with *bios*, daily life, and the philosopher's love of wisdom -- the literal meaning of *philosophia* -- becomes the source of his alienation from the mass of normal members of civil society, his estrangement from the world of men. For the philosopher, the lives of ordinary men seem but "madness, unconsciousness, and ignorance of reality" (Hadot 1995:58). Hence, until all men and women turn to philosophy, there must be always a conflict between the conventions of civil society and the moral values of the philosopher, or, to put it another way, between the customary life and the life one *ought* to live.

The ideal of wisdom personified in the sage represents that which is farthest removed from the normal life of civil society. The Epicurean sage, "like the gods, watches the infinity of worlds arising out of atoms in the infinite void; nature is sufficient for his needs, and nothing ever disturbs the peace of his soul" (Hadot 1995:58). The sage is "cosmic" -- that is, possessed always of a consciousness of his connection with the totality of the world, and "the consequent dilation of himself throughout the infinity of universal nature" (Hadot 1995:266). Moreover, the Epicurean sage is one who greets his own chance existence with "gratitude, like a kind of divine miracle" (Hadot 1995:252). It is fitting, therefore, that one such as this assume the role of *psychagogue*, or spiritual leader within the Epicurean community, for it is precisely *psychagogy*, spiritual leadership, which facilitates the growth of wisdom within disciples and the conversion of souls to philosophy.⁴ Epicurean psychagogy was not, however, a one-sided phenomenon, but rather a dialectic in which the care provider at one moment might become the recipient at the next (Glad 1995:24). Psychagogy, in other words,

⁴Thom (1995:77) summarises the evolution of the art of *psychagogy*: "As Hellenistic philosophers focused more and more on ethics, they also became correspondingly more aware of the need for moral and spiritual growth, both for themselves and for their students. Consequently, they devised ways of guiding their students toward spiritual maturity, and developed disciplines and practices that would enable a person to continue growing more mature by him- or herself. This system of intellectual, moral, and spiritual care, known as psychagogy (...'spiritual guidance'), was well-established in different philosophical traditions by the late Hellenistic and imperial periods...".

was a communal dialectic.⁵

And what kind of conversion are we speaking of? In essence, it is a conversion to a community of philosophers, not a community that considers mere abstract problems, but a community of those who enact their understanding in order to transform not only their own lives but those of others, and therefore of the Epicurean community at large. It is a conversion that returns the individual to a natural state of wisdom and raises him "from an inauthentic condition of life, darkened by unconsciousness and harassed by worry, to an authentic state of life, in which he attains self-consciousness, an exact vision of the world, inner peace, freedom" (Hadot 1995:83). Thus the spiritual exercises associated with Epicurean psychagogy lead the disciple to an authentic life.⁶

Ultimately, then, we are speaking of a conversion to *philosophia*, the love of wisdom, *qua* new mode of being and living in the world. It is this transformation to a philosophical way of being and living that constitutes the basis of the Epicurean therapy that brings *consolatio* and, in its wake, *ataraxia* and *eudaimonia*.

2.3 Epicureanism as Therapy of Anguish; *Consolatio*

Epicureanism...is a therapy of anguish and a philosophy which seeks, above all, to procure peace of mind. Its goal is consequently to liberate mankind from everything that is a cause of anguish for the soul: the belief that the gods are concerned with mankind; the fear of post-mortem punishment; the worries and pain brought about by unsatisfied desires; and the moral uneasiness caused by the concern to act out of perfect purity of intention. (Hadot 1995:222)

Thrown unbidden into the maelstrom of existence, man must somehow make his way from his "thrown-ness" to meaning and, ultimately, to his natural end. How fortunate if by chance the road travelled happens to be a relatively happy one. And yet how many are those who are not so lucky. Epicurus, though, has taught that it is possible for all men to overcome their anguish, to allay their fears, to console and transform themselves through philosophy, and to learn to emulate the life of the gods.

But what are the causes of these sufferings? Why is consolation needed? "In the view

⁵Referring to Rabbow's *Seelenfuhrung*, Clay (1983:80) observes of Epicurus: "And if he was, as has been claimed for him, the 'first European to have developed and employed in his community a *psychagogia* by means of a methodical process of memorization and exercises in repetition' ... [he was] also the first Greek philosopher to present his philosophy in a deliberately systematic manner".

⁶Clay (1983:223) comments on Lucretius' technique of *psychagogia*: "To reach his reader, Lucretius must put himself in his place: he too is terrified by visions, both awake and asleep (1.131-33) and 'we' seem to see and hear the dead. 'We' are all one in our need for the Epicurean understanding of the world".

of all philosophical schools, mankind's principal cause of suffering, disorder, and unconsciousness were the passions: that is, unregulated desires and exaggerated fears" (Hadot 1995:83).⁷ Thus, desires and fears prevent people from attaining happiness in life, and are the cause of the ubiquitous anguish for which therapy is ever required. This means, firstly, the existential anguish caused by, *inter alia*, fear of death and divine retribution, fear of loss (of loved ones, of potential life experiences snuffed out by premature death, etc.), fear of pain (not knowing that evil is easy to endure), worry about the difficulty or impossibility of attaining good (not knowing that good is easily obtained). Add to this the common fact of living always outside the present moment (which amounts to a constant deferral of existence), and irrational fears caused by a lack of understanding of reality. Furthermore, there is to be considered the situational anguish caused by countless unavoidable circumstances in life: for example, poverty, failure, accidents. And there is the anguish of empty desires: for fame, power, wealth, the extravagant table.

What is needed in the face of all this is *therapeia*, a remedy or cure, as rest and liquids are a remedy for a cold, or as gaining a correct understanding of the world is a remedy which banishes unfounded, irrational fears.⁸ Each of such remedies functions as a *consolatio*, a "comfort" in the face of anguish, an "encouragement" to carry on. In the broadest sense, *consolatio* is an easing of anguish, leading to inner peace of mind (*ataraxia*), and hence to *eudaimonia*, which, for the Epicureans as well as for Hellenistic philosophers in general, was the goal of philosophy, that "concern with individual destiny and spiritual progress, the intransigent assertion of moral requirements, the call for meditation, the invitation to seek this inner peace..." (Hadot 1995:69).

That philosophy is the *sine qua non* of therapy is well attested among the other ancient schools.⁹ Referring to the precepts expressed in the Pythagorean *Golden Verses*, Thom

⁷The Epicurean disciple Diogenes of Oenoanda, expressing the idea that man's exaggerated fears and unregulated desires are the result of faulty beliefs, puts it this way: "... the majority of people suffer from a common disease, as in a plague, with their false notions about things, and their number is increasing (for in mutual emulation they catch the disease from one another, like sheep)..." (fr. 3; trans. Smith 1993:368).

⁸The very idea of philosophy as *therapeia* was not new in Epicurus' time: "The analogy between logos and medical therapy is one of the oldest and best entrenched traditions concerning logos in all of Greek culture. From Homer on, we encounter, frequently and prominently, the central idea of the Epicurean position: that logos is to illness of the soul as medical treatment is to illness of the body" (Nussbaum 1986:52).

⁹Nussbaum (1994:14) remarks on the nature and extent of therapeutic philosophy as follows: "Philosophy heals human diseases, diseases produced by false beliefs. Its arguments are to the soul as the doctor's remedies are to the body. They can heal, and they are to be evaluated in terms of their power to heal. As the medical art makes progress on behalf of the suffering body, so philosophy for the soul in distress.

(1995:213) observes the following:

"A thorough cure" is the goal and consequence of mastering the precepts. The metaphoric use of illness and health to indicate a person's moral and spiritual condition is very common among ancient philosophers. Vice and ignorance are seen as illness of the soul for which philosophy can effect a cure. The practice of philosophy thus becomes participation in a therapeutic process.

Cicero also stresses the therapeutic function of philosophy, insisting that "there will be no end to wretchedness unless the soul is cured, and without philosophy this is impossible" (*Tusc.* 3.6; trans. King 1945:241). The medical imagery also occurs in a fragment by Diogenes of Oenoanda explaining the purpose of his stone inscription; referring to the therapeutic value of Epicurean philosophy, he writes: "These medicines...have dispelled the fears [that grip] us without justification, and, as for pains, those that are groundless we have completely excised, while those that are natural we have reduced to an absolute minimum, making their magnitude minute" (fr. 3; trans. Smith 1993:368).¹⁰

The whole Epicurean way of life -- that is, *philosophia* -- was a therapy and a *consolatio*; its emblem was the *tetrapharmakos* or fourfold remedy: nothing to fear in gods; nothing to feel in death; good can be readily attained; evil can be easily endured. A deep comprehension and internalisation of the *tetrapharmakos* became a powerful therapy of the anguish suffered by men, transforming at the same time both the individual and his way of being and seeing the world.

Let us look now towards those spiritual exercises which were at the heart of Epicureanism and which made it truly a way of life that constituted a therapy and *consolatio* for the "thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to".

2.4 Spiritual Exercises

[T]hese exercises in fact correspond to a transformation of our vision of the world, and to a metamorphosis of our personality....Above all, the word "spiritual" reveals the true dimensions of these exercises. By means of them, the individual...re-places himself within the perspective of the Whole... (Hadot 1995:82)

The spiritual exercises of the ancient philosophical schools were intended to function therapeutically in order to provide *consolatio*, thus leading the disciple to *ataraxia* and *eudaimonia*. Although each student began at a different level on the path towards wisdom and

Correctly understood, it is no less than the soul's art of life (*techne bioi*). This general picture of philosophy's task is common to all three major Hellenistic schools, at both Greece and Rome".

¹⁰Clay (1998a:210) reminds us of the therapeutic-salvific function of Diogenes' inscription on "the wall of a stoia which offered to those who stopped to read its message the remedies which bring salvation".

authenticity, all were equal as philosophers (i.e., in terms of *being philosophers*), and all were able, in principle, to improve their spiritual condition.

Let us consider the term "spiritual exercises". Hadot points out that the Greek Christian term *askesis* was well established within ancient philosophy long before Ignatius Loyola's *Exercitia spiritualia*. The term "spiritual exercises" is appropriate to describe the practices of Hellenistic philosophers in that these practices are, like the exercises performed by an athlete to improve performance in the field, designed to improve the practitioner, though in this case *qua* person, especially *qua* moral agent. Hence they are "exercises". But they are exercises of a very particular kind; that is, they are designed to transform the disciple, not in some merely superficial manner, but in a most profound way: "The word 'spiritual' is quite apt to make us understand that these exercises are a result, not merely of thought, but of the individual's entire psychism" (1995:82).

2.4.1. Examples of spiritual exercises

Ancient spiritual exercises were instrumental in dealing with emotions. Some of the exercises were directed towards preventing emotions -- hence, *prospective* -- and others towards dissipating emotions -- hence, *retrospective* (Sorabji 2000:212). All were concerned with therapy of the passions, which enslaved man and alienated him from his true self. The task of spiritual exercises was thus both liberatory and moral. "The 'self' liberated in this way is no longer merely our egoistic, passionate individuality: it is our *moral* person, open to universality and objectivity, and participating in universal nature or thought" (Hadot 1995:103). Thus the spiritual exercises were able to lead the disciple towards the good, towards a way of life which is literally *philosophia*, love of wisdom, which itself is nothing other than seeing the world as it really is and living in accordance with that vision.

Sorabji (2000:213) cites as a typical example the Pythagorean exercise of attending a feast, but then renouncing it and leaving it for the servants. The purpose was to practice renunciation of extravagant pleasures, dependence on such extravagance being a cause of turmoil in the soul. Another example is Epictetus' Stoic exercise of fortification against future loss: "You should start with a favourite pot and work up to your wife and children, reminding yourself, even as you kiss them, that one day they will be no more. Then you will be able to withstand the loss" (Sorabji 2000:216). This sort of expectation of misfortune was also a feature of other schools: the *praemeditatio malorum* was a favourite exercise of the

Pythagoreans (Thom 1995:140).

Another exercise was reviewing a day's actions prior to sleeping, as a means of cleansing the mind of guilt, anxiety, etc. in order to prevent bad dreams and encourage good ones. Emptying oneself of passions prior to retiring each evening was a normal procedure for Pythagoreans "in order that the soul not be troubled by bad dreams, which were seen as visitations of evil *daimones*, but would be able to receive good dreams (connected with good *daimones*) instead" (Thom 1995:165).

The *Meditations* of the Stoic Marcus Aurelius are a rich repository of such spiritual exercises. For example, Marcus exhorts himself in Book Five as follows: "At day's first light have in readiness, against disinclination to leave your bed, the thought that 'I am rising for the work of man'" (5.1; trans. Staniforth 1964:77). A wide variety of such exhortations are found throughout the *Meditations* and they illustrate well the diversity of spiritual exercises carried out within one of the major Hellenistic schools.

2.4.2 Epicurean exercises

Although many of the spiritual exercises were common to various philosophical schools, the Epicureans had their own chosen set of exercises fundamental to the achievement of their philosophical and spiritual objectives. First and foremost, repetition and memorisation were key factors in all the Epicurean exercises.¹¹ For example, compilations of Epicurean sayings were widely used as a means of inculcating the essential tenets of the philosophy: "Their main goals were the practical ones of education and moral formation, hence the majority of them contain material that could easily be memorized" (Malherbe 1986:105). In other words, the material was purposely condensed into aphoristic form by Epicurus so as to facilitate memorisation and internalisation.¹²

Furthermore, it was the abundance of maxims, such as those in the *Kyriai Doxai*, that made possible the practice of Epicurean meditation, a rational spiritual exercise at once

¹¹Clay (1998a:27) comments on the rationale behind memorisation of precepts, stressing that Epicurus meant his principles to be "impressed in the minds of his disciples so that they would endure as stable rhythmic movements of soul atoms which could not be confused or drastically altered by the incursion of new *eidola* and impressions from without.... But they could remain fixed in the mind only once they had been mastered with precision. And this was a matter of constant exercise".

¹²Thom (1995:145) notes a prevalent feature of many ancient schools: "Consoling and 'healing' by means of sayings was a common psychagogic practice".

imaginative and intuitive. Constant meditation on these rules helped to form the disciple into a new person, one with a philosophical orientation to the world. In his letter to Menoeceus, Epicurus stresses the importance of meditating on the basic aphorisms, and the benefits to be derived by the conscientious adherent: "Practise these...precepts day and night, by yourself and with a like-minded friend, and you will never be disturbed either when awake or in sleep, and you will live as a god among men" (*Ep. Men.* 135=IG I-4).¹³ Such practice is a valuable catalyst in bringing about the *ataraxia* sought by the disciple.

In addition to meditation on fundamental precepts, there was meditation on the ideal of the sage and on the leader of the school: "To show reverence for a wise man is itself a great good for him who reveres" (Epicurus *Sent. vat.* 32=IG I-6). This included acting as if the sage or spiritual leader – in particular, Epicurus -- were observing every action performed by the disciple.

Although each of the philosophical schools of antiquity had its own inner orientation to the world and way of speaking about it, as well as its own spiritual exercises (e.g., attention to the self, memorization of and meditation on dogmas, etc.), in all schools the meditation on death and on the present moment were of central importance: philosophy itself was particularly a meditation on death and an intense concentration on the present moment (Hadot 1995:59). The meditation on death is important precisely because it enables one to gain greater insight into the finitude of life, to understand and accept its natural end, to die with dignity (as Epicurus did), and to appreciate fully the value of the present.

Although living in the present moment takes on different meanings for Stoics and Epicureans, a readiness-for-death at every instant elevates the appreciation of the present moment of existence for both.¹⁴ This partly accounts for its importance as a psychagogic exercise: "Contemplation of one's mortality (...*meditare mortem*) forms an important exercise in the psychagogic process; it enables one, *inter alia*, to enjoy the present, no matter what the circumstances, and to live a morally responsible life" (Thom 1995:137). To put it another way, it is, paradoxically, the meditation on death that opens the path to a full appreciation of

¹³Regarding Epicurus' view of the therapeutic role of memorization, Erler has this to say: "For protection from illness of the soul it is necessary, in his opinion, that the medicine prepared by him be always at man's disposal. To such an end it is appropriate to learn his precepts" (Erler 1996:514; my translation).

¹⁴The Stoics shared a readiness-for-death with the Epicureans. The *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius is a book suffused with this attitude: "To live each day as though one's last, never flustered, never apathetic, never attitudinizing -- here is the perfection of character" (7.69; trans. Staniforth 1964:118).

life.

And life is lived always in the present: the past and the future are ever beyond our power, independent of us. The theme of the value of the present moment, in the face of eventual death, is linked to the fact that self-alienating passions arise through contemplation of the past or future. But the present is the appropriate focus, for that is where our life always resides. Meditation on the present moment "allows us to accede to cosmic consciousness, by making us attentive to the infinite value of each instant, and causing us to accept each moment of existence from the viewpoint of the universal law of the *cosmos*" (Hadot 1995:85). Attention to the present moment moves us towards inner tranquillity, the *ataraxia* which is the highest pleasure of the mind, and it allows us to experience the infinite value of the finite life.¹⁵

Horace's famous *carpe diem* is a summary of the value of the present moment: "Life ebbs as I speak: so seize each day, and grant the next no credit" (*Odes* 1.11.7). It is passion -- always concerned with the past or the future -- which diverts us from acceptance of the inestimable joy of the present moment. In taking us away from the present moment, passions take us away from the *only* moment, thus robbing us of the very joy of our own existence.

Attention to the present moment implies also a profound attention to oneself. This leads to the question of how one achieves the moral insight (*phronesis*) required to advance towards sagehood. Thom (1995:66) notes with respect to the *Golden Verses* -- a Pythagorean psychagogic work -- that "moral insight entails a set of criteria to apply in everything one does, the underlying principle being whether a specific action contributes to the ultimate moral good of the agent or not". Here, then, is a spiritual exercise in which a profound attention to oneself (*prosoche*) must form the basis of decision-making, not only in terms of consideration of consequences prior to an action undertaken, but in terms of post-action analysis as a means of both assessing moral progress and preventing future errors: "Control, practice, habituation, deliberation, and contemplation are therefore key words in this way of life" (Thom 1995:67). It is through these actions that one accedes to a cosmic perspective, to

¹⁵The same exercise is to be found in Eastern philosophy. Thich Nhat Hanh (2002:101) writes of the Buddhist practice of attention to the present moment and its relation to happiness: "When I breathe out I say, 'I am home.' If you do not feel you are home, you will continue to run. And you will continue to be afraid. But if you feel you are already home, then you do not need to run anymore. This is the secret of the practice. When we live in the present moment, it is possible to live in true happiness."

cosmic consciousness (in the sense of a profound awareness of one's connection with the Whole). In gaining an awareness of his actions and their moral consequences, the conscientious Epicurean disciple thus progresses ever more towards sagehood.

Attention to oneself is, *inter alia*, embedded within the various exercises associated with friendship: for example, the psychagogic exercise of critically reviewing the day's activities. The Pythagorean *Golden Verses* contain an example of such an exercise:

Do not welcome sleep upon your soft eyes
before you have reviewed each of the day's deeds three times:
"Where have I transgressed? What have I accomplished? What
duty have I neglected?" (40-2; trans. Thom 1995:97)

The emphasis in this exercise is clearly on the "I" and on the ability of the individual to assume responsibility for actions emanating from a growing mindfulness, an attention to oneself, *prosoche*.

Study was also an important spiritual exercise among the Epicureans -- first and foremost, study of the dogmatic treatises of the school. This provided essential material for meditation in order to thoroughly imbue the disciple with the basic precepts of Epicureanism. Such fundamental texts were central to the spiritual exercises of all the schools. In comparing the Pythagorean *Golden Verses* with the Epicurean *Kyriai Doxai*, Thom (1995:75) notes that the function of such texts "is clearly to introduce the student in summary fashion to a very specific way of life, based on certain philosophical and religious doctrines".

The study of physics was of particular importance to the Epicureans. Through it the Epicurean disciple might gain a correct view of reality, a proper understanding of the material world of which humanity is a part, and in doing so place in an appropriate cosmic perspective the finite life of man, thus rendering an individual's actions more consistent with his own true self. It also allowed one to approach the infinite: "Remember that, although you are mortal and have only a limited life-span, yet you have risen, through the contemplation of nature, to the infinity of space and time, and you have seen all the past and all the future" (Hadot 1995:266).

Epicurus himself extols the virtue of study of nature in its relation to *ataraxia*: "I recommend constant activity in the study of nature; and with this sort of activity more than any other I bring calm to my life" (*Ep. Hdt.* 37=IG I-2). The study of nature is consistently linked by Epicurus to the highest pleasure of the mind: "[D]o not believe that there is any other goal to be achieved by the knowledge of meteorological phenomena...than freedom from disturbance and a secure conviction" (*Ep. Pyth.* 85=IG I-3). In other words, theory,

although it enhances our knowledge of reality, is never an end in itself: its goal is consonant with that of all the spiritual exercises -- *eudaimonia* through *ataraxia*.

Because of the close relationship between letters and oral communication (orality being a pervasive feature of both the society of the Hellenistic philosophers and their psychagogic practices), letter-writing became a psychagogic exercise common to various schools, including the Epicureans. And there were many epistolary types: consoling, admonishing, instructive, censorious, etc. (Malherbe 1986:80-1). Epicurus' main purpose in the letters which have come down to us was principally to propagate philosophy and to offer moral instruction. His letter to Menoeceus, for example, is the single most important source for Epicurean moral philosophy; his advice to Menoeceus covers, among other things, the reasons for studying philosophy, an outline of spiritual exercises requiring constant practice, and an explication of the four strands of the *tetrapharmakos*, as well as an essential Epicurean definition of "the pleasurable life" as "sober calculation which searches out the reasons for every choice and avoidance and drives out the opinions which are the source of the greatest turmoil for men's souls" (*Ep. Men.* 132=IG I-4). This is a conception far removed from the vulgarisations of Epicurean hedonism that have gradually crept into popular discourse.¹⁶

Another distinctly Epicurean spiritual exercise is *avocatio-revocatio*. The Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius hints at such an exercise when he says, "O the consolation of being able to thrust aside and cast into oblivion every tiresome intrusive impression, and in a trice be utterly at peace!" (*Meditations* 5.2; trans. Staniforth 1964:78). This is precisely what the Epicureans sought to accomplish by detaching thought (*avocatio*) from painful things and reattaching it (*revocatio*) to pleasurable things so as to heal the anguished soul. Rather than anticipating misfortune in order to prepare themselves to bear it at some future time, as the Stoics did, the Epicureans sought to recapture memories of past joys and to savour present ones, for they recognised the agreeable nature of such pleasures.

In the absence of teleology and an afterlife, the Epicureans had to confront the question of how to simulate the confident feeling bestowed upon the disciple of religion, whereby it is believed that the beloved who has died is now at peace, in the hands of God, in "Heaven", etc., the soul having survived the body's dissolution. How is such consolation to

¹⁶"[Epicurus] was regarded as the representative of a hedonism which owed allegiance to the stomach rather than the mind. This misinterpretation of Epicurean ethics has a long history, which can be traced back even as far as Epicurus' own circle" (Erler and Schofield 1999:643). See also Sedley (1976).

be approached in the absence of such belief? The Epicurean technique of *avocatio-revocatio* is one part of a solution to this problem, for its practice contributes to dispelling even that most severe anguish associated with the death of a loved one.¹⁷ (For the Epicureans, this consolation is augmented by an appropriate understanding of the nature of death, which will be examined in Chapter 4.)

Sorabji (2000:88) observes that a similar therapeutic benefit derives from music. Commenting on Philodemus' *On Music*, he notes that music is a fine Epicurean therapy: "Instead of changing people's judgements on rational questions, wordless music merely distracts people and makes them inattentive (*anepibletoi*) to their emotional concerns". In other words, music can help *detach* our thought from painful things and *reattach* it to something pleasant.¹⁸

Pleasure itself is a spiritual exercise for the Epicureans, principally the pleasure experienced from the study of nature, the joy of contemplation of past and present experiences, and, most of all, friendship. We have seen already how contemplation of nature was a source of pleasure and a principal means of bringing calm to Epicurus, and how the Epicurean exercise of *avocatio-revocatio* brings about the reattachment of thought to pleasures past or present. Yet friendship, more than anything else, brings about the blessed life for man. The Epicurean maxim about friendship dancing around the world "announcing to all of us that we must wake up to blessedness" (*Sent. vat.* 52=IG I-6) is indicative of its importance to Epicureanism as a whole, as is *KD* 27: "Of the things which wisdom provides for the blessedness of one's whole life, by far the greatest is the possession of friendship" (IG I-5).

Furthermore, within the exercise of friendship are key psychagogic practices which are capable of further enhancing *consolatio* and spiritual growth: public confession and mutual correction -- both carried out in a spirit of friendship -- and self-examination of one's conscience.¹⁹ Thus we find the Epicurean Garden community a practical, living spiritual

¹⁷With respect to *avocatio-revocatio*, it is interesting and enlightening to compare Schopenhauer's view of past joys with that of Epicurus. For Schopenhauer, something "which *has been* no longer *is*; it as little exists as does that which *has never been*" (*Essays and Aphorisms*; trans. Hollingdale 1970:51). This applies to past joys as much as to anything else in the past. Compare this with Epicurus in extreme pain on his deathbed, experiencing the joy of remembered joys! For him an experienced joy formed part of a reservoir to be drawn from for spiritual sustenance when the need arose.

¹⁸For an example of how the Epicurean technique of *avocatio-revocatio* was adapted within Christianity, see Holloway (1998).

¹⁹See Hadot (1995:89); Glad (1995); Konstan et al. (1998).

exercise.

Yet philosophy itself is the all-embracing spiritual exercise. The term *cosmopolitan*, coined by Diogenes the Cynic, derives its meaning from a particular attitude of Hellenistic philosophy, as Philo of Alexandria notes in pointing out the utter engagement of those who adopt the spiritual exercise of *philosophia*:

As their goal is a life of peace and serenity, they contemplate nature and everything found within her: they attentively explore the earth, the sea, the air, the sky, and every nature found therein. In thought, they accompany the moon, the sun, and the rotations of the other stars, whether fixed or wandering. Their bodies remain on earth, but they give wings to their souls, so that, rising into the ether, they may observe the powers which dwell there, as is fitting for those who have truly become citizens of the world. (*De Specialibus legibus* 2.44-5; trans. Colson 1984)

Though inspired by Stoicism, this passage also describes the Epicurean conception of *philosophia* as a mode of being-in-the-world, which had to be practiced constantly, for its aim was the transformation of the very life of the disciple. Thus, philosophy is at once a spiritual exercise in the art of living, as well as a gradual progression to a higher mode of being, one which includes a cosmic consciousness on the part of the disciple. It is an overcoming of the self-alienation caused by passions, and a reclaiming of one's authentic self.

The spiritual exercises taken as a whole lead the disciple towards a way of life which is literally *philosophia*, love of wisdom, itself nothing other than seeing the world as it really is and living in accordance with that vision. In doing so, the exercises bring *consolatio*, healing the anguished soul and encouraging the disciple to overcome the fragmenting energies of the passions and to live a free and authentic life.

2.5 The *Tetrapharmakos* as Summary and Cure-All

The essential message of Epicurean ethics -- the *raison d'être* of [Epicurus'] philosophical enterprise -- was encapsulated in "the fourfold remedy" or *tetrapharmakos*... (Long 1986b:283).

The *tetrapharmakos*²⁰ is first and foremost an emblem, and a summary, of the main tenets of Epicureanism.²¹ It is normally expressed as a reduction of *KD* 1 to *KD* 4 more or less as follows: There is nothing to fear in the gods; there is nothing to feel in death; good can

²⁰ According to Gordon (1996:61) "the name *tetrapharmakos* ('fourfold remedy') cannot be traced back any further than Cicero or Philodemus".

²¹ Frischer (1982:73) notes: "The *tetrapharmakos*, or fourfold medicine, consists of four simple precepts, the acceptance of which, according to Epicurus, forms the foundation of the soul's health". Erler and Schofield (1999:645) elucidate further: "The state of happiness to which man aspires is attained by eliminating illusions about the gods; by achieving the correct attitude towards death; and by confining desires to goals that are within easy reach. These principles are formulated in the so-called *tetrapharmakos*...".

be readily attained; evil can be easily endured. This can be shortened into a balanced mnemonic signifier of Epicurus' lessons, highlighting the four major themes of Epicurean ethics:

Gods: nothing to fear; **Death:** nothing to feel;

Good: can be attained; **Evil:** can be endured.

Here, when the full meaning is understood, we have a mantram which can be repeated from memory as a meditative spiritual exercise that functions therapeutically to provide *consolatio*. How does it function so? In that the very repetition of it constitutes a *consolatio*, confers solace and encouragement. And the more pregnant with meaning the words of the *tetrapharmakos* become -- through the practice of its implicit spiritual exercises and as a result of the degree of transformation already achieved by the disciple -- the more effective and meaningful the mantram becomes in providing *consolatio* in the face of existential and situational anguish. Thus we have the *tetrapharmakos*, an emblem signifying the supreme lessons of Epicureanism, as meditative spiritual exercise in the form of a mantram.

But the *tetrapharmakos* also suggests a host of other spiritual exercises. For example, with respect to *KD 4*, the *tetrapharmakos* simply states that evil can be endured. Within this simple statement, however, are implied many exercises which both reinforce the message of the *tetrapharmakos* and enable the disciple to cope with potentially painful situations. To give but a few examples (all of which will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters), we may cite the technique of *avocatio-revocatio*, which makes evil (pain) easier to endure; the community of friendship, which enhances good (pleasure); and the study of nature, which, by revealing the world as it actually is, eliminates fear of gods and of death.

The multi-faceted *tetrapharmakos* can therefore be understood and appreciated as an emblem and summary of the most important aspects of Epicurean ethics, a mantram for meditation, a therapy providing *consolatio*, and a link to other spiritual exercises which together are capable of helping the disciple to advance towards sagehood -- that is, to live in a philosophical way.²²

The following lines from the Pythagorean *Golden Verses* exemplify a *consolatio*:

²²Clay (1998a:210) expounds on the *tetrapharmakos*: "This compound was made up of the first four of Epicurus' *Kyriai Doxai*, and it was something the Epicurean kept constantly before his mind's eye as a remedy to any threats to his peace of mind". Clay notes that its provenance was "the transfer of the term *tetrapharmakon* from a medicine to the group of four sovereign doctrines which the Epicurean could wear as a kind of amulet against the maladies of the soul".

But take courage, for mortals have a divine origin,
to whom Nature displays and shows each sacred object.
(63-4; trans. Thom 1995:99)

In just such a manner the *tetrapharmakos'* four strands offer consolation to those who recite the lines. For example, *KD* 1 and 2 are, *inter alia*, exhortations to courage, though for the opposite reason to that expressed in the line quoted above from the *Golden Verses*: namely, that divinities do *not* have an interest in man and, hence, he need have no fear of divine punishment, neither before nor after death. *KD* 3 reminds the disciple that it is not only possible, but relatively easy to attain the good; *KD* 4 informs him that evil need not be feared, for it is easy to endure it.

Thus the situational anguish caused by uncontrolled passions and consequent bad choices of action can be overcome; unavoidable evil, such as accident and illness, can be endured; even that existential anguish which poses the greatest threat to man's repose -- fear of death and everlasting punishment after death -- is seen, by virtue of the rationale underlying the *tetrapharmakos*, to be groundless. Thus the *tetrapharmakos* leads inevitably through *consolatio* to *ataraxia* and, hence, to happiness (*eudaimonia*).

The ultimate consolation provided by Epicureanism to its disciples, though, was through the process of conversion to Epicurean philosophy as a *way of life* summarised by the *tetrapharmakos*: Nothing to fear in gods; nothing to feel in death; good can be readily attained; evil can be easily endured. These strands of the *tetrapharmakos* will be examined more closely in the chapters which follow.

CHAPTER 3

FIRST REMEDY: *NOTHING TO FEAR IN GOD*

The first and, ethically speaking, the most important point to understand about the divine nature is that god is a living being who is imperishable and blessed. This conception of god is both the beginning of a right understanding of god and of the appropriate relationship of human and divine beings that is a necessary part of the good life, and it is also the most basic expression for the idea of god common to all humanity before religious doctrine, cultural education, and mistaken inferences multiply that idea into the variety of gods found in religious traditions the world over. (Preuss 1994:38)

In Epicurus' time the existence of immortal gods was generally believed in.¹ What had to be shown, if men were to free themselves from slavery to fear, was that the gods are in control neither of the cosmos nor of men's lives, and, furthermore, that they are blessed and indestructible beings with no interest in rewarding or punishing men's actions, neither in this life nor after death. Hence, not only is there nothing to fear in gods, but they serve as the supreme models for man in his search for an appropriate way of living and a realistic conception of piety. The precise nature of these Epicurean gods is an issue of ongoing debate,² but it can be argued that on any of the major interpretations, an Epicurean could reasonably expect, on the basis of the first remedy of the Epicurean *tetrapharmakos*, to find *consolatio* in a world without teleology or god-direction.

3.1 Fear of the Gods

Do not proud monarchs flinch, stricken in every limb by terror of the gods and the thought that the time has come when some foul deed or arrogant word must pay its heavy price? (Lucretius, *Rer. nat.* 5.1222-5; trans. Latham 1951:208)

The first part of the *tetrapharmakos* concerns divinity: *Nothing to fear in god*. Yet what does this mean? What was there for man to fear in god? First of all, let us recall the fact that even before Epicurus' time, it was common for men to view the gods with a mixture of awe and fear. Why? Because their wisdom, power, and immortality suggested to mortals that in view of a badly-lived life the gods might be inclined to inflict punishment after death. Festugière (1955:51) reminds us of the religious heritage of ancient Greece: "Ever since men in Greece had believed in the existence of gods -- and this belief seems to go back to an

¹Festugière (1955:51-72) discusses this phenomenon at length.

²Purinton (2001:181-231) summarises the debate on the nature of the gods.

unfathomable antiquity -- they had thought also that the gods rule human affairs". Thus, not only did the gods have a long history in the Greek world, they were in control of the lives of men. Therefore it was natural for men to think that, in good times, the gods were favouring them; in bad times, the gods were -- perhaps for some inexplicable reason, perhaps for commission of sins or omission of rites -- hostile, even actively punitive. In one sense, though, Greek religion was like any other religion in its status as "one of the sentiments most deeply rooted in the heart of man" (Festugière 1955:51). This status is what accounts for the ubiquitousness of religious belief among various peoples over time, including that of the ancient Greeks.

The gods, then, were regarded as powers superior to man, powers that -- since they ruled human affairs -- were to be feared and, hence, placated if man's life were to be happy, or at least bearable. But herein lay the source of anguish: "As long as men ascribed to the gods the entire government of earthly matters they could not help but live in permanent anxiety" (Festugière 1955:52), for how could they be certain that their actions were sufficiently pleasing to the gods? Men were thus in bondage to gods, and constantly full of fears: fear of pollution, evil omens, prophetic dreams, and the like (Festugière 1955:53). As Clay (1998a:84) has noted, "Both Epicurus and Diogenes ... reflect on the agitation created by popular views of angry and vengeful gods". Yet, not only fear but also hope imprisoned men: "fear, because they always had to dread that by an omission, even involuntary, of some ritual observation they might have offended the divinity ... hope, because it was always possible to believe that by purifications, sacrifices, and offerings the heart of the gods might be touched" (Festugière 1955:53-4). The key word here is *might* -- one could never be certain of moving the gods in one's favour. The life of man, then, in terms of his relation with the gods, was precarious even at the best of times.

It would have been bad enough were it only in this life that men had to fear the wrath of gods, but the anticipation of enduring torment after death was an even greater dread: "The belief in punishment beyond the grave had a long history in Greece, where the *Nekyia* of Homer, which all knew by heart, had popularized it" (Festugière 1955:56). Fear of the gods was therefore omnipresent, with respect to both their potential wrath towards the living and their eternal punishment of the dead.³

³Lucretius traces the process whereby humans have attributed to the gods control of celestial phenomena,

This was at once the religious climate of Epicurus' time and the main difficulty confronted by his philosophy, as therapy of anguish. His first care, therefore, was to banish a fear which served as a major obstacle to man's peace of mind (*ataraxia*) (Festugière 1955:57). It was Epicurus' belief that by learning the truth about the world men can become free, for the truth is that there is nothing to fear in god. It was erroneous belief which served as a basis for man's fears, and which Epicurus saw as one of the great evils to be remedied in life; in fact, the fear of god constitutes "one of the two main sources of anxiety among men" (Mansfeld 1999b:463), the other being fear of death. And, in large part, the goal of Epicurus' philosophy, in general, and of the first remedy, in particular, was to free men from the bondage of such fears. But how did Epicurus attempt to accomplish this? The answer is not quite as straightforward as we might wish.

3.2 Primary Sources: Words of the Master

The man who denies the gods of the many is not impious, but rather he who ascribes to the gods the opinions of the many. (Epicurus, *Ep. Men.* 123=IG I-4)

There are serious problems with the evidence on which the current perception of Epicurean theology is based, problems which hamper our efforts to gain a precise understanding. The matter is serious because it is important to arrive at a clear conception of what the Epicurean gods are like; for, if they exist (i.e., if Epicurus was not a "closet" atheist), then in order to determine whether they can harm us, we must know something of their essential nature. We shall begin by going to the principal writings of the Master himself, as preserved by Diogenes Laertius. Consider Epicurus' *Letter to Menoeceus*:

First, believe that god is an indestructible and blessed animal, in accordance with the general conception of god commonly held, and do not ascribe to god anything foreign to his indestructibility or repugnant to his blessedness. Believe of him everything which is able to preserve his blessedness and indestructibility. For gods do exist, since we have clear knowledge of them. (Epicurus, *Ep. Men.* 123=IG I-4)

Adding to this excerpt, we have the first of the forty Principal Doctrines (*Kyriai Doxai* or *KD*) of Epicurus, *KD* 1: "What is blessed and indestructible has no troubles itself, nor does it give trouble to anyone else, so that it is not affected by feelings of anger or gratitude. For all such things are a sign of weakness" (*Ep. Men.* 139=IG I-4). The terms *blessed/blessedness* and *immortal/indestructible* are the key defining concepts of god-nature. Thus our very conception of divinity *qua* divinity precludes our attributing to the gods un-

immortality, and an abiding interest in the affairs of men (*Rer. nat.* 5.1161-1240; trans. Latham 1951:206-9).

godlike motives, behaviours, etc. (i.e., we are bound by the dictates of logical consistency).

Epicurus tells us about god-nature by ruling out certain conceptions of divinity. In response to the commonly-held misapprehension that the natural phenomenon of chance is divine, Epicurus offers critical comment:

And he [the wise man] believes that chance is not a god, as the many think, for nothing is done in a disorderly way by god; nor that it is an uncertain cause. For he does not think that anything good or bad with respect to living blessedly is given by chance to men, although it does provide the starting points of great good and bad things. (*Ep. Men.* 134=IG I-4)

The randomness of chance or fate, then, is inconsistent with the blessed life of the gods. Thus chance is not divine. Nor are heavenly bodies themselves blessed gods -- "worship of the world and the heavenly bodies as divine beings" (Thom 1995:211) going back at least to Plato -- for such a state of activity is contrary to god-nature:

... one must believe that movements, turnings, eclipses, risings, settings, and related phenomena occur without any [god] helping out and ordaining or being about to ordain [things] and at the same time having complete blessedness and indestructibility; for troubles and concerns and anger and gratitude are not consistent with blessedness, but these things involve weakness and fear and dependence on one's neighbours. (*Ep. Hdt.* 76-77=IG I-2)

With respect to this mistaken notion, Epicurus instructs us further as to how to view the gods: "we should grasp the orderliness of the cyclical periods [of the heavenly bodies] [as happening] in the same way that some of the things which also happen in our experience [occur]; and let the nature of the divine not be brought to bear on this at all, but let it go on being thought of as free from burdensome service and as [living] in complete blessedness" (*Ep. Pyth.* 97=IG I-3). Once more, the word *blessedness* comes to the fore in characterising the nature of a being utterly unconcerned with the workings of nature.

Thus, a god troubled by worldly concerns is no god at all, it seems, particularly one enmeshed in every movement of the cosmos, for such troubles are a contraindication to the blessed state of the divine:

... one must also conceive that the worst disturbance occurs in human souls [1] because of the opinion that these things [the heavenly phenomena] are blessed and indestructible and that they have wishes and undertake actions and exert causality in a manner inconsistent with those attributes, and [2] because of the eternal expectation and suspicion that something dreadful [might happen] such as the myths tell about. (*Ep. Hdt.* 81=IG I-2)

Those writings of Epicurus which survive clearly emphasise the blessedness and indestructibility of the gods, who seek the highest good, which in Epicurus' hedonistic ethics means the highest pleasure, *ataraxia*. And the true nature of the gods is the key to understanding that, in themselves, they pose no danger to man -- that, in fact, only through

man's misconstrual of them do they become fearsome entities. A correct understanding of divinity is therefore paramount for Epicurus -- it is the truth that sets man free from fear.

3.3 Secondary Sources: Tenuity and Contention

For it is essential to the very nature of deity that it should enjoy immortal existence in utter tranquillity, aloof and detached from our affairs. It is free from all pain and peril, strong in its own resources, exempt from any need of us, indifferent to our merits and immune from anger. (Lucretius, *Rer. nat.* 2.646-51; trans. Latham 1951:79)

The primary sources for our understanding of Hellenistic philosophy in general are sparse indeed. Mansfeld (1999a:5) notes that "Epicureanism has fared comparatively well, because we still have three didactic letters written by Epicurus himself as well as a collection of aphorisms, the so-called *Key Doctrines (KD)*, all preserved by Diogenes Laertius book x". Other than these there is little else directly from Epicurus. The remaining major sources are secondary and centuries later: Cicero (principally *De natura deorum*), and later Epicureans -- Lucretius, Philodemus, and Diogenes of Oenoanda. Once we leave the words of Epicurus, however, and venture forth into other ancient sources -- and, *a fortiori*, into modern ones -- we begin to encounter difficulties, ambiguities, uncertainties. For not only is the evidence obscure, it is often so imprecise as to be open to a wide variety of interpretations. Preuss (1994:43) notes the difficulties presented by the surviving textual material, particularly with respect to Epicurus' views regarding god-nature:

That is a difficult question. The textual evidence is obscure, and there is no generally accepted interpretation of these difficult texts. The central text in most interpretations is Cicero who prefacing his report with the warning that Epicurus' discoveries are "too acute, and his words to [sic] subtle, to be appreciated by just anyone" for they are about "hidden and profoundly obscure things".⁴

As for the difficulties of precise translation, Purinton (2001:181, 187), in a recent essay, speaks of the perils of a "thicket of jargon" which is unlikely ever to be sorted out to the satisfaction of all Epicurean scholars, and of the "puzzling pieces of evidence provided by our sources". Mansfeld (1993:172) similarly notes the uncertainties associated with a "vexing and much debated subject", namely the nature of Epicurus' gods: "The texts at our disposal are not numerous, and some of the more important later reports about his views are notoriously difficult and even hard if not *impossible* to reconcile with each other, or perhaps even to make sense of" [my emphases]. Let us turn now to the "texts at our disposal" and, in

⁴The passage quoted by Preuss is from Cic. *ND* 1.49=LS 23E.

particular, to the main problematic sections in Epicurean writings concerning the gods' existence and nature.

The main contentious passages regarding the nature of the Epicurean gods are those from the scholion on *KD* 1 and Cicero's *De natura deorum*. Disagreement on the meaning of these passages has led to fundamentally differing views concerning the essential nature of the gods. To begin with, the scholion on *KD* 1 is problematic: "[H]e says that the gods are seen by reason, some numerically distinct, others with formal unity, resulting from a continuous influx of similar images to the same place, and human in form" (Scholion on *KD* 1=LS 23G). Thus, one is led to ask whether Epicurus means that there are two kinds of gods. And what does "numerically distinct" versus "formal unity" mean? And where is the "same place" to which the "similar images" continuously flow? This passage is the only text which apparently distinguishes two types of gods,⁵ leading to the problem of *Götterklassen* -- that is, whether or not there are two distinct classes of gods⁶ and, if so, what distinguishes them.

Purinton (2001:182) notes that "Epicurus says that the gods exist. But he also says that nothing exists except bodies and void." He goes on to ask, "Are the gods *bodies*, then, according to Epicurus?" This question concerning the nature of the gods' bodies is another contentious issue in recent writings on Epicurean theology. On this, Cicero has provided some cause for argument. Speaking of the Epicurean position on the shape of the gods, he says that the "appearance is not [really] a body, but a quasi-body, nor does a god have blood, but quasi-blood". The Epicurean Velleius is speaking and says of the gods that they

are perceived not by the senses but by the intellect, and not in virtue of some solidity or numerical identity (like those things which because of their resistance he calls "solids" [*sterennia*], but rather because the images [of the gods] are perceived by virtue of similarity and transference; and since an unlimited series of very similar images arises from innumerable atoms and flows to the gods, our intellect attends to those images and our intelligence is fixed on them with the greatest possible pleasure, and so it grasps the blessed and eternal nature [of the gods]. (Cic., *ND* 1.49=IG I-16)

From this passage emerge several difficult phrases which continue to be the focus of debate among Epicurean scholars: *quasi-body* and *quasi-blood*, *similarity and transference*, and *to*

⁵Mansfeld (1993:201). On p. 204, Mansfeld suggests an explication of the scholion on *KD* 1 consistent with the traditional view that the gods are "out there" rather than mental constructs. Elsewhere (1999b:472) he cautions regarding "the heavily restored theological works of Philodemus, who like Cicero may reflect later developments and present an *Epicurus interpretatus*".

⁶See Lemke (1973) for a discussion of the problem of *Götterklassen*.

the gods, which some scholars have emended to *from the gods*.⁷

What does it mean to say that the gods do not have actual bodies, but rather *quasi*-bodies? Carried to the extreme, it means that they literally have no corporeal bodies, for they are thought-constructs;⁸ interpreted in another way, it means that they have finer bodies, like and yet unlike those of men.⁹

In speaking of the Ciceronian phrase applied to the means whereby images are seen directly by our mind -- that is, by *similitudine et transitione* -- Rist (1972:143) acknowledges that "these words have proved difficult to interpret", though he opts for Kleve's exposition (1963:91-96), in which the phrase "refers to a process of understanding by analogy". Along with analogy, the principle of *isonomia* -- that is, the principle that scarcity of a phenomenon in one region of the universe is offset by abundance in other regions (given that the universe is infinite), thus providing a basis for arguing in favour of the gods' indestructibility -- functions to establish that the gods are immortal, a necessary condition of their enjoyment of security in the form of freedom from pain of mind and body.¹⁰

Finally, it is not without reason that images streaming *ad deos* (toward the gods) in Cicero, "has often been emended to *ad nos* (towards us or, in other words, *from* the gods), for it is difficult to see, on the traditional account of gods as material beings, why the *eidola* would be flowing *to* rather than *from* the gods. The reason for this on the Long and Sedley (1987:145) interpretation (about which more will be said in the next section), in which gods are essentially conceptual constructs, is that while the images arise from the infinite supply of atoms, in flowing *to* the gods rather than *from* them, they converge on our minds and literally *become* our gods. Mansfeld (1993:195-6), on the other hand, supporting the traditional

⁷See Sharples (1996:58) and Mansfeld (1993:190-2), who objects to Long and Sedley's translation, as well as their interpretation. See also Lemke (1973:25) on the subject of the *eidola* flowing *to us* (as opposed to *to the gods*) in order for us to perceive the nature of the gods.

⁸See Long and Sedley (1987:145-9) for a full explication of this interpretation.

⁹Lucretius refers to the "flimsy texture" of their bodies "far removed from our senses" -- that is, perceived directly by the mind (*Rer. nat.* 5.148-9; trans. Latham 1951:175) ; see also Rist (1972:144) and Mansfeld (1993:208-9).

¹⁰See Rist (1972:145) and Lucretius (*Rer. nat.* 2.532-40; trans. Latham 1951:75-6); Mansfeld (1993:210) suggests that the gods *qua* gods are "incomparably better" than mortals at "warding off" what tends to diminish them materially.

interpretation, opts for the emendation to *ad nos*,¹¹ and proceeds to defend it by outlining an account of our perception of the gods on this basis.

It is essential to bear in mind that the primary function of Epicurus' philosophy is therapeutic -- that is, to lead the disciple away from anguish towards tranquillity. Whether one accepts a thought-construct view of the gods, as do Long and Sedley, or a purely materialist account of the gods as biological entities, as does Mansfeld, or some other variant of either (such as, for example, Purinton's [2001:187] self-proclaimed "dualistic" view of the gods), or even, on the other hand, regards Epicurus as a "closet" atheist, it is still possible to accept *KD* 1 as true -- that is, to agree that there is nothing to fear in god, on the basis of accepting the necessary attributes of the gods which guarantee the truth of *KD* 1 -- that is, in Epicurus' own words, their "blessedness and indestructibility" (*Ep. Men.* 123=IG I-4). Let us proceed to examine arguments which purport to lead the Epicurean disciple to *consolatio*.

3.4 Arguments to Dispel Fear and Bring Consolation

[A] central purpose of Epicurean religious teaching was to attack the idea that the gods have the motives for angry punishing action toward humans -- or, for that matter, for gratitude or favor -- that popular religion ascribes to them. The gods are complete: that is what it is to be divine, to be without limit or need. But, being complete, they have no interest in our world and no needs from it. (Nussbaum 1994:251)

In order to derive therapy from *KD* 1 the student must *believe* that if the gods exist, they are blessed and indestructible *in a way that precludes their having an interest in punishing or rewarding human actions*. The belief in immortal gods was already widespread in Epicurus' day, as we have seen; but so was the belief that the life of the gods was blessed (*makarioi*): "for all Greeks, the divine being, whatever its essence, is a being of perfect beauty who lives a life of harmony and serenity" (Festugière 1955:62). Yet the peculiar Epicurean sense of "blessed" differed from the common conception: "In the first place, Epicurus' gods, being without cares like the Sage, take no interest in human affairs" (Festugière 1955:61). This is the essential difference enabling Epicureans to both overcome fear and revel in pious imitation of the supremely blessed life of the gods. Thus a fundamental transition for the Epicurean student is to a realisation of the precise nature of the blessedness of the gods, a nature which follows logically from the Epicurean designation of pleasure as

¹¹Lemke (1973:23-41) favours the replacement of *ad deos* "to the gods" with *ad nos* "to us" in Cicero, *ND* 1.49, and sees the gods as immortal, material beings (a form of *sterennia*). See also Sharples (1996:58).

the good and *ataraxia* as the highest good. In such a way the twofold nature of the gods, their blessedness and indestructibility, becomes believable in Epicurus' time. What remains is to demonstrate that those beliefs which cause fear of the gods are logically inconsistent with an acceptance of their twofold nature.

Perhaps some could dispense with these fears by an act of will, by changing their beliefs alone, but Epicurus says much more than this -- that by learning the truth about the world men can become free, for the truth is that there is nothing to fear in god. Rather than merely using such a belief for utilitarian purposes, we can come to understand that it is simply true. This makes our belief, and hence our tranquillity, all the stronger.

The Epicurean arguments concerning the gods are essentially threefold: 1) the gods exist; 2) they are blessed and immortal, and hence uninterested in human affairs; 3) they may be contemplated profitably by man: they have ethical relevance. We shall proceed to examine these three aspects of Epicurean god-nature in the following sections of this chapter.

3.4.1 That gods exist and how we know them; atheism

Epicurus tells us in his own words that there are gods and he tells us how we know this to be true. "For gods do exist, since we have clear knowledge of them" (*Ep. Men.* 123=IG I-4). Nothing further in the way of proof is contained in the surviving writings of Epicurus. Mansfeld (1999b:455) notes regretfully that "[n]o direct and unambiguous textual evidence survives which explains this epistemic process". We shall soon see that this ambiguity leaves the door open to differing interpretations concerning the nature of the gods' existence.

We have clear knowledge of gods, according to the Epicurean Velleius, who tells us that nature has "imprinted the conception of them in all men's minds" (Cicero *ND* 1.44=LS 23E). This preconception is called by Epicurus *prolepsis*, "a delineation of a thing, preconceived by the mind, without which understanding, inquiry and discussion are impossible" (*ND* 1.44=LS 23E). Furthermore, Velleius tells us that not only is the gods' existence given directly in this manner, but "nature has also engraved on our minds the view of them as everlasting and blessed" (*ND* 1.45=LS 23E). These atomic images which act directly on the mind, rather than on the senses, are of an extremely delicate nature, like the atoms of the mind, and are the material means by which we become aware of the gods

(Lucretius, *Rer. nat.* 4.722-48; trans. Latham 1951:152-3).

But what is this *prolepsis*? Preuss (1994:16) calls it "an epistemologically privileged concept" that is common to all men in all cultures. Specific doctrines can alter it into false beliefs as, indeed, have been widely held from ancient times. This "natural cognitive process with which we are all endowed by nature" is the origin of all religious conceptions. In fact, "a *prolepsis* is produced as naturally by a healthy human mind that is given sensory experience as body tissue is produced by a healthy human stomach (etc.) that is given food" (Preuss 1994:16). Mansfeld (1999b:472) contrasts such a preconception with "the muddled notions men derive from what happens when they are asleep, or construct e.g. in regard to cosmic phenomena ... or when ... men are incapable of sticking to the preconception and add further attributes which are incompatible with it". He goes on to note that in such cases the philosopher's task is "to point the way back to the correct preconception".

Not all thinkers in Epicurus' day were convinced, however, of his sincerity in proclaiming the existence of gods, particularly in view of his atomistic physics which, it seemed, might better be conjoined with godlessness. Thus Epicurus was accused of atheism: "In later antiquity the view that Epicurus was in reality a 'closet' atheist, whose statements and actions as regards the gods were only intended to placate a hostile public, in fact became the *communis opinio*" (Obbink 1996:12). Yet, we may ask why, if Epicurus were an atheist, he would assert the existence of gods, about whom we gain knowledge by means of atomic images which act directly on the mind. How did the ancient charge of atheism against Epicurus -- widespread in antiquity -- originate? According to Obbink (1989:188) its provenance is to be sought "in polemics over theology, epistemology, and cultural history, played out in the philosophical schools of the Hellenistic period", and, in addition to this, Epicurus' rejection of teleology and providence, together with his atomistic physics, made atheism a real possibility within his philosophical system.

Festugière (1955:59), however, lists Epicurus among the defenders of piety: "Far from reckoning Epicurus among the sceptics or the indifferent whose numbers were increasing at the end of the 4th century we must on the contrary regard him as one of those who reacted against the growing unbelief". Philodemus (*De Piet.* 19.520-27; ed. Obbink 1996:143) states the case even more strongly, saying that "those who eliminate the divine from existing things Epicurus reproached for their complete madness, as in book 12 he

reproaches Prodicus, Diagoras, and Critias among others ...". Again, Philodemus argues that rather than "subverting religion the Epicureans are the preservers of true piety. Whereas others have contaminated the worship of gods with false beliefs, the Epicureans are keepers of a genuine tradition of piety" (Asmis 1990:2383). And another Epicurean disciple, Diogenes of Oenoanda, "confronts this misconception directly by declaring that 'it is not we but other philosophers who do away with the gods' ... " (Gordon 1996:101). Finally, a strong statement against Epicurean atheism comes from Mansfeld (1993:186), who notes that when Epicurus says at *Ep. Men.* 123 that "knowledge of [gods] is vivid" he is, in essence, denying "that someone like Protagoras was right when he appealed to a 'lack of clarity' as a justification for agnosticism. So rigid atheism is excluded *a fortiori*".

3.4.2 *The gods' blessedness and immortality*

What does it mean to say the gods are "blessed"? In Epicurus' hedonistic philosophy it means they exist in a state of the highest good -- that is, the highest pleasure, *ataraxia*. It follows logically that they are in no way concerned with the affairs of the universe or of man: to show such concern would be a detraction from the state of supreme pleasure, from pure enjoyment of existence. The misconception of the gods as controllers, rewarders, and punishers is the cause of great distress among men; the cure is to correctly understand that the gods are not merely immortal, but also blessed -- that is, they have no reason to be concerned with affairs outside themselves, even if they were omnipotent. Yet how can we know this?

First, the universe does not exhibit the design one would expect from its having been created by gods. If the gods had made the world, perhaps we would have reason to fear them, for it would be clear that they had great material power, more than enough to inflict harm on man. But the gods couldn't have made, nor did they make the world. Turning to ancient secondary sources, we find Lucretius commenting on the general inhospitality of the planet for human life: "Even if I knew nothing of the atoms, I would venture to assert on the evidence of the celestial phenomena themselves, supported by many other arguments, that the universe was certainly not created for us by divine power: it is so full of imperfections" (*Rer. nat.* 5.195-9; trans. Latham 1951:177). Furthermore, as Gordon (1996:103) notes, "Diogenes ridicules the idea that the world was created for gods and people ... finds absurd ... the notion that a god would be a fellow citizen to mortals.... To Diogenes the notion that a divinity

created the world for himself is strange...; even stranger ... is the notion that god created the world for people". Lucretius cites another reason why the gods cannot be creators of the universe -- a logical impossibility given Epicurean empirical epistemology -- namely, that if the gods had created the universe, they would have first needed an idea of that which they wished to create. But from whence could come such an idea? Only from the action of atoms directly on the mind or senses. But if there were no world yet, how could this happen (*Rer. nat.* 5.181-94; trans. Latham 1951:176-7)?

Not only did gods not create the universe; neither do they keep it running. Going to the words of Epicurus, we find that, concerning meteorological phenomena, "one must believe that movements, turnings, eclipses, risings, settings, and related phenomena occur without any [god] helping out and ordaining or being about to ordain [things] and at the same time having complete blessedness and indestructibility" (*Ep. Hdt.* 76=IG I-2). Such problems and concerns would be contrary to a state of blessedness, and would involve "weakness", rendering the gods less perfect than they might otherwise be. Lucretius reminds his readers that "*nature is free and uncontrolled by proud masters* and runs the universe by herself without the aid of gods. For who -- by the sacred hearts of the gods who pass their unruffled lives, their placid aeon, in calm and peace! -- who can rule the sum total of the measureless?" (*Rer. nat.* 2.1090-6; trans. Latham 1951:92).

Nor do the gods reward and punish humans for good or evil deeds. These are not the actions of a blessed creature: "Among the false notions about the gods introduced at an early stage of civilization (according to the Epicurean theory of cultural history) is that they intervene in this world to reward the good, punish the bad, and so on" (Obbink 1989:197). Such intervention in the lives of men would be a disturbance to the gods themselves, and contrary to their blissfulness. With respect to the gods' possible malevolence or benevolence, the common experience of mankind in witnessing both evil and the unjust distribution of rewards in life constitutes empirical evidence that the gods do not trouble themselves on our account.

Yet if the gods are to be blessed, they must be immortal and impervious to bodily decay and pain of the sort suffered by humanity. Rist (1972:149) states the contrapositive: "For if the gods were not immortal, they would not be free from the bodily troubles of decay". But how is this possible? It is evident that either nature or the gods themselves must

act so as to preserve their physical existence over time.¹² At *ND* 1.18, Cicero mentions the gods' dwelling-place, the *intermundia*, or spaces between worlds, where the gods are less prone to the disruptive blows of atoms from without.¹³ Lucretius writes of the gods' location that "you must not suppose that the holy dwelling-places of the gods are anywhere within the limits of the world. For the flimsy nature of the gods, far removed from our senses, is scarcely visible even to the perception of the mind" (*Rer. nat.* 5.146-9; trans. Latham 1951:175). Thus, the Epicurean gods are not in our world, but in a place consistent with their composition, "of the same flimsy texture as their bodies" (Lucretius, *Rer. nat.* 5.153-5; trans. Latham 1951:175). Cicero mentions the law of *isonomia*, or equal distribution (*ND* 1.50): since even in the *intermundia*, the gods are "constantly being eroded by their throwing off of images", there must be "some counterbalancing forces of replenishment", without which the gods couldn't be immortal. "Hence when Cicero speaks of forces of conservation, he must refer to forces which lead to the conservation of bodies by the processes of actual replenishment" (Rist 1972:145). Suffice it to say that either the gods (who have "come into existence from eternity" [Rist 1972:153]) are capable of warding off destructive forces themselves¹⁴ or they are protected in some way by nature.¹⁵ They have always existed; they will always exist.

Consider, now, what conditions would contradict the Epicurean *KD* 1. It asserts essentially that the reason we don't need to fear gods is that their blessedness and indestructibility render them immune to troubles themselves and, in the same way, to any propensity to bestow troubles on others, specifically mankind. Neither anger nor gratitude affect such gods, for they are not weak, and both anger and gratitude are signs of weakness.

Thus we can ask: what kind of god would bestow anger or gratitude on mankind and,

¹²See Rist (1972:149), who gives a useful summary of the complexities of god-replenishment from both perspectives.

¹³"The Epicureans ... held that the gods have a body that, though similar to a human body, is made of much finer stuff.... From the fine texture of the gods, as Lucretius shows, the Epicureans in turn inferred that the gods cannot have an abode in this world, since the world is too coarsely textured to support them; thus the gods live in the interspaces between worlds" (Asmis 1984:316).

¹⁴Mansfeld (1993:210) concludes that "the idea that the gods, just as ordinary living things, are capable of assimilating what suits them and of warding off what does not, but that they are incomparably better at this than mortals, is not really far off".

¹⁵"[A]ll their wants are supplied by nature" (Lucretius, *De rerum natura*; trans. Latham 1951:97).

in doing so, contradict *KD* 1? Only such a god would be worthy of man's fear of consequences in this life or after it. Such a god is Yahweh, for example, who, "In the beginning ... created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1.1), and then, on the seventh day, "rested from all the work of creating that he had done" (Gen 2.3) -- hardly a picture of Epicurean bliss! Such a god not only labours, but is punitive: to Eve he says, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing"; to Adam, "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life" (Gen 3.17). On the other hand, those who are persecuted will receive their reward after death, in heaven (Matt 5:12). And, most significantly, prayer is effective: "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer" (Matt 21:22). All such divine attributes run counter to *KD* 1; but the Epicurean deities are a world apart from such a god, and they share neither his omnipotence nor his transcendence. On the contrary, they are composed essentially of the same clay as mankind and are subject, for the most part, to the same universal natural laws.

3.5 Divine Ontology: the Nature of the Gods

This is one of Epicurus' great intuitions. He does not imagine divinity as the power of creating, dominating, or imposing one's will upon the less powerful. Instead, it is the perfection of the supreme being: happiness, indestructibility, beauty, pleasure, and tranquillity. (Hadot 2002:121)

Our preconception tells us that the gods exist. They are blessed and immortal. We can imitate their blessedness and thereby approach godhood in our lives. But what is the ultimate nature of the gods? Of course they are atomic in some sense, like everything else in the Epicurean universe, but what does this mean?

3.5.1 *The gods as mental constructs*

The most influential position on gods as mental constructs in current debate is that of Long and Sedley (1987:149), who note that while Epicurus' advice regarding what we must *think* or *believe* the gods to be like "may suggest that they are actual living organisms" it is actually "no less consistent with their being mere thought-objects". Long and Sedley (1987:145) opt for the *ad deos* rendering of Cicero's passage, which they acknowledge as "our most promising technical report of [Epicurus'] theory". Gods then become "simply the product of streams of images with human shape which enter our minds and form in us idealized impressions of a supremely blessed existence. The images are said to arise from the

inexhaustible stock of atoms and to flow *to* the gods, not from them. That is, by converging on our minds they *become* our gods" (Long and Sedley 1987:145). Such an interpretation has, among others, the advantage of explaining easily the imperishability of the gods: first as everlasting concepts; second, as everlasting imagined beings which, by our own correct thinking of them, we preserve and benefit from (Long and Sedley 1987:145-6).

Obbink (1996:478) offers some support for the Long-Sedley view, for example, when from Philodemus' assertion that "... those who are oath-keeping and just are moved by the most virtuous influences both from their own selves and from those [gods]", he concludes that

[t]he notion that the good are "moved by the finest effluences" both from the gods and from *themselves* implies that we are to think of the two as more or less equivalent in this process of causation. This is highly suggestive of the view that according to Epicurus the gods exist even for the good and wise as their own conceptions of divinity, as "projections of their moral ideals".

And, in a recent essay, Purinton (2001:187) advances what he calls a "dualist" interpretation, which he admits is closer to Long and Sedley's "idealist" view, as opposed to the "realist" view (which he asserts is no longer the orthodox view), though he disagrees with Long and Sedley on the significance of Cicero's *transitio* at *ND* 1.49 and proposes a "subtler version" of their idealist interpretation.¹⁶

Nussbaum (1994:253), on the other hand, indicates just how contentious the issue of the gods' nature and dwelling is:

Do the gods have a substantial form of their own, or are they simply identical with the stream of *simulacra* that is the object of our awareness? If the former, how do they replenish themselves, given that *simulacra* are constantly peeling off? What resources do they have for this in the *intermundia*, and how, without trouble or action, do they secure these? If the latter, what sort of existence, what sort of self-sufficiency, is this? How is this life supposed to be a life of serene peace?

As if these questions were not enough, Nussbaum points to the major question that arises from these considerations, that concerning the ontological status of the gods -- that is, the question concerning whether or not they are merely our conceptual constructs. Nussbaum (1994:253 n.18) finds much to object to in the Long-Sedley position:

It requires placing a good deal of weight on a passage from Sextus Empiricus, who probably should not be regarded as a very reliable authority in such a matter. And their contention that each human constructs an image of divinity in accordance with his or her own personal norms makes the view far more subjectivistic than the evidence allows: for Epicurus plainly believes that he can criticize many

¹⁶In developing his "subtler position" on Long and Sedley's interpretation, Purinton (2001:184) outlines his view on the question of the gods' nature vis-à-vis the scholion on *KD* 1: "What, for example, is the nature of Zeus? My answer is this: Zeus is a 'dual-natured' ... being, a 'unity' from similar elements'... that becomes a 'unity from the same elements' ... as a result of the 'transcendence of the intervening gaps.... And although, as a nature of the former kind, Zeus does *not* exist 'numerically' ... yet, as a nature of the latter kind, he *does*".

widely held views of divinity as false and inappropriate; and he also thinks that it is the striking consensus on certain features of divinity that provides some evidence for the validity of those features.

Here we have come back to Epicurus himself and must now reconsider his own words concerning god-nature.

3.5.2 *The Gods as Biological Entities*

Mansfeld (1993:178) argues that Epicurus states clearly that god is "an 'animal' or 'living being'" at *Ep. Men.* 123=IG I-4, but that "Long and Sedley, and others, have forcefully argued that Epicurean gods are concepts, not living beings, by which they mean that they are imagined and idealized living beings, not real ones that exist in some sort of biological way". He goes on to invoke Epicurus' integrity when he asks, if this is the case, then "why didn't [Epicurus] say so?" (1993:179). In support of this Mansfeld (1993:179) points out that for Epicurus "words must be used in their primary (one is tempted to say proleptic) sense". Hadot (2002:122) also comes down on the side of living gods:¹⁷

We might think -- not without reason -- that such ideal gods are merely representations imagined by human beings and owe their existence only to human beings. Nevertheless, Epicurus seems to conceive of them as independent realities who maintain their eternal existence because they know how to ward off what could destroy them and what is alien to them.

Mansfeld (1993:175-189) argues that the surviving writings of Epicurus are of greatest significance in trying to get a clear picture of the Epicurean gods. Thus he goes to Epicurus' very own words (*ipsissima verba*) as the most important and reliable source (incomplete though it is) regarding the precise nature of the gods. For Mansfeld (1993:192), the gods are "out there". In response to the mental constructs theory, he notes with regard to the Ciceronian phrase that "to 'flow to the gods' ... means to flow to *the gods*, i.e. to something that is already there rather than to produce it by flowing and converging".¹⁸ As to their replenishment for the losses they suffer in losing atoms -- a problem which must be dealt with

¹⁷ See Rist (1972:140), who declares that the fact of nature's providing man with his general conception of the divine "renders impossible the theory of Scott that the gods are identical with the images of the gods" and that "it is even more destructive of the elaboration of Pfligersdorffer that these images are merely the projections of human ideals", etc.

¹⁸ Sharples' (1996:58) response to the question of whether or not the gods are merely thought constructs made from images from other sources is as follows: "... Epicurus is committed not only to the view that the stream of atomic images exists objectively, but also to the view that there are right and wrong notions about the nature of the gods in a way that there are no right notions about centaurs, except the notion that they cannot exist. The gods cannot therefore be simply arbitrary mental constructs...".

if the gods are to be immortal (as we have seen above) -- Mansfeld (1993:196) suggests that the images which "flow to" the gods are distinct from those which are apprehended by us. The latter arise from the gods themselves; the former, which arise from the innumerable atoms, are what replenish the gods and maintain their eternal existence.

A passage in Lucretius bears on the issue: "So mind cannot arise alone without body or apart from sinews and blood" (*Rer. nat.* 5.132-3; trans. Latham 1951:175). The gods have minds and, hence, must have sinews and blood -- albeit of a very fine texture -- like and yet unlike ours (*quasi*-body, *quasi*-blood?).

On either of the above interpretations of god-nature, it is possible to assert that *KD* 1 is true: the gods are not to be feared, for, whatever they are -- constructs or ethereal biological entities -- they lead a life of blessedness and have no worries, since they recognise the highest good and are able to secure it for eternity. An analysis of astronomy and physics shows that the gods are not involved in running the cosmos; logic tells us they are not inconsistent, as they would indeed be if they worried about the affairs of men; experience shows that they do not respond to men's prayers, nor do they dispense just rewards and punishments in accordance with men's deeds. If gods didn't exist (a conclusion arguably consistent with Epicurean materialism), there would literally be nothing for rational men to fear. But on Epicurus' account the gods do exist, and this is not without great value to man, for the blessed immortals remind us ever of the tranquil life that awaits us if only we choose it.

3.6 True versus False Piety: Ethical Relevance of the Gods

Well, then, you people, let us reverence the gods [rightly] both at festivals and on [unhallowed occasions, both] publicly [and privately ... and let not the imperishable beings be falsely accused] ... by us [in our vain fear that they are responsible for all misfortunes]... (Diogenes of Oenoanda, fr. 19; trans. Smith 1993:376)

How is it that the gods may be contemplated profitably by man? Because the gods seek pleasure just as man does, and they seek the highest pleasure, which they experience constantly: *ataraxia*. Hence they remain in a eudaimonistic state. This is the model for man's life. His natural end is the same, though he be mortal. Hence the gods serve as the epitome for man, provided that man preserve the image of the gods as they actually are and not be swayed by popular opinion, filled as it is with ignorance and distortion. In other words, we

play a role in gaining help from divinity, by our mode of conception of the gods.¹⁹ Easy though it may be to distort the gods in our conception of them, "the wise, who preserve a correct conception of the gods, derive a sense of immense calm and religious awe from perceiving and imitating their nature" (Obbink 1989:200). In this way, the gods show us the path to blessedness.

Let us turn to Epicurus' own words: "The man who denies the gods of the many is not impious, but rather he who ascribes to the gods the opinions of the many. For the pronouncements of the many about the gods are not basic grasps but false suppositions" (*Ep. Men.* 123-4=IG I-4). The Epicurean gods are ethically relevant to man, then, in that they represent the limit to which he is capable of aspiring -- if, that is, he truly understands their nature. The relation is asymptotic, as man -- no matter how close he approaches -- can never fully reach godhood, being mortal, but all men can potentially experience the blessedness of the gods through appropriate worship and imitation of them. Thus the religion of Epicurus differs from that of the common people in two ways: 1) Epicurus' care-less gods take no interest in man's affairs, know neither toil nor fatigue; and 2) man can partake of their happiness through ritual (Festugière 1955:62).

The benefits of and the extent to which man can approach the tranquillity of the gods are illustrated in a passage from Philodemus' *On Piety*: "'Let us sacrifice to the gods', Philodemus says, 'devoutly and fittingly on the proper days, and let us fittingly perform all the acts of worship in accordance with the laws, in no way disturbing ourselves with opinions in matters concerning the most excellent and august of beings.... For in this way it is possible for mortal nature, by Zeus, to live like Zeus, as it seems'" (Obbink 1996:167). To *live like* Zeus, then, is true piety, for in such manner men show their respect to the gods.²⁰

¹⁹Long and Sedley (1987:148) note that "god's primary existence is as a moral concept". In other words, even if one accepts Epicurean gods as biological entities, opting for some explanation or other for their indestructibility, their moral function will nonetheless be dependent on *how we think* of them.

Obbink (1989:200) describes the behaviour of the wise, who, since they correctly conceive gods, "derive a sense of immense calm and religious awe from perceiving and imitating their nature. For Epicureans, the restriction of divine attributes to those compatible with blessedness and imperishability is less a devaluation of traditional forms of piety than a source of deeper psychological dimension of religious ritual".

²⁰See Lucretius, *Rer. nat.* 6.43-95. Mansfeld (1999b:464) describes the state of mind of the Epicurean worshipper: "[T]he Epicurean is in a position to participate in traditional acts of worship provided he does so while concentrating on the correct conception of divinity. In the same state of mind he attends the religious ceremonies in honour of Epicurus, the members of his family, and of other prominent early Epicureans".

Thus Epicurus, in his depiction of the gods, establishes their power as a therapy of anguish, a power whose substance derives from a correct perception of the gods, for this is what constitutes true piety. What emerges most clearly, then, is that only in the form of our own thoughts about the gods are they able to harm us, for as we have seen, they possess no such will or ability of their own, these things being contrary to their state of imperturbable bliss. Lucretius indicates what lies in store for men who view the gods incorrectly, with false piety:

Poor humanity, to saddle the gods with such responsibilities and throw in a vindictive temper! What grieves they hatched then for themselves, what festering sores for us, what tears for our posterity! This is not piety, this oft-repeated show of bowing a veiled head before a graven image; this bustling to every altar; this kow-towing and prostration on the ground with palms outspread before the shrines of the gods; this deluging of altars with the blood of beasts; this heaping of vow on vow. True piety lies rather in the power to contemplate the universe with a quiet mind. (*Rer. nat.* 5.1194-1203; trans. Latham 1951:207-8)

He continues on with a description of how men create their own anxieties over the gods purely through their own wrong thinking about god-nature, and of how the futile efforts of men to placate the gods with prayer and sacrifice still do not yield the sought results. Yet rather than turning men to right thinking about the gods, the effect of all this is to plunge them further into superstition and subservience to omnipotent and cruel masters. The remedy for this brand of false piety is true piety as outlined by Epicurus; men must free themselves from irrational fears by recognising the nature and limits of the gods:

Unless you purge your mind of such notions and banish far away all thoughts unworthy of the gods and foreign to their tranquillity, then the holy beings whom you thus insult will often do you real harm. This is not because the supreme majesty of the gods can in fact be wronged, so as to be tempted in a fit of anger to wreak a savage revenge. No, the fault will be in you. Because you will picture the quiet ones in their untroubled peace as tossed on turbulent waves of anger, you will not approach their temples with a tranquil heart; you will not be able to admit into a breast at peace those images emanating from a holy body that bring to the minds of men their tidings of a form divine. From this you can gather what sort of life must ensue. (*Rer. nat.* 6.68-79; trans. Latham 1951:219)

The purging of the mind of "such notions" through understanding the essence of *KD* 1 constitutes a spiritual exercise capable of leading the Epicurean disciple to *consolatio* and *ataraxia*, and, therefore, ultimately to a eudaimonistic life. This is true *a fortiori* when *KD* 1 becomes associated with the various spiritual exercises implicit in an Epicurean understanding of divinity.

3.7 Spiritual Exercises for Piety, Consolation

To my knowledge, Epicurus was the first Greek philosopher to demand that his disciples memorize and constantly rehearse those of his doctrines which he considered of critical importance. (Clay 1983:80)

That *KD* 1 functions as a *therapeia* leading to *consolatio* is evident. But this strand of the *tetrapharmakos* suggests a host of other spiritual exercises for the disciple, exercises directed towards overcoming baseless fear of the gods. These exercises follow logically from Epicurus' atomism and from the hedonistic foundation of Epicurean ethics. All hinges on pleasure as the good; thus the highest beings seek the highest pleasure -- *ataraxia* -- in order to secure a life of happiness through undisturbed bliss. But this is logically inconsistent with gods' interest in (and expenditure of concern regarding) the cosmos and the life of man. Man is therefore on his own, so to speak, but fortunately has friendship, philosophy, physics, the example of the gods, and other exercises through which he can gain a right understanding of things and, hence, therapy of his anguish.

Epicurus, as psychagogue, constantly exhorts his disciples to *believe*, *memorize*, *practise*, *meditate on* his teachings. The surviving letters themselves constitute spiritual exercises at the heart of Epicureanism, designed to be memorised in order to transform the individual, leading him to *philosophia* and *consolatio*. Belief is crucial for Epicurus and his disciples -- the practice and control of one's beliefs. "Do and *practise* what I constantly told you to do, *believing* these to be the elements of living well. First, *believe* that god is an indestructible and blessed animal ... and do not ascribe to god anything foreign to his indestructibility or repugnant to his blessedness. *Believe* of him everything which is able to preserve his blessedness and indestructibility..." (*Ep. Men.* 123=IG I-4; my emphases).

Thus, belief is conjoined with practice: "*Practise* these and the related precepts day and night, by yourself and with a like-minded friend, and you will never be disturbed ... and you will live as a god among men" (*Ep. Men.* 135=IG I-4; my emphasis). This practice is manifold: it may consist in memorisation and recitation of the Epicurean precepts, alone or with a friend, or in religious rituals whose goal is not to influence the gods, but to show respect to one's correctly conceived deities; or it may consist in imitation of the blessed gods whom one wishes to be like. Thus the Epicurean prays,²¹ for example, and in doing so performs a spiritual exercise which enhances his life through partaking in a social ritual (yet seeing the ritual for what it is) and through picturing the limit to which he aspires -- that is,

²¹ See Obbink (1996:157), where Philodemus at *De Pietate* 26.730-50 says that "Epicurus loyally observed all the forms of worship and enjoined upon his friends to observe them, not only on account of the laws but for physical reasons as well. For ... he says that to pray is natural for us, not because the gods would be hostile if we did not pray, but in order that, according to the understanding of beings surpassing in power and excellence, we

the blessedness of the gods: "Numerous acts of worship by Epicurus and individual Epicureans are attested, including sacrifice, adoration of statues, dedications, mystery initiation, and participation in calendrical festivals and rites of private and ancestral cult" (Obbink 1989:200). And as to the power of the gods to influence us, Diogenes' insistence that statues of the gods ought to portray the gods as "genial and smiling, so that we may smile back at them rather than be afraid of them" (*The Epicurean inscription* fr. 19; trans. Smith 1993:376) is an exercise of imitation whose goal is transformative.

Epicurus makes very clear the connection between philosophy, which seeks a true understanding of things as they are, and happiness; and further, by implication, between philosophy and fear of the gods:

Let no one delay the study of philosophy while young nor weary of it when old. For no one is either too young or too old for the health of the soul. He who says either that the time for philosophy has not yet come or that it has passed is like someone who says that the time for happiness has not yet come or that it has passed. (*Ep. Men.* 122=IG I-4)

He goes on to stress the most important aspect of this study when he says that "one must *practise* the things which produce happiness, since if that is present we have everything and if it is absent we do everything in order to have it" (*Ep. Men.* 122=IG I-4; my emphasis). Thus philosophy becomes a practical spiritual exercise vis-à-vis fear of gods, a way of living on a daily basis such that happiness becomes an increasingly present state of being for the disciple. And philosophy's handmaiden in this enterprise is physics.

Epicurus tells us we must study the physical world, but he also emphasises that we must do this *only* in order to free ourselves from fear and anguish: "First of all, do not believe that there is any other goal to be achieved by the knowledge of meteorological phenomena, whether they are discussed in conjunction with [physics in general] or on their own, than freedom from disturbance and a secure conviction, just as with the rest [of physics]" (*Ep. Pyth.* 85=IG I-3). The purpose would be to "give a correct and complete causal account of the source of our disturbance and fear, and [so] dissolve them, by accounting for the causes of meteorological and other phenomena which we are constantly exposed to and which terrify other men most severely" (*Ep. Hdt.* 82=IG I-2). When it is seen, in other words, that natural phenomena can be accounted for by reference to other natural phenomena -- that is, without reference to the ever blessed gods -- then the disturbances which plague us will disappear.

With this representation of the gods -- as deities who embody the Epicurean way of life -- physics may realize our fulfilments and social conformity with the laws".

becomes an exhortation to practice concretely the initial option of which it was the expression. It thus leads to peace of mind, and to the joy of participating in the life of contemplation which the gods themselves lead. Like the gods, the wise man gazes into the infinity of innumerable worlds. The closed universe expands into infinity. (Hadot 2002:122)

There are other Epicurean spiritual exercises which have a role to play with respect to *KD* 1: for example, holding in mind a vision of the sage -- "To show reverence for a wise man is itself a great good for him who reveres [the wise man]" (*Sent. vat.* 32=IG I-6); the mutual support of friendship (as in the joint recitation and memorisation of Epicurean precepts), "by far the greatest" of those things which wisdom has provided for a blessed life (*KD* 27); *avocatio-revocatio*: in particular the turning of the mind away from fearful thoughts about the gods toward the consoling Epicurean precepts. In such a manner the "practice of philosophy ... becomes participation in a therapeutic process" (Thom 1995:213), and *consolatio* becomes a reality for the Epicurean disciple who conscientiously practices the exercises; he advances from *philosophia* to *phronesis*, from the love of wisdom to real, practical wisdom, and *ataraxia* increasingly suffuses his being.

On the Epicurean account of the cosmos and of man (as composed of matter and void), it is logical to believe that gods exist, that they are blessed and indestructible, and that reverence of them is conducive to a eudaimonistic life for man. In fact, on the Epicurean notion of *hedone* as man's ethical basis, with *ataraxia* as the highest pleasure, we can imagine the gods *only* as blessed, for anything less would imply less than divinity.

The majority of modern scholars have interpreted the Epicurean notion of gods as living beings, while others, as we have seen, have construed them as thought-constructs of one sort or another. Let us remind ourselves of the consequences of these views with respect to the first remedy of the *tetrapharmakos*. If the gods are conceived as thought-constructs, then there is surely nothing to fear other than ill consequences of our own misconceptions of them (i.e., conceptions inconsistent with divine nature -- fear of divine retribution is one such consequence). If the gods are regarded as living beings (biological entities), then there are no reasons to fear them except, once again, through our inconsistent understanding of god-nature, *unless* these material, biological entities possess both the power to influence our lives materially and an interest in doing so. The former is inconsistent with a correct understanding of physics and cosmology, and the latter is inconsistent with a correct understanding of the blessed imperturbability of the gods. (As for Epicurus *qua* atheist, there would be literally nothing to fear on this account, since there would be no gods at all.)

Thus the first remedy of the *tetrapharmakos* is, indeed, a therapy of the anguish caused by unrealistic fear of the gods. Yet there is one other fear to be disposed of, if man is to be consoled in the face of existential anguish and begin the positive project of living a blessed life: fear of death. This we now turn to in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

SECOND REMEDY: *NOTHING TO FEEL IN DEATH*

Cowards die many times before their deaths;
The valiant never taste of death but once.
Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,
It seems to me most strange that men should fear;
Seeing that death, a necessary end,
Will come when it will come.

(Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* II, ii, 32-37)

That death is complete extinction is the message forcefully driven home by the Epicurean analysis of the soul as a temporary amalgam of atomic particles.... The moral corollary, that you should not let the fear of death ruin your life, is a cardinal tenet of Epicurean ethics. (Long and Sedley 1987:153)

The second remedy of the *tetrapharmakos* concerns the second of the two great fears to which man is subject: death. Frischer (1982:208) observes that the Epicureans regarded death as "more damaging to peace of mind than all other fears except fear of the gods". The Epicurean position is stated clearly in the surviving writings of the Master, and it is necessary to go directly to the *ipsissima verba* as our starting point, and then to augment our understanding of Epicurus' words with further passages from later Epicureans and other philosophers. In these writings we shall see that death, as the material dissolution of body and soul, is a process at once natural, inevitable, and final.

4.1 Primary Sources: Epicurus on Body, Soul, and Death

The first thing which Epicurus strove to establish in his psychological theory was the complete and permanent loss of consciousness at death. (Long 1986a:49)

In order to comprehend the Epicurean view of the nature of death, it is essential to gain an understanding of the nature of the soul-body relation according to Epicurus, since it forms the basis for his assertions regarding the irrationality of our fears concerning our own death.

Let us consider first how the soul is distributed throughout the body and therefore possesses unique abilities. According to Epicurus the soul is material, a body consisting of "fine parts distributed throughout the aggregate, and most closely resembling breath with a certain admixture of heat, in one way resembling breath and in another resembling heat" (*Ep. Hdt. 63=IG I-2*). Epicurus mentions also a third part, much finer than the other two "and because of this ... more closely in harmony with the rest of the aggregate too. All of this is revealed by the abilities of the soul, its feelings, its ease of motion, its thought processes, and

the things whose removal leads to our death" (*Ep. Hdt.* 63=IG I-2).

The soul is also the seat of sense-perception, acquiring this ability by virtue of its containment and thorough integration within the body:

That is why, when the soul has departed, it does not have sense-perception. For it could not have acquired this power all by itself, but something else which came into being with it provided body [with this power]; and this other thing, through the power actualized in itself by its motion, immediately produced for itself a property of sense-perception and then gave it (because of their close proximity and harmonious relationship) to the body too... (*Ep. Hdt.* 64=IG I-2)

Furthermore, not only does its enclosure and distribution within the body enable the soul's power of sense-perception, the body as a whole also shares in this power.¹

Epicurus goes on in his letter to indicate that the soul's powers of perception are paramount, and that "the soul, as long as it is in [the body], will never lack sense-perception", but that a body bereft of its soul will lack these powers. Therefore, once the entire body is dispersed along with the soul, as in death, the soul will have lost its powers of sense-perception and motion. It is impossible in this case, says Epicurus, even to imagine the soul with its customary powers while no longer an integral part of the entire aggregate (*Ep. Hdt.* 65=IG I-2).²

Finally, Epicurus draws a conceptual limit to the term "incorporeal" by prohibiting its application to anything but void, for only void can "be conceived of as independently existing.... And the void can neither act nor be acted upon but merely provides [the possibility of] motion through itself for bodies" (*Ep. Hdt.* 67=IG I-2). Thus, argues Epicurus, it is an utter misconception to regard the soul as incorporeal, for this would rob it of its essential characteristics -- namely, the ability to perceive, and to act and be acted upon (*Ep. Hdt.* 67=IG I-2).

For Epicurus, then, body and soul are material entities, so integrated as to account for the salient features of living men -- intentions, perceptions, actions, etc. -- yet subject, like all

¹Lucretius, distinguishing "spirit" and "mind", tells us that they are "so conjoined as to constitute a single substance" (*Rer. nat.* 3.421-4; trans. Latham 1951:109). Regarding the composition of the mind he states, "Since, therefore, the substance of the mind has been found to be extraordinarily mobile, it must consist of particles exceptionally small and smooth and round" (*Rer. nat.* 3.203-5; trans. Latham 1951:102). He goes on to depict the human mind as consisting of wind, warmth, air, and a nameless mobile force which is the vital element of the vital spirit lurking at man's core (*Rer. nat.* 3.262-81; trans. Latham 1951:104).

²According to Lucretius, although the atoms of the body will soon enough be dispersed, at the moment of death the body of the deceased remains essentially intact, albeit lifeless: "Death leaves everything there except vital sentience and warmth" (*Rer. nat.* 3.214-5; trans. Latham 1951:102).

atomic structures in the universe, to a dissolution which constitutes the death of these same creatures.³ In the words of Lucretius, "The mind ... is a natural growth: it is composed of a body that had first to be born, and it cannot remain intact for all time" (*Rer. nat.* 5.59-61; trans. Latham 1951:172-3). Dissolving into the eternal flux, the ephemeral mind and body of man return to their origin.

4.2 The Fear of Death

For no one knows whether death may not be the greatest good that can happen to man. But men fear it as if they knew quite well that it was the greatest of evils. (Plato, *Apology* 17.29; trans. Cumming 1956:35)

Men fear death, as children fear to go into the dark; and as that natural fear in children is increased with tales, so is the other. (Bacon, *Essays* 1812:6)

There are two principal manifestations of the fear of death.⁴ First, there is the fear of everlasting *post mortem* survival and, consequently, of eternal punishment, a fear which is effectively confronted by Epicurean arguments concerning men's fear of gods.⁵ In any case, the atomistic philosophy of Epicurus leaves no room for *post mortem* survival, since both mind and body are subject to the same processes of dissolution as everything else in the universe (save the gods). Secondly, there is the fear of death as personal extinction, a fear independent of the eschatological considerations intrinsic to the fear of *post mortem* survival: "For the fear of going to the underworld is equalled by the fear of going nowhere" (Seneca, *Ep. mor.* 82.16; trans. Gummere 1930:251). A consequence of this fear is highlighted by Camus' famous pronouncement: "There is but one truly serious philosophical question and that is suicide" (1975:11). In other words, it may be questioned whether it is even possible to live a meaningful life in view of the fact that it may be cut off at any instant, one's desires, plans, relationships suddenly ended once and for all. Another consequence, and for some undoubtedly the greatest source of anxiety, is fear of the death of loved ones, especially their

³For Lucretius it is the exodus from the body of the atoms of mind and intellect which determines death: "While mind remains life remains" (*Rer. nat.* 3.402; trans. Latham 1951:108). In other words, when death has come, mind or sentience no longer remains; the atoms constituting mind and spirit have returned to the void.

⁴Here we are not considering that fear which has evolved as a protective mechanism for the species: "certain types of fear, by stimulating men (and animals) to take avoiding action, contribute to survival.... To cultivate such fears may be a rational course of action for a man or a society to take" (Furley 1986:84).

⁵For arguments that the fear of death was not as ubiquitous as Epicurus and others have suggested, see Cicero, *Tusc.* 1.48 and *ND* 1.86, 2.5. Lucretius' reply to such accusations is that the truth about men's fears is to be found in moments of adversity rather than in words uttered in calm circumstances (*Rer. nat.* 3.57).

premature death, as well as the fear of similar consequences to others of one's own death.

Epicurus suggests the importance of trying to preserve equanimity in the face of death-as-something-to-be-feared, when he conjoins this notion to the other cardinal goals of Epicurean philosophy in a portrait of the good man which embodies the *tetrapharmakos*: "For who do you believe is better than a man who has pious opinions about the gods, is always fearless about death, has reasoned out the natural goal of life and understands that the limit of good things is easy to achieve completely and easy to provide, and that the limit of bad things either has a short duration or causes little trouble?" (*Ep. Men.* 133=IG I-4).

Elsewhere Epicurus depicts the fear of death as a substantial source of anguish in several manifestations: the intellect's fear of death (*KD* 10=IG I-5), suspicions concerning death as an evil (*KD* 11=IG I-5), apprehensions regarding the limitations on pleasure imposed by finitude (*KD* 20=IG I-5), the power of communal living as a buffer against grief suffered upon premature death of loved ones (*KD* 40=IG I-5), man's universal subjection to death (*Sent. vat.* 31=IG I-6), and even the possibility of being driven to death by fear of death itself.

With respect to death there is one unavoidable problem for man: All men must die; there is no escape. As Epicurus puts it, "One can attain security against other things, but when it comes to death all men live in a city without walls" (*Sent. vat.* 31=IG I-6). This inescapable fact is the ultimate ground of the following fears associated with death.

4.2.1 Death as survival and torment

Lucretius, following in Epicurus' footsteps, discusses both the ways in which men fear death and the consequences of those fears. He speaks of the fear of death caused by an imagined Hell, but points out that such fears are unfounded, for it is in *this* life that men are so oppressed by their own unbridled passions that they live *as if* in Hell: "As for all those torments that are said to take place in the depths of Hell, they are actually present here and now, in our own lives" (*Rer. nat.* 3.978; trans. Latham 1951:126). One who accepts these words of Lucretius may yet fear survival, not because of the torment that lies waiting, but because of the otherwise unknown nature of such survival. The Epicurean response to this is that there is no survival, hence nothing about it to be unknown. Death for the individual person is simply an experiential blank, as was that person's pre-natal nonexistence; this is a reflection of the symmetry of nonexistence with respect to man's brief existence.

4.2.2 Death as a final (and possibly painful) end

Segal (1990:12) comments on Lucretius' view on death as follows: "For Lucretius, as an Epicurean thinker, death is a scientifically understood process, the dissolution of atoms. But death has another, darker side, hidden in the shadows: fear of the painful process of dying through massive physical injury and fears about annihilation, the total extinction of one's self, dissolution into nothingness". Epicurus, recognising this fear, has the following to say: "[O]ne must ... conceive that the worst disturbance occurs in human souls ... because they fear that very lack of sense-perception which occurs in death..." (*Ep. Hdt.* 81=IG I-2).

4.2.3 Death as a degradation of life's value

Is happiness possible in a mortal life? This question embodies the notion that the value of life is degraded by the fact that death awaits us all and will not be put off. Camus' identification of suicide as the fundamental philosophical question reflects this fear. Epicurus recognised the possibility of such an absolute flight from existence: "The many sometimes flee death as the greatest of bad things and sometimes choose it as a relief from the bad things in life" (*Ep. Men.* 125=IG I-4). Yet Epicurus reproaches a longing for death as much as he does a fear of death: "[I]t is absurd to pursue death because you are weary of life, when you have made death worth pursuing by your way of life.... So great is the folly, nay madness, of men that some are driven to death by the fear of death" (Seneca, *Ep. mor.* 24.22-23=IG I-150).

4.2.4 Death as the end of (or pain to) loved ones

Euripides asks rhetorically, "What greater grief can there be for mortals, than to see our own children, ash and bone" (*Suppliant Women* 1071-3; trans. Warren and Scully 1995:59). (In fact, it is precisely this worst of punishments that Medea inflicts on her husband, Jason, in Euripides' *Medea*.) The question also arises: "How will my family and my dearest friends cope with my (especially premature) death?" In an insecure world, such a question assumes significant proportions.

4.2.5 Death, fear, and consequences

Later Epicureans continued to recognise the fundamental importance of the second

strand of the *tetrapharmakos*. Philodemus speaks of death as something to be on guard against, of the importance of having learned "to bear up against natural pains and ... death" (*On Piety* 72.2080-90; trans. Obbink 1996:249). He also mentions man's apprehension concerning his natural end: "... humans have the fear of death..." (*On Piety* 9.240-2; trans. Obbink 1996:123). Diogenes of Oenoanda writes of "... the [vain] fear of [death]" (fr. 2; trans. Smith 1993:367). In another fragment, he notes the two main fears that man is prey to: "Well what are the disturbing emotions? [They are] fears -- of the gods, of death..." (fr. 34; trans. Smith 1993:385).

Lucretius describes men as running away from themselves, filled with self-hatred, "... no one knowing what he really wants and everyone forever trying to get away from where he is, as though mere locomotion could throw off the load" (*Rer. nat.* 3.1057-9; trans. Latham 1951:128). The source of this anxious self-loathing turns out to be fear of the death that awaits all men. This is what initiates the escapist mania he describes, and its consequences are ambition, greed, mistrust, etc., the "running sores of life ... fed in no small measure by the fear of death" (*Rer. nat.* 3.59-82; trans. Latham 1951:97-8).

Thus, the fear of death was a significant anxiety-producing factor in Epicurus' time -- a sickness of the soul, requiring *therapeia* -- along with fear of the gods, and that is precisely why Epicurus and the Epicureans who followed took great pains to demonstrate through both philosophical argument and a variety of spiritual exercises that man need not fear death, nor, as a result, allow its waiting hands to snatch away from him (in the midst of life) the opportunity to achieve tranquillity and happiness -- to live, in other words, a good life. But is such a thing possible, and if so, how?

4.3 That Death Is Nothing to Us

It is uncertain where death awaits us; let us await it everywhere. Premeditation of death is premeditation of freedom. He who has learned how to die has unlearned how to be a slave.... So I have formed the habit of having death continually present, not merely in my imagination, but in my mouth. (Montaigne, *Essays*; trans. Frame 1960:1:81, 84)

Let us look more closely at a passage from Epicurus already quoted above: "[O]ne must also conceive that the worst disturbance occurs in human souls ... because they fear that very lack of sense-perception which occurs in death, *as though it were relevant to them*" (*Ep. Hdt.* 81=IG I-2; my emphasis). Here Epicurus clearly indicates the irrelevance of death to man, a theme which constitutes the second strand of the *tetrapharmakos*. How can death, that

most salient fact of human existence, be irrelevant to man? For an answer to this question, we must look further into the surviving writings of Epicurus as well as those of Lucretius.

KD 2 gives us the most succinct expression of the Epicurean position regarding the fear of death: "Death is nothing to us. For what has been dissolved has no sense-experience, and what has no sense-experience is nothing to us" (IG I-5). In accordance with the atomistic physics of Epicurus, then, the death of men (as we have noted above, in 4.2) is the dissolution of an atomic structure, one which constitutes the end of the knowing subject. With this dissolution comes an end to all sense-experience -- the *modus operandi* of the human mind -- the means by which the objective material world is known. Thus, the sense-experience of man, like his body, is a necessarily finite phenomenon.

Lucretius echoes the very same Epicurean message of *KD 2*: "[D]eath is nothing to us and no concern of ours, since our tenure of the mind is mortal.... So, when we shall be no more -- when the union of body and spirit that engenders us has been disrupted -- to us, who shall then be nothing, nothing by any hazard will happen any more at all. Nothing will have power to stir our senses, not though earth be fused with sea and sea with sky" (*Rer. nat.* 3.830-42; trans. Latham 1951:121).⁶ Once again, it is the lack of sense-experience that defines the nothingness of man in death.

Epicurus' view of death is treated at greater length in his letter to Menoeceus than in any other of his surviving writings.⁷ Its essence is the same as that of *KD 2*, but here it is more fully developed:

Get used to believing that death is nothing to us. For all good and bad consists in sense-experience, and death is the privation of sense-experience. Hence, a correct knowledge of the fact that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life a matter of contentment, not by adding a limitless time [to life] but by removing the longing for immortality. (*Ep. Men.* 125=IG I-4)

⁶Diogenes of Oenoanda expresses similar thoughts when he declares, "I have no fear on account of the Tityuses and Tantaluses whom some describe in Hades, nor do I shudder [when I reflect upon] the decomposition of the body, [being convinced that we have no feeling, once the] soul [is without sensation]..." (fr. 73; trans. Smith 1993:402). See also Lucretius, *Rer. nat.* 3.894-930.

⁷Epicurus surely argued in greater detail concerning the fear of death in some of his major works, but beyond the letter to Menoeceus, little of his work survives. Fortunately, Lucretius allots an entire book of *De rerum natura* to "Life and Mind" and to the problem of the fear of death. Preuss (1994:53), referring to *Rer. nat.* 3.417-829, concludes that "the battery of arguments for the mortality of the soul given by Lucretius is probably a fairly orthodox report of many of them". Hutchinson (1994:iv), however, reminds us regarding Lucretius' *De rerum natura* that "it is not possible to know exactly how reliable it is as a source for the views of Epicurus, since the so-called *Major Summary* (a detailed summary of Epicurus' thirty-seven-volume *On Nature*), on which it seems to have been based, has entirely perished".

All of our judgements concerning good and bad are based on, and refer to, sense-experience. Hence, it makes sense for a living man to say "Nutritious food is good for me" or "Gambling is bad for me", but it makes no sense for him to say "Death is bad for me", since death is not something which will be part of his sense-experience: it will, on the contrary, be a "privation of sense-experience", and therefore beyond any relevance to him. Yet how does "a correct knowledge of death" remove one's "longing for immortality"? Epicurus goes on to report that "there is nothing fearful in life for one who has grasped that there is nothing fearful in the absence of life" (*Ep. Men.* 126=IG I-4). Thus, if there is nothing fearful in the absence of life, one need not long for immortality as a remedy of fear; for death will be merely absence of experience, nothingness.⁸

Epicurus augments his argument against the fear of death, "the most frightening of bad things", and reiterates that death is nothing to us, for "when we exist, death is not yet present, and when death is present, then we do not exist. Therefore, it is relevant neither to the living nor to the dead, since it does not affect the former, and the latter do not exist" (*Ep. Men.* 126=IG I-4). In other words, while we live we would be foolish indeed to dwell upon death and thereby allow it to prevent our living a good life; for death is irrelevant while we live and, once we have died, death is equally irrelevant, since we no longer exist to undergo any experiences.⁹

The absence of sensation in death implies the absence of pain. Thus, since death is not a painful state, it is not rational for one to anticipate its pain. Epicurus would call this unnecessary anguish, and Epicurean therapy would remove it through promoting a correct understanding of death. Epicurus concludes: "Thus, he is a fool who says that he fears death not because it will be painful when present but because it is painful when it is still to come. For that which while present causes no distress causes unnecessary pain when merely anticipated" (*Ep. Men.* 125=IG I-4).

Still less prudent is to attempt to avoid the vicissitudes of life by seeking death as a

⁸Commenting on the conclusion to Philodemus' *De morte*, Asmis (1990:2393) notes that he "places all humans on the same level: all inhabit a city that is unfortified against death ... everyone is ephemeral.... Therefore, we should prepare ourselves mentally for death, so that when the time comes, we will die without panic, knowing that we have enjoyed life and will no longer have any sensation".

⁹Preuss (1994:52) puts it "in a Parmenidean way" as follows: "[D]eath is nothing because we cannot be dead. The dead do not exist and therefore cannot be anything, even dead. Quite literally there is no one who is dead. If being dead is a state or condition, then no one can ever be in that state or condition".

relief. Worst of all are those -- for whom Epicurus has only scorn -- who claim that the best is never to have been born, but once having been born the next best is to exit life as soon as possible (*Ep. Men.* 126-7=IG I-4). True wisdom vanquishes both rejection of and fear of death: the wise man is afraid neither to live nor to die, and he will concern himself not with living the longest life but rather the most pleasant life. In fact, says Epicurus, "the same kind of practice produces a good life and a good death" (*Ep. Men.* 126=IG I-4). Such a life and death are possible only for those who have internalised a proper understanding of the true nature of the world.

The distinction between pleasures of the flesh and the higher pleasure of *ataraxia* is the basis for Epicurus' assertion that "[u]nlimited time and limited time contain equal [amounts of] pleasure, if one measures its limits by reasoning" (*KD* 19=IG I-5). He goes on to explain that while only an unlimited time could provide the unlimited pleasures of the flesh, "the intellect, reasoning out the goal and limit of the flesh and dissolving the fears of eternity, provided us with the perfect way of life and had no further need of unlimited time" (*KD* 20). To put it another way, the "perfect way of life" means "rejoicing at each instant that we have acceded to being, and knowing that death cannot diminish the plenitude of the pleasure of being" (Hadot 2002:197-8).

Let us now consider some of Lucretius' remarks regarding fear of death. In response to the idea that adding a significant measure to our lives would lessen our fear of death, he says that such a prolongation "cannot subtract or whittle away one jot from the duration of death. The time after our taking off remains constant.... The time of not-being will be no less for him who made an end of life with yesterday's daylight than for him who perished many a moon and many a year before" (*Rer. nat.* 3.1087-94; trans. Latham 1951:129). In other words, man must still perish into an unfathomable infinity of not-being, no matter how short or long his life on the earth; any prolongation is merely a deferral of the inevitable end.

Regarding our possible suffering in death, Lucretius argues that the self must continue to exist if we are to "suffer" death, and he argues against a continued identity after death.¹⁰ From the fate of suffering in death, "we are redeemed by death, which denies existence to the self that might have suffered these tribulations" (*Rer. nat.* 3.864; trans. Latham 1951:122).

¹⁰Since we are material, only the reassembly of our identical atomic structure could guarantee our return after death; yet "even that contingency would still be no concern of ours once the chain of our identity had been snapped" (*Rer. nat.* 3.848-54; trans. Latham 1951:121).

But what about our loss, in death, of the joys of life? Lucretius speaks of men "unhappily cheated by one treacherous day out of all the uncounted blessings of life!", and he counters with, "And now no repining for these lost joys will oppress you any more" (*Rer. nat.* 3.898-901; trans. Latham 1951:123). In other words, such men have lost nothing since they are no longer capable of being the subjects of tragic loss. In a similar vein, regarding the grief of those who remain behind after the death of a loved one, or one who fears the grief of those he leaves behind, Lucretius asks, "If something returns to sleep and peace, what reason is that for pining in inconsolable grief?" (*Rer. nat.* 3.909-11; trans. Latham 1951:123). Once again, death has robbed suffering of a subject; hence, lamentations cannot be for one who suffers. When we see that this is the case, we will not endure inconsolable grief ourselves.¹¹

Finally, Lucretius presents what has come to be known as the Symmetry Argument, based on the observation that man's life is like a brief candle between two essentially identical, vast darknesses, neither of which, vis-à-vis man's existence, is any more fearful than the other.¹² First Lucretius compares the dead to one who has never existed: "One who no longer is cannot suffer, *or differ in any way* from one who has never been born, when once this mortal life has been usurped by death the immortal" (*Rer. nat.* 3.866-69; trans. Latham 1951:122; my emphasis). He continues with his famous image of "Nature's mirror": "Look back at the eternity that passed before we were born, and mark how utterly it counts to us as nothing. This is a mirror that Nature holds up to us, in which we may see the time that shall be after we are dead. Is there anything terrifying in the sight -- anything depressing -- anything that is not more restful than the soundest sleep?" (*Rer. nat.* 3.972-77; trans. Latham 1951:125). It is clear that Lucretius means that there is *no difference* for an individual person between the dark void before birth and the one after death, and therefore no reason to fear the latter as if it were different from the former.

The power and value of memory as a balm is given testimony by Epicurus: "Sweet is the memory of a dead friend" (Plut., *Suav. viv.* 1105e=IG I-121); and he indicates the proper

¹¹Diogenes of Oenoanda echoes a similar Epicurean refrain: "[Therefore] in this matter [I must say now: 'I shall be deprived of] life and I shall leave behind the pleasures that belong to it -- [pleasures for which however] after [death noone yearns...]' (fr. 73; trans. Smith 1993:402).

¹²Considering the longest and shortest of human lives, Marcus Aurelius thinks about his own life and advises himself to "look at the abyss of time behind it, and the infinity yet to come. In the face of that, what more is Nestor with all his years than any three-days babe?" (*Meditations* 4.50; trans. Staniforth 1964:75-6).

action toward the grief of friends: "Let us share our friends' suffering not with laments but with thoughtful concern" (*Sent. vat.* 66=IG I-6). One is reminded here of Epicurus' letter to Idomeneus, in which he recounts joyfully, on his last day of life (though in a state of extreme pain), the pleasures of past discussions of philosophy with friends -- recollections sufficient to grant him "a blessedly happy day" (IG I-41).

Epicurus notes also a particularly strong connection between the security of belonging to a community, on the one hand, and the proper attitude toward death, on the other: "All those who had the power to acquire the greatest confidence from [the threats posed by] their neighbours also thereby lived together most pleasantly with the surest guarantee; and since they enjoyed the fullest sense of belonging they did not grieve the early death of the departed, as though it called for pity" (KD 40=IG I-5). Death is not to be feared, nor the departed to be pitied as if suffering; the pleasant life resulting from "the fullest sense of belonging" is what makes this attitude possible.

We can now suggest typical Epicurean responses to various manifestations of the fear of death by considering several answers to the question *Why am I afraid of death?*

A₁: I fear I will be nowhere (I fear the unknown).

Epicurean response: You will be as much nowhere as you were before you were born. You did not fear it then; why should you fear it now?

A₂: I have not lived a good life and fear I may be tormented in Hell.

Epicurean response: Hell is here and here alone, and it consists primarily in those phenomena resulting from men's fear of death -- greed, selfishness, alienation, etc.¹³ In any case, you will not be alive after death, the soul having been dispersed and followed by the body: no sensation will be possible.

A₃: I fear the pain of dying.

Epicurean response: There may be pain *before* death -- that is, in *dying* (as there was with Epicurus, for example, who demonstrated how to overcome it) -- but there can be no pain *in death*, for there is no longer any subject capable of experiencing pain.

A₄: I don't fear my own death as much as the death of my loved ones, or the sadness of those I leave behind after my own death.

¹³Epictetus reflects on this point: "Why, do you not know, then, that the origin of all human evils, and of baseness and cowardice, is not death, but rather the fear of death?" (*Discourses* 3.26.38; trans. Oldfather 1928:239).

Epicurean response: The correct attitude to death is based on a proper understanding of nature. Such knowledge teaches us that the departed cannot suffer, their atoms having returned to the void from whence they originated. Let those left behind understand the true nature of death and hold dear the memory of lost loved ones, as Epicurus has taught, but not unduly lament a return to the ultimate peace of nothingness.

As: I fear the utter end of my life -- I fear nothingness and, most especially, a premature death. Hence, I long for immortality. In fact, life seems pointless in view of my certain death and the non-survival of my soul. Can a finite life be anything other than absurd?

Epicurean response: Death will come when it will come; meanwhile, it is not present, nor ought we to allow fears about it to ruin each potentially blessed day of life. When death is present, we shall no longer be. Furthermore, there is nothing absurd in the blessed life which we can all live, for once we have realised that death is nothing to us, we will have already begun to make life's mortality a blessing by having removed our desire for immortality. We can continue to live a blessed life through those pleasures which are worthy of us -- philosophy, friendship, discussion, communal life, etc. -- knowing that accession to the highest pleasure in the present moment is equivalent to an infinity of such moments.¹⁴

Epicurus thus provides, through philosophy, *therapeia* for those who fear death as one of the worst of human ills: for those who fear *post mortem* torment, he assures them that death represents a final atomic dissolution (and, in any event, divine punishment is inconsistent with divine blessedness);¹⁵ for those who fear their own utter dissolution, he assures them that the end is not capable of being experienced, because after death there is no longer a conscious subject to experience anything; for those who doubt the possibility of living a meaningful yet finite life, Epicurus assures them that the good, the highest pleasure,

¹⁴ Annas (1993:346) comments on the duration of Epicurean pleasure: "[W]e make a mistake about duration; we think that, if a happy life is good, then more of it is in itself better than less. Epicurus can meet this point by showing us that the pleasure that is fit to be our final end is not the kind of thing that is improved by having more of it. Living a life free of frustration, trouble and disturbance is good, without being made better by going on longer." See also *KD* 19 and 20, and Hadot's (2002:197-8) discussion on this point.

¹⁵ Interestingly, one reason why the gods' life was blessed was that "... none of them was tormented by the fear of death" (Lucretius *Rer. nat.* 5.1180; trans. Latham 1951:207).

ataraxia, can be experienced fully in a finite time. Epicureans of the ancient world seemed convinced of these assurances, on the basis of Epicurean arguments as well as their everyday practical activity; modern scholars, however, have expressed serious doubts, to which we shall now turn, for they are seen by some of these scholars to constitute a major obstacle to acceptance of Epicurus' dictum: "Death is nothing to us".¹⁶

4.4 Deprivations of Death

The idea that a premature death is a misfortune for its victim seems rather obvious. I believe that it has been responsible for most of the anxiety which people (such as I) have felt about dying; it seems to them very likely that they are going to die prematurely even if they live to be 120 years old, which they will not. (Luper-Foy 1987:272)

Many modern philosophers have suggested that grounds for fear of death exist on the basis of death's possible harm to the one who dies.¹⁷ The alleged harm takes the form of thwarted desires, impaired interests, unfulfilled possibilities (projections of oneself into the future), etc. -- in a word, *deprivation*. Those who make such allegations are generally known as *deprivation theorists*.¹⁸ Here we shall use the term *deprivation theory* to include any such deprivations (if one's desires are thwarted, then one is *deprived* of having one's desires satisfied; if one's interests are impaired, one is *deprived* of having one's interests fulfilled, etc.).

Erler and Schofield (1999:663), recognising that our fear of death in the form of fears concerning "what happens to our dead bodies", or possible "punishment in the underworld", or the "distress of anticipation itself" is dissipated by the words of Epicurus at *Ep. Men.* 124-5, point to another possibility:¹⁹

¹⁶To be sure, there were also ancient critics of Epicureanism, usually with an axe to grind -- Cicero and Plutarch, for example -- but, with respect to the fear of death, it is the anti-Epicurean arguments of modern critics that have been the focus of recent scholarship. In referring to Epicurus' main argument against the fear of death, Nussbaum (1994:204) declares that "[m]ajor interpreters agree, on the whole, in finding the argument insufficient to establish its radical conclusion". The "major interpreters" referred to by Nussbaum include such scholars as Nagel (1979), Pitcher (1984), Feinberg (1984), Furley (1986), Luper-Foy (1987), and Feldman (1991), among others.

¹⁷Nussbaum (1994:204) notes with respect to the question of death's possible harm that "there is no aspect of Hellenistic ethics that has generated such wide philosophical interest, and produced work of such high philosophical quality".

¹⁸See Li (2002), Chapters 2, 3, and 4, where anti-Epicurean deprivation arguments are considered under the separate headings "Desire-thwarting Theory", "Deprivation Theory", and "Interest-Impairment Theory".

¹⁹Annas (1993:345), reflecting on the meaning of the fear of death, notes that "it is hard to think that the

But what if our fear at the thought of death is caused not by apprehension that something bad will or may befall us, but by the belief that we will be deprived of good things we *might* have enjoyed or gone on enjoying? Such a belief would be particularly upsetting if the goods in question were conceived as forms of pleasure or enjoyment needed to make our lives in some important sense complete. A fear of this kind is not adequately dealt with by the argument that in death we *actually* experience nothing at all.

They go on to acknowledge that both Lucretius and Philodemus "were aware of this possibility",²⁰ as was Epicurus himself. The possibility to which they refer, that death is bad because it prevents the fulfilment of desires or objectives and/or takes away possible goods we might have enjoyed, is the heart of deprivation theory. A number of scholars intuitively disenchanted with the Epicurean view of "death as nothing to us" have argued in support of deprivation theory, although, as we shall see, there are others who have rallied to Epicurus' defence.

4.4.1 Deprivation Theory

What, exactly, is the nature of arguments for death's badness? Mitsis (1996:803) offers a general characterisation:

One standard and intuitively compelling way of expressing the harm of death is to say that it deprives people of the life and goods that they would have enjoyed had they not died. Such a view of the harm of death -- death as deprivation -- has received widespread support from several contemporary philosophers, and indeed, it is sometimes claimed that the Epicurean attack on the fear of death falters precisely on this point; that is, by concentrating too exclusively on the actual condition of the dead and their lack of existence, Epicureans fail to take sufficient notice of the nature and extent of what the dead have possibly lost.

Thus, deprivation theorists argue that death deprives us of something intrinsically good -- as yet unfulfilled possibilities in life.²¹

Furley (1986:85) develops this distinction into two possible reasons for fearing death: "(1) because what may follow a man's death may be unpleasant or in some other way bad for him; (2) because although nothing follows upon death, death will deprive him of the good things of life."

fear of death and what it deprives us of, is merely a fear of being mortal".

²⁰Erler and Schofield cite, in particular, Lucretius, *Rer. nat.* 3.894-9 and Philodemus, *De morte* 4, col. 12.1-14.14; see also Epicurus, *KD* 20=IG I-5.

²¹Furley (1986:90) writes that "the essential element in a rational fear of death is the fear that our desires and intentions are unreal, in the sense that they have no possibility of fulfillment.... I am suggesting that the fear of death is the fear that there are no more possibilities, and that Epicurus's argument does not succeed in making out that this is irrational, because it is a fear concerned with our present state, not about our future (or timeless) state".

Furley admits that the Epicurean argument against the first reason is a strong one, given Epicurean atomism and the soul's non-survival of death. He goes on, however, to propose a rationale for distinguishing two sub-categories of the second case:

In the case of the second reason, we must first of all note that "fear" is an inappropriate name for the emotion felt when there is no uncertainty. So for the sake of completeness we must distinguish two cases: (2a) S fears that he may die prematurely (being uncertain when he will die), because he will then be deprived of all the good things of life; (2b) S is angry that he will die (knowing that he will die), because he will then be deprived, etc. (1986:85)

In other words, one can fear the incertitude of death's timing, or be angry with the certitude of death itself -- both for the reason that death is a deprivation.

We shall not, at this point, attempt to engage in a detailed consideration of all modern arguments for and against the Epicurean position concerning fear of death (in any case, the enormity of the literature precludes such an in-depth examination here). Rather, we shall consider the salient features of deprivation theory in general, as well as some of the responses to deprivation theory by defenders of the Epicurean position; further, we shall show how deprivation theorists implicitly assume (or posit as "intuitive") premisses which contradict the Epicurean notion of a good life.

What, then, is the harm or evil in death alleged by deprivation theorists, and to whom does it apply, and when? In order to answer these questions, deprivation theorists try to relate the fact of death to its consequent fear of plan-, desire-, or action-deprivation, and to show why it is rational to fear death. They usually aim their efforts directly at the Epicurean argument which concludes that death is not a harm to the one who is dead. This argument has been set out by Rosenbaum (1986:121-2) as follows:

(A) A state of affairs is bad for person *P* only if *P* can experience it at some time.

Therefore, (B) *P*'s being dead is bad for *P* only if it is a state of affairs that *P* can experience at some time. (C) *P* can experience a state of affairs at some time only if it begins before *P*'s death.

(D) *P*'s being dead is not a state of affairs that begins before *P*'s death. Therefore, (E) *P*'s being dead is not a state of affairs that *P* can experience at some time.

THEREFORE, *P*'s being dead is not bad for *P*.

Note how central to the argument is the notion of *experience*. If one cannot experience a given state of affairs, it cannot be bad for one (Premiss A); this principle is known as the "existence requirement". In addition, a given state of affairs can be experienced only if it begins before death (Premiss C). Deprivation theorists typically question one or the other, or both of these premisses.

Let us now examine some of the ways in which deprivation theorists have approached the Epicurean argument. First, consider a basic *attitude* common to deprivation theorists, as

expressed by Murphy (1976:54): "That it is bad is, I take it, obvious; for death, along with suffering, in part define the very concept of what is a bad thing for a person...the very concept of the fearful". Thus, deprivation theorists take it that, *intuitively*, death is bad for the one who dies -- in fact, generally, because of its ultimate nature, the worst of bad things; and death is bad because of what it deprives us of: as Nagel (1979:63) puts it, "[I]f death is an evil, it is the *loss of life*, rather than the state of being dead, or nonexistent, or unconscious, that is objectionable". The deprivationist view can be characterised generally as one in which death is seen to be "bad for the person who is no longer, because it makes empty and vain the plans, hopes, and desires that this person actually had during life" (Nussbaum 1994:207). This, then, is the position from which deprivation theorists argue against the Epicureans. In attempting to refute the Epicurean argument, they have produced some innovative, and often complex, arguments of their own²² (significantly, as we shall see, deprivation theorists reject -- usually implicitly -- the hedonistic basis of Epicurean ethics).

A common view held by deprivation theorists is that accepting Epicurus' dictum that "death is nothing to us" involves accepting also some rather disagreeable and counter-intuitive consequences:

It means that even if a man is betrayed by his friends, ridiculed behind his back, and despised by people who treat him politely to his face, none of it can be counted as a misfortune for him so long as he does not suffer as a result. It means that a man is not injured if his wishes are ignored by the executor of his will, or if, after his death, the belief becomes current that all the literary works on which his fame rests were really written by his brother, who died in Mexico at the age of 28. (Nagel 1979:64)

²²Nagel (1979:65) suggests a subject of harm: "... most good and ill fortune has as its subject a person identified by his history and his possibilities, rather than merely by his categorical state of the moment"; he goes on to argue that death has such a subject. Silverstein's (1980:95-116) complex approach is to revise the ontological status of the dead by arguing that the dead, though dead, are nonetheless existent. Yourgrau (1987:137-156) criticizes Silverstein, on the one hand, yet defines the dead as *Nonexistent Objects*, on the other, going so far as to claim that "there simply is such a person as Socrates, and nothing, not even his death, can ever erase this fact" (1980:143). Feldman (1991:305-26) uses a "possible worlds" analysis in which a state of affairs is bad for someone if "her welfare level at the nearest possible world where it obtains is higher than her welfare level at the nearest possible world where it does not obtain" (1991:315). Mitsis (1996:811) criticizes Feldman's approach on the grounds that "the thesis that possible-world counterparts carry a person's identity forward is at least initially at odds with the causal discreteness required of distinct possible worlds". Feinberg (1984:169-90) and Pitcher (1984:157-68) argue that it is the *antemortem* person who is harmed by death. Williams (1973:73-92), on the other hand, distinguishes "categorical" or "unconditional" desires from "conditional" desires in an attempt to show that thwarted desires need not be experienced in order to be harmful. Luper-Foy (1987:267-90) contends that the indifference of Epicureans towards death is a reflection of their lack of meaningful desires: "Epicureans are not interested in anything that could lead them to regard living as a good thing" (1987:280). One wonders whom Luper-Foy is referring to here, for anyone who has read the surviving words of Epicurus, Lucretius, Philodemus, and Diogenes of Oenoanda -- or even Seneca's characterizations of Epicureans -- could hardly regard the Epicureans as "cold-hearted and passionless" (Luper-Foy 1987:272); see Rosenbaum (1989:291-304) for a pro-Epicurean response to Luper-Foy.

Here Nagel has given us "intuitively plausible cases of harm that seem to be counter-examples to the Epicurean view" (Braddock 2000:53). In addition to declaring that such consequences are entailed by Epicurus' dictum, deprivation theorists also stress, in particular, the harm of *premature* death. Annas (1993:346) observes a relation between deprivation and premature death: it is not so much that death ends a life, but that a life is "cut short before its proper time, or a death ... is premature". This is because we are inclined to view life as "having a shape, progressing from youth to middle age and then to old age", each stage having its own peculiar domain of interests and activities serving to confer on it a particular form. For this reason we can intuitively recognise that "a normally endowed person who dies at eighteen, with hopes and projects unfulfilled, has had a premature death, whereas someone who dies at seventy-five, with a reasonable proportion of her projects fulfilled, has not".²³ Epicurus could deny this "intuition", Annas (1993:347) concedes, though only if the young person had acceded to the state of *ataraxia* before dying, but she resists the conclusion that, having achieved the full Epicurean life, dispensing with false belief, "living naturally and achieving a state where you are not bothered by troubles and upsetting desires, there is *nothing* to choose between living like that for forty years and dying tomorrow".

Thus, the notion of *duration* becomes a central one in deprivationist arguments: the idea that by being deprived by death of a number of years of life, one is harmed by consequent deprivation of goods -- the shorter life's duration, the greater the deprivation. This is the serious charge laid at the doorstep of Epicurus and his followers.

4.5 Epicurean Defences

The realization that because of man's mortality such happiness itself is limited in that sensation and hence all pleasure ends at death is not disturbing. Indeed so far from being disturbing it is a source of satisfaction. After death we can be completely confident that there is nothing to fear.... Indeed the fear of death being removed, we can enjoy the fullness of pleasure, the highest happiness, in the instant. (Rist 1972:119)

Nothing is to be gained by extending our lives. Indeed, to wish to extend our lives is to betray an incorrect and pernicious view of pleasure. (Warren 2000:243-4)

The deprivation theorists' arguments ultimately boil down to the belief that death is bad because it deprives us of goods, the goods we would have enjoyed had we not died when we did. Particularly significant is the notion of prematurity of death: death in youth is

²³Li (2002:74) argues that "a person's premature death is *always* a harm to him".

ultimately a greater loss than death in old age. Epicurean responses focus on a) death's alleged harm, b) an elucidation of Epicurus' position regarding death, c) the relation between duration and completeness of a life, and d) the opposing conceptions of the good life implicit in deprivation theory and Epicureanism.

4.5.1 *Death's alleged harm*

Rosenbaum (1986:127) identifies a problem in the unusual nature of the alleged harm of death: "It is all right, I suppose, to *call* a person's death a loss for the person, but it is clearly not like paradigmatic cases of losses that are bad for persons". A loss, normally, is something that one suffers through, experiences, and possibly overcomes; death is not like this, for it is not experienced, not suffered through, not overcome.²⁴

Mitsis (1996:807) observes that Epicurus, arguing that "something must exist for it to be the subject of a harm such as deprivation", is able to draw the conclusion "that death in no way harms the dead. And if the dead cannot be harmed generally, they certainly cannot be harmed by being deprived of anything". He also notes that in ordinary situations involving harm, it is possible to answer questions such as "When is someone harmed?" or "How is someone harmed?" or "Who or what is harmed?" (1996:807). Thus, we can determine *when* a person was injured (e.g., at 3 p.m. yesterday), how that person was injured (e.g., he fell off his bicycle), and who was injured (e.g., Guido was injured). Death, however, is different in that such questions become problematic: "... the Epicurean argues that to ask such questions about death is nonsensical", principally because the subject of harm (something which must be *experienced*) no longer exists. Mitsis (1996:808) points out that deprivation theorists, believing that death harms the deceased by depriving him of possible future goods, must be able to explain how, when, and to whom the loss occurs. This remains problematic for deprivation theorists and yet in attempting to do so, they depart radically from Epicurus' hedonistic ethical basis, by positing or assuming a different conception of the good life.²⁵

²⁴In responding to Premiss A in Rosenbaum's outline of the Epicurean argument, Fischer (1993:20) comments: "What makes the things in question bads or evils for the relevant individuals has (intuitively speaking) nothing to do with whether the things are actually or even possibly experienced". Yet Fischer's concession "that it is only 'intuitively speaking' that harm has nothing to do with possible experience" is particularly interesting in view of the fact that it is precisely the normal intuitions people have about death's badness that Epicureans are questioning and rejecting (Braddock 2000:56).

²⁵Furley (1986:85) suggests that Epicurus' argument "depends on the premises of hedonism.... If it is

The Epicurean argument, then, is attacked by deprivation theorists with conceptions of harm that are non-Epicurean, since for Epicurus harm is pain that is either physical or psychical and is expressed only through sense-experience. Hence, the expression "bad for one" or "bad for one's life" can, for Epicureans, mean only that one *experiences* a pain *before* death.

4.5.2 *Intention of Epicurean arguments*

There is also contention over the exact nature of Epicurus' claims regarding fear of death. What, precisely, were Epicurean arguments meant to show regarding fear of death? We can see that with respect to Furley's first reason for fearing death, Epicurus would say that there is nothing bad for one in being dead. With respect to Furley's second reason, the one to which deprivation theorists have devoted so much time and energy, death brings no loss or harm to us, according to Epicurus, because we cannot experience a loss of goods. Furthermore, loss is nothing to us who live in the present moment and are capable of experiencing the highest pleasure, and a happiness that confers the completeness of life on man.²⁶ The possible exception to the second reason seems to be the premature death of one who has not yet risen to *ataraxia*; but then such a person is not yet the "us" in "nothing to us" (about which more will be said later).

Turning to the words of Epicurus, the main thrust of his argument is to be found at *Ep. Men.* 124-7, in which he tells us *who* he directs his message to and *what* the message is: to those who *fear the absence of life* -- that is, the utter end of being -- the message is that *there is nothing to fear in nothingness*. When the thought of nothingness leads to the fear of even existing (since after death nothing will remain, plans will have come to naught, etc.), we must realize that our only plan should be to imitate the blessed life of the gods, and this,

true that nothing is good or bad for a man except what gives him pleasure or pain, then the case is settled.... But for one not committed to Epicurean hedonism, there is a case to be made against this proposition". Thus Furley, like other deprivation theorists, makes his case against Epicurus on the basis of a rejection of Epicurean hedonism, of the Epicurean conception of the good life -- but at least he admits doing so, and he admits the consequences of not doing so.

²⁶Lucretius' Symmetry Argument is capable of showing that in death, *qua* non-being, there is nothing different for us than in prenatal non-being; thus we need not fear the state of being "in death". This point covers death as feared because we might be punished, etc. and death as feared because it is pure nothingness. It doesn't cover death as feared because it is a loss of goods. This can be adequately countered only by the Epicurean notion of the good life, with desires regulated so as to avoid living always in anticipation of a future fulfilment.

Epicurus insists, we can do. Thus the desire for immortality is irrational (because unattainable) and therefore so is the fear that leads directly to this desire -- that is, the fear of death as an utter end. In short, our lives are made *more* enjoyable, not less, by removing the desire for *athanasia* (Warren 2000:243).

Striker (1989:328) suggests that "all the Epicurean arguments were meant to show is that we should not ruin our lives by worrying about being mortal".²⁷ Certainly they were meant to show that, but is that all? Preuss (1994:67), sympathetic to Striker's comment, and a defender of Epicurus, charges that the deprivation theorists are not addressing the fear Epicurus meant to dispel. Preuss suggests that Epicurus' argument is directed only at Furley's first reason. Regarding Furley's characterisation of the true object of fear in death, Preuss (1994:66) concedes that "Furley has identified a real fear here, but it is not the fear of death.... Make a list of your important projects, of the kinds of things Furley is likely to have had in mind. It seems incredible that if an insurance company could somehow guarantee their completion in the event of death they would have relieved you of your fear of death". Thus, Preuss focusses on death *itself*, rather than consequential losses, as the object of fear, arguing forcefully that this is the intent of the Epicurean argument.²⁸ He reinforces his point by considering that accounts of those "who have had a 'near-death experience'" include the admission that "they no longer fear death. No mention is made of the fulfillment or non-fulfillment of present possibilities for good reason: such possibilities are a different matter, irrelevant to (or, at most, only incidentally relevant to) the fear of death" (1994:66-7).

If this is so, then Epicurus is on stronger ground than otherwise, and yet if the deprivation theorists are right in focussing on the alleged loss in death (it is certainly *possible* to fear death as a harbinger of loss of goods -- not death *per se*, but loss), Epicurus must, and

²⁷"The Epicurean argument is designed primarily to keep people from allowing the fear of death to play a debilitating role in their lives. If fear cannot keep death away but can only serve to ruin a life, then a person who fears death is irrational, even if death can be considered a case of deprivation" (Braddock 2000:60; my emphasis).

²⁸Preuss (1994:67) treats premature death in the same way: "Epicurus is not concerned with any special features of death ... with death so far as it may be premature, or violent or painful, etc., but he is concerned simply with our mortality, with the fact that we must die and be no more. The elderly notoriously revive their interest in religion when there is no longer a question of the prematurity of death. They are fanning their hope of immortality.... Epicurus argues that this hope of immortality is an unjustified and irrational hope, and the point of his discussion of death is to show how we can face our mortality, how we can live a lucidly mortal life, without resorting to the irrational hope of immortality".

can, still be defended.

4.5.3 Duration and the complete life

Furley's two reasons for fearing death are related to Epicurean argument by Striker (1989:327): "It seems to me that [Epicurus'] argument might have some merit if it were meant to address the fear of mortality, but it will not serve to establish that it makes no difference whether we have a very short or a very long life, simply because a very short life could not possibly be complete". The completeness of life, for Striker, -- as well as for deprivation theorists in general -- has something to do, as we have seen, with the shape of a life, its projects, etc. For Epicureans, however, completeness of a life has to do with achieving the highest level of pleasure -- *ataraxia* -- which is not the kind of thing that is augmented by duration.

The irrelevance of duration for happiness (*eudaimonia*) is reflected in Barigazzi's (1983:55) comment on the felicity of the immortal gods: "Happiness is independent of duration and the gods are immortal because they are happy rather than happy because they are immortal" [my translation]. In the same way man can live like the immortal gods by acceding to a eudaimonistic life through *ataraxia*.²⁹ Referring to *KD* 10 and 19, Barigazzi (1955:41) again notes the independence of happiness and duration in Epicurean ethical thinking: "The gods have as essential attributes immortality and blessedness. Their principal advantage with respect to man is cancelled by the fact that happiness is independent of time, because pleasure is already perfect in the moment ... so that it becomes senseless to desire infinite time" [my translation]. In the Epicurean quest for, and attainment of, *eudaimonia* through *ataraxia*, man can imitate the blessedness of the gods. Thus, dying at one point rather than another may be seen as irrelevant to (i.e., no better or worse with respect to) the goodness of one's life.³⁰

Philodemus, too, reiterates Epicurus' position on the attainment of completeness in a finite time. Warren (2000:238-9) notes that "Philodemus, *De morte* XII.30-XIII, after quoting

²⁹See *Sent. vat.* 33, where Epicurus tells us how little it takes to rival Zeus in happiness.

³⁰This does not mean that dying at one point rather than another is of no concern *whatsoever* to the Epicurean. Purinton (1993:317-18) comments on precisely this point: "Epicurus would say that it is *rational* to prolong one's life *especially* when one has attained the *telos*, for to have attained the *telos* is to be living pleasantly. And if one is going to go on living, it is rational to desire to continue to enjoy the highest pleasure (though it is *not* rational to fear that death might prevent one from doing so, since, if one dies, one will lose one's *desire* to enjoy this pleasure together with the enjoyment itself)".

the example of Pythocles, who prodigiously attained happiness at the age of eighteen, speaks of: 'It being possible both to achieve and enjoy the greatest [goods] in some certain [sc. finite] period of time...'.³¹

Thus, the much-touted "goods of life" referred to constantly by deprivation theorists, and the time required to realise them, assume a contrasting insignificance for Epicureans, as Warren (2000:241) observes:

Once it has been realized that the addition of more goods, or more time in which to acquire more goods, is irrelevant to happiness, which is understood as a state of satiety, then desire for more goods, and more time in which to accumulate goods, disappears. Temporal duration becomes irrelevant to my assessment of my life and its goodness...

It is not duration, therefore, but the attainment of the highest state of happiness that determines a complete life.³²

Quoting Cicero's assertion that Epicureans deny that time adds to the highest good, Furley (1986:81) claims that the Epicurean position "is just dogma, without argument, and the surviving Epicurean texts offer nothing in the way of argument". This latter comment, of course, may be true, if by "argument" is meant an explicit step-by-step reasoning leading to the Epicurean notion of a complete life. But it is possible to adumbrate a tentative route to the conclusion concerning duration and completeness implicit in Epicurean writings, as follows:

- A. The gods are the highest beings -- perfect, in fact;
- B. *Eudaimonia* through *ataraxia* (tranquillity) is the essential state of the gods, permeating and defining their existence;
- C. Therefore, *ataraxia* (leading to *eudaimonia*) is the highest state of being;
- D. Man is capable of achieving the state of *ataraxia*;
- E. Therefore, man is capable of acceding to the eudaimonistic state of the gods;
- F. *Ataraxia* does not increase with duration: once achieved, it is perfect;
- G. Therefore, man's blessed state, which permeates his being and defines his life,

³¹ A modern version of the same message is found in Warren (2000:237): "If we remember that for an Epicurean the only criterion of value is (perceived) pleasantness (*Ep. Men.* 124), then a longer period of enjoyment is no better (i.e. more pleasant) in any way than a shorter period enjoying the same degree of pleasure".

³² Warren (2000:238) notes that Cicero, in *De finibus*, "finds this as unconvincing as most modern commentators.... However, Cicero is thinking mainly of *kinetic*, not katastematic, pleasure, which Epicurus would allow to be a process and therefore to have duration. Once this misunderstanding is removed, Epicurus' theory appears much more coherent, even if it does not fit our intuitions about a 'complete' life".

does not increase (become more complete) with duration;

H. A complete life is one which needs no further duration to make it complete;

I. THEREFORE, man's life is complete if he accedes to *eudaimonia* through *ataraxia*.

Thus, for Epicureans, whose goal is the achievement of *ataraxia*, it is possible to experience in a finite time a complete life.

4.5.4 The "Us" in "Nothing to Us"

At this point it is worth reminding ourselves to whom Epicurus addresses his letters and precepts: principally to a community of like-minded philosophers and disciples striving to emulate them. Hence, when he says, "Death is nothing to us", he is in effect referring through the word "us" to anyone who has adopted the Epicurean way of life and, along with it, the various spiritual exercises used to prepare one to accede to progressively higher levels of *philosophia* and *phronesis*, and to the ultimate goal of *eudaimonia* through *ataraxia*. They are those who have accepted, memorised, and practised the Epicurean precepts, and thereby have begun to live the best possible life, one resembling that of the supreme models for man, the gods. Thus, while others may believe that death is something worth fretting over day and night, those who work at internalising the essential message of Epicurean philosophy will not do so. They will live more fully than others, by living intensely in the present moment, which is where life always resides.

While the letters and precepts, as we have seen, were prepared by Epicurus as therapeutic aids to help Epicurean disciples to live a good life, emulating the gods, there was no barrier preventing anyone from realising the truth of Epicurus' teachings and deciding to adopt the Epicurean way of life. To put it another way, the "us" in "nothing to us" is an open invitation to Epicurean philosophy as a rational way of life free from the fears and superstitions that plague so much of mankind.

4.6 Differing Conceptions of the Good Life

[T]here is clearly a connection to be made between the removal of one's fear of death and the approximation to divine immortality held out as the goal of life. (Warren 2000:236)

In summarising the import of Furley's argument, Nussbaum (1994:207) intimates the wide gulf between modern deprivation theorists and Epicureans:

Any death that frustrates hopes and plans is bad for the life it terminates, because it reflects retrospectively on that life, showing its hopes and projects to have been, at the very time the agent was forming them, empty and meaningless. Our interest in not dying is an interest in the meaning and integrity of our current projects. Our fear of death is a fear that, right now, our hopes and projects are vain and empty.

The hopes of deprivation theorists are ones waiting to be fulfilled at some time in the future, and they are ones which give meaning to life through their fulfilment.

For Epicureans, on the other hand, it is not the fulfilment of hopes that confers meaning on one's life,³³ but rather the way in which one's life activities are carried out -- that is, the way in which one lives at any given moment: "It is not that the completion of projects in the future is unimportant, but rather that being unimpededly engaged in the activity of completing them is the only essential aspect of their contribution to one's well-being" (Rosenbaum 1990:37). In other words, we are speaking here of a *philosophical* life rather than a life whose significance depends on a series of projects that can be completed before death. The completeness of the Epicurean life lies in one's state of being, not in completion of projects, fulfilment of desires, etc.

The conscientious Epicurean can indeed enjoy full happiness in the moment, independent of successes or failures due to circumstances beyond his control:

He may possess little that is good in his life, but there is no good he needs to supply contentment: his poverty is great wealth. This flexibility means that his life lacks nothing to make it the best possible -- ideally adapted to the constraints imposed by nature. Of course, it is conceivable that at some given moment within it he might have been enjoying more pleasure than in fact he is. But that does not show that his *life* might have been better: for a life is to be conceived from the ethical point of view not as a set or sum of moments or episodes, but as the implementation of a strategy for living. (Erler and Schofield 1999:664)

The phrase "strategy for living", counterpoised to the deprivation theorists' notion of meaning through completion of projects, is useful in demarcating two distinct conceptions of the good life.³⁴

³³"If death 'cuts short' my enjoyment of life, then mortality is to be regretted. However, an Epicurean takes a much different view. Since once I have attained *ataraxia* nothing 'better' (i.e. more pleasant) will be achieved however much longer I live, there is no reason to fear death. Death cannot rob me of any further goods" (Warren 2000:239).

³⁴Cf. Braddock (2000:48), who concludes that "what is really at issue in this debate is not so much the proper attitude toward death as the proper attitude toward life. Implicit in the Epicurean view and in the deprivation theory are *differing conceptions of the human good*" (my emphasis). It is also worth bearing in mind that the two views of the good life and its relation to death are reflections of the two distinct cultures from which they have emerged: modern industrial capitalist "consumer" culture and Hellenistic culture, within which the Epicurean Garden was a distinct sub-culture. Murphy (1976:54) intimates the cultural conditioning of the deprivation theory when he states that it may be "a very 'bourgeois' conception of personality, for it is a

The typical deprivation theorist's conception of the good life is characterised by Braddock (2000:61-2) as an existentialist-like view in which human life is "a perpetual work-in-progress ... one is always, in a sense, outside of oneself as the story of one's life unfolds toward the future. Wrapped up with this view is a high regard for human desire". Death, on such a view, is seen as "*lost opportunity*" and "*no more chances*" (Murphy 1976:54-5), harm to "one's future-oriented interests" (Feinberg 1984:179), the "collapse of [one's] life's work" (McMahan 1988:240), etc. Murphy (1976:54) suggests that "[t]he death of a *person* ... also represents the end of a conscious history that transcends itself in thought.... [P]ersons define themselves in large measure in terms of their future-oriented *projects*. What I am is in large measure what I want to accomplish".

When we inquire into the constitution of death's badness, we find expressions like the "*lost opportunity*" mentioned above. And what are "*lost opportunities*" for Murphy (and deprivation theorists generally)? "*Opportunities*" such as "the desire to accomplish something in one's profession, to provide for one's family, to achieve certain satisfactions" (Murphy 1976:53-4). Here we see the typical emphasis of deprivation theorists on such future-oriented fulfilments as one's "life's work".

An Epicurean's "life's work", by contrast, is to be found not in something which can collapse (as, for example, in an architect's plans for a project that will bring him renown), but rather in the day to day living of a blessed life among friends.³⁵ Note how the very existentialist notion of projecting oneself into the future is the antithesis of living intensely in

definition in terms of individual agency".

³⁵The Epicurean view of death stands out in bold relief against ancient Greek attitudes in general, which, like those of deprivation theorists, stress the tragic nature of an "*untimely*" (*aôros*) or premature death. In Euripides' *Trojan Women*, for example, what distresses Hekabe most is that the infant prince Astyanax has not known "youth or marriage or godlike sovereignty" (Garland 2001:84); a fourth-century inscription from Kotiaion depicts parents lamenting their daughter's "most untimely and unwedded youth" (Alexiou 1974:106-7). Here we sense the special sadness surrounding the fate of those "to whom death came in the place of that marriage which was regarded as the consummation of earthly happiness" (Gardner 1896:115). Also particularly tragic is the death of a Greek child, "a painful and disturbing event" (Garland 2001:86); a fourth-century B.C. Halikarnassos inscription portrays such premature death as a matter of injustice: "... / Eukleitos died first, a boy of eighteen years, / and his mother beat her breast for him; / after him she wept for twelve-year-old Theodoros, / Alas for those who are gone beneath the earth unjustly!" (Alexiou 1974:106). The notion of an appropriate age for death – that a proper life, in other words, must be sufficiently long to encompass certain fulfilling elements: youth, sexual maturity, marriage, children, grand-children, etc. – is implicit also in Andromache's lament at Hector's wake: "Husband, you were too young to die...!" (Alexiou 1974:183). Garland (2001:78) notes that "According to Solon ... seventy was the age at which 'a man could receive the apportionment of death, not being *aôros*'". These examples suggest the background against which the radical nature of Epicurus' thanatology, symbolised by the dictum "Death is nothing to us", must be measured.

the present moment, as envisioned by Epicureans.³⁶ Of course, it is true that the practice of spiritual exercises aimed at improving the individual Epicurean is itself future-directed, in a sense; but the emphasis is always on the present -- the exercises are performed with an intense concentration on the present moment, and if and when the future comes, the individual will have undergone change for the better and, at that time, will continue to live intensely in *that* present.

A passage from Philodemus, quoted by Warren (2000:241), expresses well the Epicurean perspective on the good life and the good death: "The one who understands, having grasped that he is capable of achieving everything sufficient for the good life, immediately and for the rest of his life walks about already buried, and enjoys the single day as if it were eternity". This understanding, coupled with the Epicurean mode of living-in-the-present, is what enables the same individual both to live well and to die well.³⁷

Thus, although there is contention permeating the issue of fear of death, Epicureans can legitimately claim that their opponents are positing, consciously or unconsciously, a different conception of the good life, one which includes *necessarily* the completion of projects, fulfilment of desires, etc. -- a life, in other words, that is future-directed in a way in which the Epicurean good life is not. In rejecting Epicurus' hedonism, the basis of Epicurean ethics, the deprivation theorists are essentially arguing amongst themselves about the specific nature of death's badness while Epicureans continue to live a simple life of mild hedonism, striving to emulate the gods.

Furley (1986:90) even admits that in order to eliminate the fear of death, "it would be necessary to be in a state in which future possibilities were of no concern. This is indeed the state of one who follows to the letter Epicurus' advice to confine one's desires to the bare essentials for avoiding present pain. If Epicurus' case that death is nothing to us is to be persuasive, one must accept the hedonist premiss of Epicurean morality in its fullest

³⁶"This emphasis on possibilities, opportunities, and great achievements is in direct opposition to the Epicurean ideal of an uncomplicated life spent enjoying static pleasure" (Braddock 2000:63-4).

³⁷Warren (2000:241) comments on this passage from *De morte* 38, as follows: "The wise man is always ready for death. He walks about 'already buried' because once he has achieved *eudaimonia*, to die at any point would be no better or worse than dying at another. His attitude towards time and duration is also significantly different from that of those who do not view their mortality correctly. The single day becomes for him eternity, not in the sense that he lives life 'slowly', but, presumably, because he has recognized that a single day offers him the chance of absolute fulfilment".

strength". Of course, this is precisely what Epicureans do and deprivation theorists do not do.³⁸

We have given the deprivation theorists the benefit of doubt as to their claim that the real fear in death is not death *qua* nonexistence (Furley's first reason for fearing death), but the consequent loss of goods suffered in death (Furley's second reason). In spite of doing so, we find Epicureans able to surmount even this obstacle, through their achievement of *ataraxia* via the wide range of spiritual exercises at their disposal, to which we shall now turn.

4.7 Spiritual Exercises on Death

[M]editation on death ... is to become self-aware by means of the thought of death, for the self which thinks of its death always, in one way or another, thinks of itself in the atemporality of the Spirit or of being. We can therefore say that, in this sense, the exercise of death is one of the most fundamental philosophical exercises. (Hadot 2002:198)

Acquaintance with Epicurean philosophical discourse, while an important aspect of *therapeia*, is not sufficient by itself: spiritual exercises are an integral part of a consolatory programme vis-à-vis the fear of death (Hadot 2002:122). The Epicureans and others "trained for death".³⁹ *KD* 2, the second remedy of the *tetrapharmakos*, is the condensed substance of the Epicurean meditation on death (*meditare mortem*):⁴⁰ "Death is nothing to us. For what has been dissolved has no sense-experience, and what has no sense-experience is nothing to us" (IG I-5). This, in conjunction with Epicurus' letter to Menoeceus, constitutes the principal focus for meditation on death: "Do and practise what I constantly told you to do, believing these to be the elements of living well.... Get used to believing that death is nothing to us" (*Ep. Men.* 123-4). Here Epicurus exhorts the disciple to engage in *practice* as a transformative activity. Again, at *Ep. Men.* 135, he urges engagement: "Practise these and the related precepts day and night, by yourself and with a like-minded friend". And such practice will bring about the desired conversion to *philosophia* and *phronesis*, and allow the Epicurean follower to live in utter peace, without fear of death: "[Y]ou will never be disturbed either when awake or in sleep, and you will live as a god among men" (*Ep. Men.* 135). This is the

³⁸"The Epicurean point stands against the deprivation theorists as long as one accepts the Epicurean view of the good life" (Braddock 2000:59).

³⁹See Hadot (1995:93-101) for a discussion of spiritual exercises on "Learning to Die".

⁴⁰The expression comes from Epicurus through Seneca: "[T]he Stoic Seneca borrowed the maxim '*Meditare mortem*' from Epicurus" (Hadot 1995:120).

ultimate goal, for when one lives like the gods, sharing in their blessedness, one is no longer in any respect "like a mere mortal animal" (*Ep. Men.* 135). Thus, the *meditare mortem*, carried out in the finite, present moment, is the basis of the Epicurean elevation to the infinite: "For the Epicurean, the thought of death is the same as the consciousness of the finite nature of existence, and it is this which gives an infinite value to each instant. Each of life's moments surges forth laden with incommensurable value" (Hadot 1995:95-6). We may ask, with respect to death: "Is this not *consolatio*? Is it not *therapeia*?"

Memory plays a varied role as spiritual exercise in Epicurean psychagogy. There is first of all the memorisation of precepts as described above; and there is also the use of memory to preserve in the mind dear friends and fellow-philosophers. As Epicurus says, "Sweet is the memory of a dead friend" (Plut., *Suav. viv.* 1105E=IG I-121). When we hold fast to the memory of a friend, he lives within us, and, besides offering *consolatio*, even helps to transform us -- perhaps moreso than when he breathed and walked about in the world.⁴¹

When we consider such practices, we begin to sense the manifold nature of Epicurean spiritual exercises. Meditation on precepts constitutes the core of Epicurean transformative exercise, not only with respect to death, but in general. Augmenting this basic internalisation of principles, however, are the fundamental spiritual exercises of friendship, physics, philosophy, etc., designed to bring *consolatio* to the disciple.

Friendship, which Epicurus deems "by far the greatest" of those things wisdom provides for a blessed life (*KD* 27=IG I-5), is a spiritual exercise of utmost importance with respect to death. Expanding Epicurus at *Sent. vat.* 78,⁴² Rist (1972:136) makes explicit the functions of friendship within the Epicurean community:

In a sense friendship provides the immortality for the group which death removes from each of its individual members. Friendship can be passed on for ever within the Epicurean community; perhaps this is at least a part of the reason why Epicurus can believe that, while wisdom and friendship are what generate a noble man, it is not wisdom alone which outlives each individual who possesses it. Friendship too is deathless, for the community of the wise lives on. And even if the community of Epicurus were to die out, we should still have the gods to provide us with a paradigm of the life of friendship.

This explains, in part, why Epicurus proclaimed friendship as that which, in dancing around the world, wakes us up to blessedness (*Sent. vat.* 52=IG I-6).

⁴¹As Saint-Exupéry puts it, "He who has gone, so we but cherish his memory, abides with us, more potent, nay more present, than the living man" (*The Wisdom of the Sands* 1948:2).

⁴²"The noble man is most involved with wisdom and friendship, of which one is a mortal good, the other immortal" (*Sent. vat.* 78=IG I-6).

Physics and philosophy also constitute spiritual exercises with respect to fear of death, for dread and darkness of the mind can be dispelled "by an understanding of the outward form and inner workings of nature" (Lucretius, *Rer. nat.* 3.90; trans. Latham 1951:98). As for the importance of studying philosophy, Epicurus points to death in suggesting that a young man may benefit from philosophy particularly in becoming "like an old man owing to his lack of fear of what is to come" (*Ep. Men.* 122=IG I-4). Here we see that the old are less likely than the young to fear death, especially if they have lived a good life.⁴³ The young, through the practice of philosophy, can emulate the wisdom of their elders.

The exercise of *avocatio-revocatio*, or of turning the mind away from unpleasant thoughts towards pleasant ones, also has a role with respect to fear of death. Such an exercise need not (though it can) be a last resort when all else fails to console; it can equally well function as an integral part of one's thinking on a daily basis, from moment to moment, thus enhancing natural good -- that is, pleasure -- and dissuading natural evil, or pain. And from *avocatio-revocatio*, one can consciously move towards seeking the spiritual exercise of the highest pleasure: *ataraxia*, the gateway to *eudaimonia*.

We have seen that for the Epicurean there are no good reasons to regard the fear of death as rational. On the contrary, there are many reasons for declaring such a fear to be utterly irrational. For on the basis of Epicurean hedonism, in conjunction with the variety of spiritual exercises practised by the Epicureans, a good life can equal that of the gods, not in duration, but in completeness; there need be nothing lacking in such a life of simple pleasure and friendly good will:

If to be immortal is to live without thinking death relevant at all to one's life, then the Epicurean sage is indeed "immortal". Death is "nothing to him". Absolutely nothing. Not only does it not cause him distress; it has no part to play in his conception of his life. He transcends his mortality as Epicurus did. *Deus ille fuit.* (Warren 2000:261)

⁴³On this point, Epicurus declares: "It is not the young man who is to be congratulated for his blessedness, but the old man who has lived well. For the young man at the full peak of his powers wanders senselessly, owing to chance. But the old man has let down anchor in old age as though in a harbour, since he has secured the goods about which he was previously not confident by means of his secure sense of gratitude" (*Sent. vat.* 17=IG I-6).

CHAPTER 5
THIRD AND FOURTH REMEDIES:
GOOD CAN BE ATTAINED; EVIL CAN BE ENDURED

Perhaps the most important and certainly the most controversial feature of [Epicurus'] ethical theory is his identification of pleasure (*hedone*) with our ultimate and final goal (*telos*), happiness (*eudaimonia*). By equating pleasure with happiness, Epicurus places his discussion of pleasure not only at the very center of his ethics but also squarely within the tradition of Greek ethical eudaimonism. (Mitsis 1988:11)

Thus far, we have seen that for Epicureans there is nothing to fear in god; nor is there anything to feel in death: indeed, the disciples of Epicurus who have acceded to the highest pleasure, *ataraxia*, are entitled to say, "Death is nothing to us". But so far we have relied on assumptions regarding good and evil, and it is now necessary to enquire more closely into their precise nature. If we are to agree with *KD* 3 and 4, and the corresponding third and fourth remedies of the *tetrapharmakos* -- that "Good can be attained" and "Evil can be endured" -- we shall first have to ascertain the nature of good and evil. We shall have to be able to say what they are and, in view of what they are, how good might be easily attained and evil endured. Only then will we be able to conclude that the *tetrapharmakos* not only summarises the main lessons of Epicurean ethics, but that each of its four fundamental propositions is true in a practical philosophical sense for those who live in accordance with them.

We shall begin by examining the hedonistic foundation of Epicurus' ethics in order to secure the above judgement and validate the third and fourth remedies. We shall therefore focus on the following questions:

- a) How can we know that pleasure is the *telos*?
- b) What is the relation between *katastematic* pleasure and *kinetic* pleasure?
- c) How do pleasure and pain function ethically within Epicureanism?
- d) How do Epicurean spiritual exercises contribute to the attainment of good and the averting or enduring of evil?

We shall examine how the answers to these questions illuminate the third and fourth remedies of the *tetrapharmakos*, or, in other words, how they enable Epicurean disciples to have sufficient confidence in the dicta "Good is easily attained" and "Evil is easily endured" to transform their lives through these and the other strands of the *tetrapharmakos*, as well as through its associated spiritual exercises.

5.1 Pleasure as the *Telos*¹

It was Eudoxus who held that pleasure is the supreme good. His reasons may be briefly stated. 'All creatures, endowed with reason or not, manifestly seek it. What is desirable is always good, and what is most desirable is best. Hence the fact that all creatures are attracted to the same point shows that the centre of attraction is the supreme good for all, since a particular thing finds its particular good in the same way as it finds the food particularly suited to it. Now that which is good for all and which all seek to have is the supreme good'. (Aristotle, *Ethica Nichomachea* 10.2; trans. Thomson 1955:288)

So, we are asking what is the final and ultimate good, which according to the view of all philosophers ought to be what everything should be referred to, but which should itself be referred to nothing else. Epicurus places this in pleasure, which he claims is the highest good and that pain is the greatest bad thing. (Cic., *Fin.* 1.29=IG I-21)

In a recent essay, Striker (1993:3) begins with the following words relevant to our investigation:

Hedonism, like pleasure, can take many forms, and its fundamental tenet, "pleasure is the good", is notoriously open to different interpretations. Also, the advice, moral and otherwise, given to people who try to pursue this good may vary a great deal, depending on one's view of what pleasure is. To say that a certain philosopher is a hedonist, therefore, is not yet to say much about the content of his doctrine.

In order to determine the plausibility of *KD* 3 and 4, and hence their therapeutic value, or capacity for conferring on the Epicurean disciple the *consolatio* which leads to *ataraxia* and *eudaimonia*, we need to take seriously Striker's opening comments -- to elucidate, in other words, Epicurus' meaning of such fundamental assertions as, for example, "pleasure is the starting point and goal (*telos*) of living blessedly" (*Ep. Men.* 128=IG I-4), and then to examine such moral and other advice given by Epicurus on the basis of his meaning here -- to determine, in short, what kind of hedonist Epicurus is.²

We may begin by noting that in Epicurus' time "pleasure had become one of the most discussed topics in Greek philosophy" and, furthermore, that Epicurus was familiar with existing Platonic and Aristotelian arguments for and against hedonism (Long and Sedley

¹"When Epicurus awarded pleasure the rank of ultimate good, and pain that of ultimate evil, he completed the last stage of a transformation of the older ethics of virtue (*arete*) as prowess on a public stage into a concern with *eudaimonia* interpreted in terms of subjective experience: a transformation that may with hindsight be perceived as mediated by the fierce and unresolved debate over the role of pleasure in which Plato, Aristotle and the Academy engaged" (Erler and Schofield 1999:647).

²Purinton (1993:303-9) presents a survey of previous interpretations of Epicurean pleasure, indicating the contentious nature of the subject. He considers the views of Merlan, Hossenfelder, Gosling and Taylor, Rist, Plato and Aristotle, Diano, Giannantoni, and Mitsis, countering the general thrust of each position with observations of his own.

1987:121).³ In addition, Epicurus was almost certainly acquainted with and influenced by Democritus' "blend of temperate enjoyment, quietude and self-sufficiency" (Long and Sedley 1987:121).⁴ The idea of a eudaimonistic life as the ultimate goal for man was generally accepted in Hellenistic philosophy, though the specific nature of that good within Epicureanism is distinctive:⁵ "In common with other Hellenistic schools, Epicureanism advocates the good life or *eudaimonia* as the goal of all actions. What is distinctive in its position becomes apparent in the concrete form of the good we are thereby to achieve: pleasure, construed as quiet of mind (*ataraxia*) and the absence of bodily pain (*aponia*)" (Erler and Schofield 1999:644).

In connection with pleasure, Rist (1972:100-114) identifies several issues of contention, among which are the following: the idea that the limit of pleasure is the absence of pain, and the corresponding absence of a neutral state between pleasure and pain (111-14); the lack of argument for assertions regarding the "first natural impulse" of children and animals being directed towards pleasure (105-6); that the beginning and root of every pleasure is pleasure of the stomach (104-5); the relation of katastematic to kinetic pleasure (109-11); and the "quietist" versus "sensualist" passage in Epicurus (100). Each of these will be discussed in the following pages.

5.1.1 *That there is no neutral state between pleasure and pain*

Epicurean hedonistic ethics can be readily characterised by its distinctive features.

³Hadot (2002:115) observes: "In the Epicurean theory of pleasure, historians of philosophy correctly discern an echo of the discussions of pleasure which had taken place in Plato's Academy, and which are exemplified by Plato's dialogue *Philebus* and the tenth book of Aristotle's *Ethica Nichomachea*." See Plato, *Protagoras* 351b-358d, *Gorgias* 492d-507e, *Republic* 9.581a-587e, *Philebus*; also Aristotle, *Ethica Nichomachea* 7.11-17, 10.1-5, *Rhetoric* 1.10-11.

⁴The flavour of Democritean pleasure and its kinship with that of Epicurus is adumbrated in the following fragment: "For good spirits come to men through temperate enjoyment and a life commensurate. Deficiencies and excesses tend to turn into their opposites and to make large motions in the soul. And such souls as are in large-scale motion are neither in good balance nor in good spirits" (KRS 594). See also Chapter 2 in Gosling and Taylor (1982) for a discussion of the Democritean background to Epicurean hedonism.

⁵"Like most other Greek moralists, Epicurus thinks that the central aims of an ethical theory are to describe the nature of happiness (*eudaimonia*) and to delineate the methods by which one achieves it..." (Mitsis 1988:11).

Consider first the idea that there is *no neutral state* between pleasure and pain.⁶ Since all Hellenistic schools agreed that man's goal is a eudaimonistic life, it was natural that Epicurus should regard happiness as a good to be sought, and to indicate how it might be attained. He did so by identifying good with pleasure and, conversely, evil with pain. Following from this came his assertion that there is "a connection between the elimination of all pain and the degree of pleasure attained. In his view there is no third state, no so to speak neutral state, between the two poles of pain and pleasure. Accordingly freedom from physical pain (*aponia*) and freedom from mental disturbance (*ataraxia*) constitute the ultimate goal of all actions for Epicurus" (Erler and Schofield 1999:649).⁷ The equivalence of good with pleasure was not unique to Epicureanism: the Cyrenaics also had a hedonist ethics; but the notion that there was no neutral state between pleasure and pain, and further, that the absence of pain is itself a pleasure, was peculiar to Epicurean ethics.⁸

5.1.2 *Limits of pleasure and pain*

A second distinctive feature of Epicurean ethics is, therefore, the notion that pleasure is the absence of pain, and further, that this state constitutes the *limit* of pleasure. At *KD* 3, we confront this aspect of Epicurus' hedonism: "The removal of all feeling of pain is the limit of the magnitude of pleasures. Wherever a pleasurable feeling is present, for as long as it is present, there is neither a feeling of pain nor a feeling of distress, nor both together" (IG I-5).

⁶"So Epicurus did not think that there was some intermediate state between pleasure and pain; for that state which some people think is an intermediate state, viz. the absence of all pain, is not only pleasure but it is even the greatest pleasure. For whoever perceives the state which he is in must in fact be in pleasure or in pain. But Epicurus thinks that the limit for the greatest pleasure is set by the absence of all pain; and though later [i.e., after all pain has been eliminated] pleasure can be varied and adorned, it cannot be increased or augmented" (Cic., *Fin.* 1.38=IG I-22).

⁷That *all* actions are concerned with securing *aponia* and *ataraxia* is contentious. Purinton (1993:314), for example, argues that Epicurus intended kinetic pleasures to be sought in conjunction with the main goal of katastematic pleasure: "the key is to see that one makes katastematic pleasure one's end only on the assumption that doing so will also allow one to enjoy kinetic pleasures -- and, indeed, purer kinetic pleasures, and more of them, at least in the long term".

⁸"Epicurus disagrees with the Cyrenaics, who do not accept the existence of katastematic pleasure and who hold that pleasure necessarily involves motion -- that is, pleasure is exclusively kinetic. Furthermore, the Cyrenaics oppose Epicurus in believing that pains of the body are worse than those of the soul" (DL 10.136-7=IG I-9). The orthodox Cyrenaic position and Epicurus' break with it is discussed by Purinton (1993:282-7).

Here we encounter directly that most curious feature of Epicurean hedonism: that the absence of all feeling of pain is not merely pleasure, but the *limit* of pleasure. This principle, which forms the basis for the third remedy of the *tetrapharmakos*, clearly separates Epicurean hedonism from that of the Cyrenaics, for whom the absence of pain does not constitute pleasure -- let alone the *limit* of pleasure.⁹

Epicurus further notes regarding the limit of pleasure another distinctive feature of his ethics: "As soon as the feeling of pain produced by want is removed, pleasure in the flesh will not increase *but is only varied*. But the limit of mental pleasures is produced by a reasoning out of these very pleasures [of the flesh] and of the things related to these, which used to cause the greatest fears in the intellect" (*KD* 18=IG I-5; my emphasis). This notion that pleasure is *varied* has proven to be a difficult one for scholars, and we shall return to it later in this chapter.

KD 15 also bears directly on the third remedy: "Natural wealth is both limited and easy to acquire. But wealth [as defined by] groundless opinions extends without limit" (IG I-5). Thus, the Epicurean disciple who directs himself principally to fulfilment of desires that are natural and necessary, will easily attain good. This idea is augmented by *KD* 21, on the relatively easy attainment of good: "He who has learned the limits of life knows that it is easy to provide that which removes the feeling of pain owing to want and make one's whole life perfect. So there is no need for things which involve struggle" (IG I-5). Here we see the relative importance of the pleasure consisting in the absence of pain, a pleasure capable of making "one's whole life perfect".

With respect to the fourth remedy of the *tetrapharmakos*, we find in Epicurean writings a corresponding statement of limitation regarding pain or evil: "The feeling of pain does not linger continuously in the flesh; rather, the sharpest is present for the shortest time, while what merely exceeds the feeling of pleasure in the flesh lasts only a few days. And diseases which last a long time involve feelings of pleasure which exceed feelings of pain" (*KD* 4=IG I-5). Thus the Epicurean disciple need not fear that pain will be insurmountable, for it will, on the contrary, be easy to endure.

⁹Pleasure as *telos* is discussed in Erler and Schofield (1999:651-7), with particular reference to differences between Cyrenaic and Epicurean hedonism.

Therefore, pleasure and pain have their limits; but what state is it in which one has "pleasure consisting in the absence of pain"? For the present it is sufficient to stress the importance of not regarding this state in a purely negative way, as Nussbaum notes: "What the healthy creature goes for, according to the texts, appears to be not a zero state, a state of stagnant inactivity; such a state, indeed, would be death for the organism. The goal seems to be something more substantial and more positive: the continued undisturbed and unimpeded functioning of the whole creature" (1994:109). We shall return to the limit of pleasure when we discuss katastematic in the pages ahead.

5.1.3 *The beginning and root of all pleasure*

What does Epicurus mean when he tells us at *Sent. vat.* 33 that the flesh cries out not to be hungry, or thirsty, or cold, and that one who is free from these afflictions and who feels confident of remaining so is able to contend with gods for happiness? Here it would seem that Epicurus is pointing to the fact that these particular fleshly concerns are natural and necessary desires relating to kinetic pleasures, ones whose satisfaction may carry us toward *aponia* (freedom from bodily pain), but ones which, in any case, we must satisfy if we are to continue to live and have even a possibility of seeking more sublime pleasures. Note that Epicurus does not say that satisfaction of these desires will be sufficient for the highest pleasure, but clearly they are necessary. However, we must get beyond bare necessities in order to work towards the supreme pleasure: "[W]hile our efforts are still directed at and our energy used up in the struggle for mere survival we're hardly capable of a humanly good life" (Preuss 1994:90). To put it another way, man must first eat, drink, and be comfortable before he can pursue philosophy.

We may add that Epicurus' purpose here is also to draw a limit to fleshly desires -- we need very little to be happy -- if more comes our way occasionally, fine, but we are imprudent to live in expectation of it.¹⁰ He also means that once we have a true understanding of our nature and the good, we will then be able to enjoy to the fullest that which merely removes hunger, thirst, cold -- in short, fleshly pain.

¹⁰Cf. *KD* 21; see also Erler and Schofield 1999:658.

Although it is tempting to think of *ataraxia* as strictly a mental phenomenon, it is essential to remember that, for Epicurus, the body encompasses mind and soul, and that "the principle and root of all good is the pleasure of the belly; and the sophisticated and refined [goods] are referred to this one" (Ath., *Deipnosophists* 12.546f=IG I-130).¹¹ Hadot (2002:114) gives a concrete characterisation of the subject of Epicurean fleshly experience: "Epicureanism originated in an experience and a choice. The experience was that of the 'flesh' ... not an anatomical part of the body, but -- in a sense which is phenomenological and apparently wholly new in philosophy -- it is the subject of pleasure and pain, or the individual". It is this subject which dwells in the world, must eat, drink, and keep warm in order to survive first, then pursue the *telos*.

Rist (1972:104) speaks of "one of Epicurus' most notorious sayings ... 'The beginning and root of every good is the pleasure of the stomach'". His solution consists in the observation "... that when Epicurus says that the beginning and root of all good is the pleasure of the stomach, he means not that eating is fun, but that the beginning and root of all good is not to be hungry and not to be thirsty" for this, asserts Rist (1972:104-5), allows a man to "enjoy freedom from the hardships of the body (*aponia*)" and this facilitates the attainment of "the supreme pleasure of the mind ... untroubledness (*ataraxia*)".

Finally, Cicero comments on this point, as follows: "[W]e say that the pleasures and pains of the mind take their origin from the pleasures and pains of the body ...; moreover, although mental pleasure and pain do produce good and bad feelings, nevertheless both of them have their origins in the body and take the body as their point of reference" (*Fin.* 1.55=IG I-23). Thus, in a very real and fundamental material sense, the natural and necessary needs of the body are primary with respect to pleasure.

5.1.4 Our first natural impulse; the cradle argument

According to Epicurus, "our first innate good and ... our starting point for every choice and avoidance" is pleasure (*Ep. Men.* 129=IG I-4), and every pleasure is good *qua* pleasure, just as every pain is evil *qua* pain. A famous passage from Cicero contains what is

¹¹Cicero says, similarly: "You have often said that no one rejoices or feels pain except because of the body ... you deny that there is any joy in the mind which is not referred to the body" (*Fin.* 2.98=IG I-24).

commonly referred to as Epicurus' "cradle argument":¹²

As soon as each animal is born, it seeks pleasure and rejoices in it as the highest good, and rejects pain as the greatest bad thing, driving it away from itself as effectively as it can; and it does this while it is still not corrupted, while the judgement of nature herself is unperverted and sound. Therefore, he says that there is no need of reason or debate about why pleasure is to be pursued and pain to be avoided. He thinks that these things are perceived, as we perceive that fire is hot, that snow is white, that honey is sweet. None of these things requires confirmation by sophisticated argumentation; it is enough just to have them pointed out. For there is a difference between the rational conclusion of an argument and simply pointing something out; for the former reveals certain hidden and, as it were, arcane facts, while the latter indicates things which are evident and out in the open. (*Fin.* 1.30=IG I-21)

Here we observe two main points. First, there is a natural propensity for animals to seek pleasure and avoid pain -- sensation and feeling, the criteria of truth, show this, just as sense-perception shows that snow is white, fire hot, etc. Second, no debate is required on this point, since rational argumentation reveals in its conclusion "arcane facts", while pointing to something shows it as it is.¹³ Epicurus did not supply any argument on this, for it was not necessary. Later Epicureans, however, developed two means of supporting Epicurus' position. First, Epicurus' observation regarding young animals' natural propensity to seek pleasure and avoid pain was "described as a 'proof' (*apodeixis*) -- since referred to as the 'cradle argument' -- of the thesis that pleasure is the goal" (Erler and Schofield 1999:649).¹⁴ Secondly, Cicero affirms that later Epicureans wanted "to teach a more subtle form of this doctrine"; they wanted to augment Epicurus' explanation or provide an alternative explanation via reason and intellect: hence, the notion of a *prolepsis*, a "conception, which is, as it were, naturally implanted in our souls, and that as a result of this we perceive that the one is to be pursued and the other to be rejected" (*Fin.* 1.31=IG I-21).¹⁵

We also notice that Cicero refers to a young animal whose judgement is not corrupted by virtue of its having been socialised within a particular culture. But what kind of corruption

¹²Piso, disciple of Antiochus in Cicero's *De finibus*, says: "All the ancient philosophers ... turn to cradles [*ad incunabula accedunt*] because it is in childhood [*in pueritia*] that they think we can most easily recognise the will of nature [*naturae voluntatem cognoscere*]" (Brunschwig 1986:113).

¹³Again, at *Fin.* 3.3, Cicero reaffirms that Epicurus himself says that it is not necessary to argue about pleasure, since sense-perception is the basis of our knowledge concerning it.

¹⁴No reference to the cradle argument is to be found in the surviving writings of Epicurus (Erler and Schofield 1999:650).

¹⁵See also Erler and Schofield (1999:650).

is being referred to here? Nussbaum (1994:107) suggests "... religious superstitions that teach us fear of the gods and of death; love stories that complicate our natural sexual appetite; conversations all around us glorifying wealth and power ... if in imagination we can catch the human animal before it gets corrupted ... we will have an authentic witness to the true human good...". Nussbaum (1994:108) also makes the point that the reliability of the senses, which underpins Epicurean epistemology, also does the same for his account of the *telos*, for error is to be found solely in faulty beliefs.¹⁶

Finally, Erler and Schofield (1999:650) maintain that the cradle argument is presented "not as a direct, independent proof that pleasure is good, pain bad, but merely as a reason for thinking that our adult desire for pleasure and aversion to pain must be something natural to us, not the consequence of exposure to the corruptions of upbringing or society". In fact, as we have seen, an Epicurean reply would be that such adult desires are evidence of what observation of young animals and children reveals -- that is, that pleasure is good, pain evil; and the corruptions of upbringing and society are evident in the faulty beliefs which keep most of humanity in anguish and slavery.¹⁷

5.2 *Kinetic and Katastematic Pleasure*

The pursuit of *ataraxia* is constant and should underpin any other desires an agent may conceive. The desire for *ataraxia* is more akin to a general principle of prudential reasoning: that one should always act in one's best interests. The pursuit of *ataraxia* is merely the Epicurean specification of what is in fact in one's best interests. (Warren 2001:162)

Epicurus distinguishes two varieties of pleasure: the kinetic pleasures of motion (satisfying a desire) and the katastematic pleasures of stability (having a satisfied desire). (Mitsis 1988:45)

Two kinds of pleasure are reflected in the following passage: "Happiness is conceived of in two ways: the highest happiness, which is that of god and does not admit of further intensification, and that which <is determined by> the addition and subtraction of

¹⁶Nussbaum (1994:108) comments further on Epicurus' epistemology, which "supports his choice of an ethical witness; but it is also supported by his analysis of ethical disease; it is because society and its teaching are found so sick and unreliable that we need to rely on a judge that stands apart from its teaching. And Epicurus shrewdly grasps the implications of his moral epistemology for philosophical method. A claim about the end is not something to be demonstrated by subtle argument, because subtle argument is not the reliable cognitive tool some think it is, but something easily perverted by culture...".

¹⁷On the "cradle argument" see Brunschwig's (1986) analysis and Sedley's (1996) response.

pleasures" (DL 10.121a=IG I-8). These have come to be called *katastematic* and *kinetic* pleasure, respectively.

Aristotle had already identified two kinds of pleasure: those of the soul and of the body: "There is a theory that some pleasures, generally described as the 'higher' pleasures, are exceptionally desirable, while the bodily pleasures (which give the intemperate man his opportunity) are not" (*Eth. Nic.* 7.14; trans. Thomson 1955:223). Epicurus likewise recognises two types of pleasure: static and kinetic, or, more familiarly, *katastematic* and *kinetic*.

We can profitably begin here by noting the problematic nature of the distinction between *katastematic* and *kinetic* pleasure, and by sampling the highly contentious nature of their interpretation.¹⁸ Erler and Schofield (1999:654) summarise the problems:

Modern scholarship finds the distinction obscure. It does not occur in the *Letter to Menoeceus* or the *Kuriai Doxai*; and the interpretation of the one quotation from Epicurus' own writings which appears to exploit it is controversial. There is particular disagreement on the range of pleasures which fall within the kinetic class, and over the philosophical provenance of the actual idea of a kinetic pleasure. Are we to think primarily of the discussions in Plato and Aristotle of whether there are pleasures of process, e.g. of the restoration of the body from conditions of deprivation to its natural state? Or does Epicurus borrow the notion of kinetic pleasure from Aristippus, who is reported to have insisted that both pleasure and pain are "motions"...?

Plato in *Philebus* (31e-32b) defines pain as the sensation of the dissolution of a natural state, pleasure as sensing the restoring of that state.¹⁹ He also defines an intermediate, neutral state in which neither of the above sensations is indicated -- that is, in which neither pleasure nor pain is sensed. For Epicurus, however, as we have seen, there is no neutral state, and although the restoration of a natural state is indeed pleasure, it is certainly not the only kind. In contradistinction to the Cyrenaics, Epicurus declares that there is also the pleasure consisting in "freedom from disturbance and freedom from suffering" (DL 10.136=IG I-9). The former, Diogenes informs us, Epicurus refers to as *kinetic* pleasure, the latter as *katastematic*.

Mitsis (1988:45) also speaks of "restoration", in distinguishing kinetic from *katastematic* pleasure: "Epicurus suggests that the pleasure of eating, say, brown bread or

¹⁸Erler and Schofield note that the distinction is "the subject of a large literature"; see Diano (1974), Merlan (1960), Rist (1972), app. D; Gosling and Taylor (1982), ch. 19; Purinton (1993); Preuss (1994).

¹⁹See Purinton (1993:305), who argues against kinetic pleasure as restoration.

white bread, and in the process, stilling my hunger is a kinetic pleasure. When my hunger has been satisfied and my natural constitution has been restored to a state of balance, my occurrent state of satisfaction is a katastematic pleasure".

Purinton (1993:315) responds to this point regarding the distinction between kinetic and katastematic pleasure:

To show that Epicurus denied that pleasures differ in intensity, Mitsis cites *Men.* 131, where Epicurus asserts that "bread and water provide the greatest pleasure when someone needy gets them." Now, Mitsis correctly notes that, in saying this, Epicurus means to claim only "that by satisfying our hunger with bread and water, we reach the limit of pleasure." But what *that* shows is that the pleasure which Epicurus is talking about here is *katastematic* pleasure. And the fact that *katastematic* pleasures do not differ in intensity has no bearing on the question of whether *kinetic* ones do.²⁰

Observing a relation between Aristotle's and Epicurus' conception of static pleasure, Nussbaum (1994:109 n.10) comments: "We should notice that Aristotle's characterization of pleasure as the activity of a *hexis* or settled condition is close to Epicurus' conception of the central type of pleasure as 'katastematic,' that is, pertaining to a settled systemic condition".

And Epicurus himself hints at the nature of katastematic pleasure when he says, "For the stable condition (*katastema*) of the flesh and the reliable expectation concerning this contains the highest and most secure joy, for those who are able to reason it out" (Plut., *Suav.* viv. 1089d=IG I-36). And we may ask why the well-balanced state of flesh and confident expectation regarding it would be the greatest and most secure joy. Precisely because the stable condition of the flesh is *aponia*, a katastematic pleasure, and the reliable expectation of its continuance leads in significant measure towards the katastematic unperturbedness of *ataraxia*.

With respect to this very same passage, Rist (1972:106) notes: "All the ancient sources agree that Epicurus identified unsurpassable pleasure, the fullness of pleasure, which he called a stable condition of the flesh and a confident expectation for the future on this score, with a complete absence of pain and anxiety". Elsewhere (1972:100-01) he says "that the highest pleasure is to be identified with the absence of pain".²¹ Rist, seems here to be suggesting that there is general agreement on a *definition* of pleasure by Epicurus. Preuss (1994:98-9), on the

²⁰In a footnote on the same page Purinton outlines the debate over this issue between Diano and Bignone during the 1930s.

²¹Gosling and Taylor (1982:347) also state that "pleasure is defined as the absence of pain".

other hand, rejects this notion. Referring to *Ep. Men.* 131, where Epicurus writes that by "pleasure is the goal" is meant "lack of pain in the body and disturbance in the soul" (IG I-4), Preuss declares that "Epicurus is not defining pleasure here. He is responding to a criticism of this doctrine which tends to identify his hedonism with Cyrenaic hedonism. And he responds by distinguishing between two kinds of pleasure". Since Epicurus clearly recognises as "pleasure" the "continuous partying and enjoying boys and women" as well as "the lack of ... disturbance in the soul", and since the second kind of pleasure is plainly different from the first, Preuss rightly concludes that Epicurus cannot be *defining* pleasure.

That pleasure is an "object of joy" is asserted by Purinton (1993:286-7) and is also mentioned by Erler and Schofield (1999:653): "The pleasure which is the *summum bonum* is not the mere negation of a sensory state. It consists in a perception accompanied by a kind of delight or enjoyment, namely one that has the absence of pain or distress and emancipation from them as its intentional object. But absence of pain would not give us this delight unless it were itself pleasurable".

For Purinton katastematic pleasure is, like all pleasure, not joy but "an object of joy";²² it differs from kinetic pleasure in that, *inter alia*, it is not a feeling (as is, for example, the pleasant sensation of warm bath water on the skin), but a state -- in fact, the "stable condition (*katastema*) of the flesh". Katastematic pleasure does not *feel* good: it simply *is* good (1993:303).²³ Purinton argues that, for Epicurus, everything in which we rejoice is a pleasure. Therefore painlessness is a pleasure -- in fact, the greatest of pleasures (1993:283-7).

Preuss (1994:162-3) maintains that pleasures which are the result of fulfilling recurring desires will be intermittent and will possess an object. For example, if I desire a cup

²²Cf. Cic., *Fin.* 1.37=IG I-22.

²³Purinton (1993:287) suggests the consequences: "Having established, then, that Epicurus holds that 'all that in which we rejoice is pleasure,' let us consider what this thesis entails. It entails, to begin with, that Epicurus does not consider "joy" to be a kind of pleasure, as is usually assumed. For, had Epicurus wished to claim that joy is a pleasure, he would have had to claim that this pleasure is itself something in which we rejoice (since he defines pleasure as that in which we rejoice), and this would lead to an infinite regress: the joy we take in *this* pleasure would itself have to be a pleasure in which we rejoice, and *this* pleasure would have to provide us with a *further* joy, and so on *ad infinitum*. We should rather conclude, then, that Epicurus does not think of joy as a pleasure, but as the intentional state which has pleasure as its intentional object".

of coffee and then proceed to drink one, I will have fulfilled my desire -- the object of which was the coffee. Later in the day, I will perhaps desire another cup of coffee, in which case my intermittent desire will again have to be satisfied if I am to achieve pleasure. Such pleasures, Preuss argues, are regarded by Epicurus as kinetic. Katastematic pleasures, on the other hand, are ones like *ataraxia* and *aponia*: "... *ataraxia* ... results in the removal of an object of fear or disturbance such as the superstitious understanding of the gods.... The removal of these objects of disturbance (*tarache*) results in *ataraxia*, and the negative form of the word expresses the objectiveness of the state (*katastema*)..." (1994:166).²⁴

Aponia is portrayed by Preuss (1994:167) as "literally absence of toil and hardship (*ponos*)".²⁵ He argues that "*aponia* in Epicurus means something like idleness in the best sense of the word" (1994:169). And thus he concludes that "what Epicurus means by *ataraxia* and *aponia* in the fragment from the *Peri Telous* quoted by Diogenes Laertius is a lucid tranquil state of pleasant idleness which, if it continues to be sustained without boredom and other species of catastematic pain, is the good, catastematic pleasure" (1994:170; my emphasis).

This interpretation of Epicurean pleasure makes catastematic pleasure and catastematic pain incompatible; it does not make the former incompatible with kinetic pain, however. In fact, the ability to maintain catastematic pleasure in the face of kinetic pain is a measure of the degree to which one has advanced towards sagehood: "It is part of becoming an Epicurean sage to learn to develop catastematic pleasure when there is no kinetic pain.... The more accomplished Epicurean has also learned to sustain catastematic pleasure during bouts of kinetic pain". The Epicurean sage, in fact, is one who has reached the point of being capable

²⁴ Referring to those who live in fear because of false beliefs, Epicurus characterises *ataraxia* as follows: "And freedom from disturbance [*ataraxia*] is a release from all of this and involves a continuous recollection of the general and most important points [of the system]" (*Ep. Hdt.* 82=IG I-2). This shows the character of *ataraxia* as something which one can *live in*, a *continuous* state of highest pleasure, or, as Purinton might put it, the highest joy in response to painlessness.

²⁵ Preuss (1994:157) summarises Merlan's position: "Merlan understands the basic difference between kinetic and catastematic pleasure to be the source from which they spring. Kinetic pleasure has its source in some external stimulus, while the source of catastematic pleasure is the organism itself". He is in sympathy with Merlan's position, for he says that "[k]atastematic pleasure in Epicurus surely is something like the pleasure of just being alive, and kinetic pleasure something like the various particular pleasures we experience in the process of living" (Preuss 1994:162); see Merlan (1960).

of "sustaining katastematic pleasure ... even ... under torture" (Preuss 1994:172).

We can see, then, that there is contention regarding even the basic nature of the ultimate forms of katastematic pleasure; in fact, such disagreement extends to virtually all major aspects of the Epicurean *telos*, of which a few of the more significant will be discussed in the following pages.

5.2.1 Kinetic versus Katastematic pleasure; variation of pleasures

Cicero's Epicurean spokesman Torquatus explains the nature of pleasure at *Fin.* 1.37:

For we do not just pursue the kind [of pleasure] which stimulates our nature itself with a kind of smoothness and is perceived by the senses with a sort of sweetness, but rather we hold that the greatest pleasure is that which is perceived when all pain is removed. For since when we are freed from pain we rejoice in this very liberation from and absence of annoyance, and since everything in which we rejoice is a pleasure (just as everything which irritates us is a pain), then it is right to call the absence of all pain pleasure. Just as when hunger and thirst are driven out by food and drink, the very removal of annoyance brings with it resulting pleasure, so in every case too the removal of pain brings with it a consequent pleasure. (IG I-22)

It seems clear that by a pleasure which "is perceived by the senses with a sort of sweetness" Torquatus means *kinetic* pleasure, for he contrasts this pleasure with "the greatest pleasure", which "is perceived when all pain is removed", and this latter pleasure is clearly *katastematic*. He goes on to clarify katastematic pleasure as one in which, like all pleasures, we *rejoice*. Hence, he concludes that this "absence of all pain" is indeed pleasure "since everything in which we rejoice is a pleasure" (and, conversely, "everything which irritates us is a pain"). His example of food and drink removing annoyance and bringing pleasure in its wake is meant to be one from which we can extrapolate to other cases of pain's removal bringing "a consequent pleasure". Thus Torquatus demonstrates that absence of pain is a pleasure and, furthermore, he asserts that it is "the greatest pleasure"; in other words, it is superior to mere kinetic pleasure of the senses.

Purinton (1993:283) interprets this passage in a similar manner: "... Epicureans do not pursue only kinetic pleasure. For we consider the katastematic pleasure of painlessness to be 'the greatest pleasure.' And we draw the conclusion that painlessness is a pleasure from two simple premises: (1) 'when we are free of pain, we rejoice,' and (2) 'everything in which we rejoice is a pleasure' (*omne id quo gaudemus voluptas est*)".

Another already-quoted passage also refers to katastematic pleasure as supreme: "For

the stable condition (*katastema*) of the flesh and the reliable expectation concerning this contains the highest and most secure joy, for those who are able to reason it out" (Plut., *Suav.* viv. 1089d=IG I-36). From this passage and Torquatus at *Fin.* 1.37, Purinton (1993:285-6) concludes that Epicurus is doubtless "referring here to the katastematic pleasures, respectively, of the body and of the soul when he speaks of 'the well-balanced *katastema* [state] of the flesh and the confident expectation about it'", and that the magnitude of pleasure "is proportional to the greatness of the joy which it provides, so that what provides the *greatest* joy is the *greatest* pleasure". Since it is the "stable condition (*katastema*) of the flesh and the reliable expectation concerning this" which provide the greatest joy, the greatest pleasures are therefore katastematic pleasures of body and soul.

Now, Purinton (1993:306) agrees with Diano and Rist "that the kinetic pleasure of the body always merely supervenes on the katastematic pleasure of the body, i.e., merely 'varies' it".²⁶ This is because they share a belief that *katastematic* pleasure is that which is referred to at *KD* 18: "As soon as the feeling of pain produced by want is removed, pleasure in the flesh will not increase but is only varied" (IG I-5). They maintain that once this katastematic pleasure exists, as a result of removal of pain -- that is, painlessness -- it can be varied only by the addition of kinetic pleasures to it.

Preuss (1994:104), however, argues that the pleasure in the flesh "due to need makes it clear that Epicurus is here talking about necessary desires, desires, that is, which bring pain if they are not satisfied". Such pleasures, he notes, are *kinetic*: satisfaction of hunger, thirst, etc. And kinetic pleasures can be varied only by the addition of other kinetic pleasures: "This variation can take two forms. Either the means used to produce the pleasure can be varied, that is, do it with different food next time. But when you're full, you're full. Or you could still produce some additional pleasure unrelated to the pain of non-satisfaction: you can usually still enjoy dessert after you're full, it doesn't require hunger or pain due to need" (Preuss 1994:105). Such kinetic pleasure supervening upon an already existing kinetic pleasure would, he avers, "vary" the existing limit by producing "some additional pleasure

²⁶See Diano, "Note Epicuree II" (1935) and "Questioni Epicuree I" (1937), reprinted in Diano, *Scritti Epicurei* (Florence, 1974), 23-128; see also Rist (1972) Appendix D, 170-172.

unrelated to the pain of non-satisfaction".²⁷

In favouring Diano's thesis, Purinton (1993:307) asserts that all bodily pleasures are states of painlessness which may be varied by kinetic pleasures without alteration of the painless state: "And that is why 'Epicurus did not hold that there is a middle state between pain and pleasure' (*Fin.* 1.38): there is only pleasure and pain, though the former comes in two varieties, viz., plain painlessness (which, without kinetic variation, does not *feel* pleasant) and varied painlessness (which does)". Like Rist, Purinton (1993:306) speaks of localized katastematic pleasure: "the kinetic pleasure of *the palate* precedes the katastematic pleasure of *the belly*". But Preuss (1994:152-6) argues at length against localised katastematic pleasures, favoured by Rist and Diano, on the grounds that "... none of Epicurus' examples of katastematic pleasures, for example *ataraxia* and *aponia*, are plausibly understood this way".²⁸

Irrespective of Epicurus' specific meaning at *KD* 18, it seems evident that there are two consistent ways in which the "variation" referred to might occur: a kinetic pleasure being varied by another kinetic pleasure (as in the example propounded by Preuss); also, a katastematic pleasure being varied by a kinetic pleasure's supervening on it (e.g., an advanced Epicurean disciple enjoying a state of *ataraxia* smells a rose, or gazes at a rainbow). This latter variation is the *only* one for Purinton, Rist, and Diano.

Thus, while there may be no consensus on the precise nature of the kinetic-katastematic distinction, nor on whether kinetic pleasures *always* supervene on katastematic ones (nor even, it seems, on the exact constitution of *ataraxia* and *aponia*), there *is* general agreement on *ataraxia* and *aponia* as the modes of katastematic pleasure regarded as the

²⁷Preuss (1994:148) notes that Diano and Rist base their interpretation "of katastematic pleasure as the condition of the organism free from natural and necessary wants, and of kinetic pleasure as presupposing katastematic pleasure and consisting merely in the variation of it" on a passage in Lucretius: "The pleasure derived from taste does not extend beyond the palate. When the tasty morsel has all been gulped down the gullet and is being distributed through the limbs, it gives no more pleasure" (*Rer. nat.* 4.627-9; trans. Latham 1951:149-50). Preuss argues at length (1994:148-62) that the "pleasure in the flesh" referred to at *KD* 18 is kinetic, not katastematic.

²⁸Preuss (1994:152) argues that the very notion in question "commits the theory to the incoherent notion of unfelt pleasures, i.e., unfelt feelings". He also gives examples which he believes are clear cases in which "it is just plain nonsense to speak of a kinetic pleasure supervening upon an existing katastematic pleasure and merely varying it ..." (1994:154).

ultimate goal of man.²⁹ These pleasures are ultimate because they are the katastematic pleasures of the gods, who represent the limit of man's aspirations. They are also the continuous pleasures of the sage, katastematic pleasures on which kinetic pleasures *do* indeed supervene -- for example, the kinetic pleasures of association with friends, philosophical discussion, appreciation of beauty, contemplation of nature, and the anticipation of future pleasures.

5.2.2 *The quietist versus the sensualist passage*

Let us now look briefly at a puzzle involving two contrasting Epicurean passages -- what Rist refers to as the "quietist" passage and the "outrageously 'sensualist'" passage (1972:100-01). He discusses the problem at length as does Purinton (1993), who devotes his entire essay to the question. The problem has possible implications with respect to Epicurus' conception of pleasure.

Consider first the following familiar Epicurean passage:

So when we say that pleasure is the goal we do not mean the pleasures of the profligate or the pleasures of consumption, as some believe, either from ignorance and disagreement or from deliberate misinterpretation, but rather the lack of pain in the body and disturbance in the soul. For it is not drinking bouts and continuous partying and enjoying boys and women, or consuming fish and the other dainties of an extravagant table, which produce the pleasant life, but sober calculation which searches out the reasons for every choice and avoidance and drives out the opinions which are the source of the greatest turmoil for men's souls. (*Ep. Men.* 131-2=IG I-4)

Here it is clear that Epicurus is referring to the katastematic pleasures of *ataraxia* and *aponia*, which he contrasts starkly with the sensual -- that is, *kinetic* -- pleasures of drinking, sex, and extravagant dining. This is in accord with virtually all other direct quotations and doxographic material, and is also excerpted from our most important source for Epicurean ethics: Epicurus' *Letter to Menoeceus*.

Note, however, the following passage, the "sensualist" one:

For he [Epicurus] says: "For I at least do not even know what I should conceive the good to be, if I eliminate the pleasures of taste, and eliminate the pleasures of sex, and eliminate the pleasures of listening, and eliminate the pleasant motions caused in our vision by a visible form". (Ath., *Deipnosophists* 12.546ef=IG I-37)

The solution consists in the reconciliation of these two apparently divergent intentions.

Purinton (1993:314) attempts to reconcile the "quietist" passage with the "sensualist" one,

²⁹Epicurus himself states this clearly at *Ep. Men.* 128.

and, in the process, to explain what Epicurus means by equating pleasure with the *telos*:

This, then, I believe, is how Epicurus would reconcile his claim that katastematic pleasure is the *telos* with his claim that the good cannot be conceived if all kinetic pleasures are removed: the key is to see that one makes katastematic pleasure one's end only on the assumption that doing so will also allow one to enjoy kinetic pleasures -- and, indeed, purer kinetic pleasures, and more of them, at least in the long term. For the good life must certainly include kinetic pleasures, since, as Lucretius puts it, "our nature cries out for nothing but that pain be absent from the body *and* that the mind enjoy pleasant sensation, free of care and fear...". Our nature cries out, i.e., not only for painlessness and fearlessness, but also for the pleasant sensation of kinetic pleasure. And these things, Lucretius adds, are easy to procure. For our bodily nature needs few things, "just whatever remove (*demanter*) pain in such a way that (*ut*) they are also sometimes able (*possint*) to provide gratifyingly many delights." We need, i.e., only the things which rid our bodies of pain but which also provide kinetic pleasures sometimes. We ought, then, to make katastematic pleasure our primary aim, but with the understanding that we will also sometimes enjoy kinetic pleasures as well.

Rist (1972:108-9) also explains the passage in terms of the possibility of conception of goodness: "Hence when we begin to form a *concept* of pleasure, it is natural that the first pleasures which spring to our minds are kinetic pleasures. This may be all that Epicurus meant ... when he said that he could not conceive of the good apart from the (kinetic) pleasures of the senses. If these things are not pleasures, what is?"

Preuss (1994:89) comments similarly that the passage is "not the claim that sensuous pleasures *are* the good, but rather that if we try to conceive the good as entirely unlike these pleasures we find ourselves unable to form a conception with any content ... we are left with empty words".

We might also observe that the passage may have been simply a response to an allegation of Epicurus' doing away with our normal (i.e., Cyrenaic) understanding of pleasure -- that is, as *sensuous* activity. A denial of such an allegation would likely take the form of a passage very much like the sensualist one, for obvious reasons.

5.3 Pleasure and Pain as Ethical Judgements: Desires and Prudence

In conformity with Epicurus' general theory of knowledge, pleasure and pain are sensations which show us the truth about good and evil, and cannot themselves be in error, though we may err in our *opinions* about how to achieve the greatest pleasure. (Sharples 1996:88)

In the face of such widely varying interpretations of many aspects of Epicurean pleasure, we must remind ourselves that our inquiry into kinetic and katastematic pleasure is directed toward the question: "What is the state of the Epicurean sage?" For this is the state of being which is sought by the Epicurean disciple, because it is the one which derives from

consolatio of therapeia. The state consists in the dual katastematic pleasure of *ataraxia* and *aponia*, the path to which lies through a prudential selection of pleasures and avoidance of pains, and through *askesis*, or spiritual exercises. As in previous chapters, in order to gain greater insight into the Epicurean view of pleasure we will turn now to examine more closely the *ipsissima verba*, particularly Epicurus' *Letter to Menoeceus*, which constitutes our most important, direct, integral source on Epicurean pleasure.

5.3.1 Pleasure and pain; the need for a prudential calculus

Consider, first, pleasure and pain. They constitute ethical judgements, for they are, respectively, good and evil. Hence, when we shun a pain, we are saying "no" to an evil; when we accept a pleasure, we are saying "yes" to a good. But how are we to know in advance which of such actions will produce a good -- that is, pleasant -- life (for Epicurus frequently warns of the imprudent selection of pleasures)? The key is to be found in the kinds of desires to which man is subject:³⁰

One must reckon that of desires some are natural, some groundless; and of the natural desires some are necessary and some merely natural; and of the necessary, some are necessary for happiness and some for freeing the body from troubles and some for life itself. (Epicurus, *Ep. Men.* 127=IG I-4)

Here we immediately encounter a difficulty: we cannot choose every pleasure which presents itself, for some pleasures harbour pain in their shadow.³¹ Recognising this, Epicurus suggests to Menoeceus a moral principle to guide his actions and, by extension, all human actions: Menoeceus is advised to hold the above passage in mind and direct his contemplation of every choice to the *telos*:

The unwavering contemplation of these enables one to refer every choice and avoidance to the health of the body and the freedom of the soul from disturbance, since this is the goal of a blessed life. For we do *everything* for the sake of being neither in pain nor in terror. As soon as we achieve this state every storm in the soul is dispelled..... For we are in need of pleasure only when we are in pain because of the absence of pleasure, and when we are not in pain, then we no longer need pleasure. (Epicurus, *Ep. Men.* 128=IG-I-4; my emphasis)

³⁰See Cic., *Tusc.* 5.93-96; necessary and unnecessary desires were already distinguished in Plato, *Republic* 558d.

³¹As to how to identify desires which are not necessary, Epicurus has this to say: "The desires which do not bring a feeling of pain when not fulfilled are not necessary; but the desire for them is easy to dispel when they seem to be hard to achieve or to produce harm" (*KD* 26=IG I-5). Such desires, being harder to fulfil, are easy to ignore.

Here we see that conscious awareness of the different kinds of desires is the basis for referring "every choice and avoidance" to the goal of *ataraxia* and *aponia*. And *everything* is done for this sake. (Epicurus also makes it clear that there is no neutral state between pleasure and pain, for when one is absent the other is present.)

With respect to choice of pleasures, Epicurus emphasises the point that although every pleasure is good *qua* pleasure and every pain bad *qua* pain, we must be prepared to exercise caution with respect to choice:

[W]e do not choose every pleasure; but sometimes we pass up many pleasures when we get a larger amount of what is uncongenial from them. And we believe many pains to be better than pleasures when a greater pleasure follows for a long while if we endure the pains. So every pleasure is a good thing, since it has a nature congenial [to us], but not every one is to be chosen. Just as every pain too is a bad thing, but not every one is such as to be always avoided. (*Ep. Men.* 129=IG I-4)

Thus, we seek good and avoid or bear evil on the basis of the principle which links them to the *telos*.³² Undergoing medical treatment for a pain may itself be painful; but it is worthwhile if it brings an increase of pleasure and a lessening of pain. Similarly, all our decisions must be made prudentially, in full awareness of consequences with respect to the *telos*:

It is, however, appropriate to make all these decisions by comparative measurement and an examination of the advantages and disadvantages. For at some times we treat the good thing as bad and, conversely, the bad thing as good. (*Epicurus, Ep. Men.* 130=IG I-4)

We know when to treat "the good thing as bad" or "the bad thing as good" by virtue of a wise consideration of the consequences of our actions.³³

³²Purinton (1993:316-7) cites *Ep. Men.* 129 as support for the view that kinetic pleasures vary in intensity: "'[W]e consider many pains to be superior to pleasures, when a greater ... pleasure follows for us if we endure the pains for a long time.' Surely at least part of what Epicurus means by this is that we sometimes pass up an available kinetic pleasure in order to procure a later kinetic pleasure which is 'greater' in the sense of being more intense (though, of course, we might also pass it up in order to obtain the *greatest* pleasure, viz., painlessness, which is not great in the sense of being intense, since it is not a feeling of pleasure at all). Surely, in other words, Epicurus means to say that one pleasure can be 'greater' than another in just the same sense that one pain can be greater than another".

³³On the relation between our goal and the kinds of desires, the scholiast on *KD* 20 makes it clear that "Epicurus thinks that those which liberate us from pains are natural and necessary, for example drinking in the case of thirst; natural and not necessary are those which merely provide variations of pleasure but do not remove the feeling of pain, for example expensive foods; neither natural nor necessary are, for example, crowns and the erection of statues" (IG I-5).

5.3.2 *The spiritual exercise of simple living*³⁴

A simple life is more than merely living frugally: it is a spiritual exercise of utmost importance:³⁵

And we believe that self-sufficiency is a great good, not in order that we might make do with a few things under all circumstances, but so that if we do not have a lot we can make do with few, being genuinely convinced that those who least need extravagance enjoy it most; and that everything natural is easy to obtain and whatever is groundless is hard to obtain; and that simple flavours provide a pleasure equal to that of an extravagant life-style when all pain from want is removed. (*Epicurus, Ep. Men.* 130=IG I-4)

Why is the simple life a spiritual exercise on pleasure? Because it requires the kind of diligent practice definitive of such exercise and, in addition, it is transformative of the individual. Furthermore, the self-sufficiency Epicurus advocates makes the disciple free from desires which are uncertain and/or which require inordinate effort to satisfy.

Epicurus continues, advising Menoeceus and other disciples that the simple life has more benefits than freedom from want:

Therefore, becoming accustomed to simple, not extravagant, ways of life makes one completely healthy, makes man unhesitant in the face of life's necessary duties, puts us in a better condition for the times of extravagance which occasionally come along, and makes us fearless in the face of chance. (*Ep. Men.* 131=IG I-4)

We are healthier from a simple diet, unafraid of lean times or of random changes in circumstances, and yet ready to accept the occasional extravagance when it comes along, without becoming a slave to the desire for its permanence. And in the continuation of this passage, Epicurus states categorically what Epicurean pleasure *is* and what it *is not*:

[W]e do not mean the pleasures of the profligate or the pleasures of consumption, as some believe, either from ignorance and disagreement or from deliberate misinterpretation, but rather the lack of pain in the body and disturbance in the soul. (*Ep. Men.* 131=IG I-4)

Thus Epicurus makes the *telos* clear, and he shows how a simple life is both spiritual exercise

³⁴Epicurus intimates simplicity of living when he says, "If you wish to make Pythocles wealthy, do not give him more money; rather, reduce his desires" (Stob., *Anthology* 3.17.23=IG I-45); cf. *KD* 21. On simple living, Lucretius has this to say: "And yet, if a man would guide his life by true philosophy, he will find ample riches in a modest livelihood enjoyed with a tranquil mind" (*Rer. nat.* 5.1117-19; trans. Latham 1951:205). On the futility of limitless wealth and honour, see *Sent. vat.* 81=IG I-6.

³⁵"The *askesis* of desire consists in limiting one's appetites -- suppressing those desires which are neither natural nor necessary, and limiting as much as possible those which are natural but not necessary. The latter do not suppress any real suffering, but aim only at variations in pleasure, and they may result in violent and excessive passions. This *askesis* of pleasure thus determined a specific way of life" (Hadot 2002:117). See also *KD* 30 for Epicurus' warning concerning this type of pleasure.

and means to the end we seek. But, in order to achieve our end, we require a special kind of overriding wisdom that is not merely theoretical.

5.3.3 Prudence: principle of all these things

For Epicurus the source of men's greatest anxiety is unfounded opinion, which he seeks to replace with "sober calculation which searches out the reasons for every choice and avoidance and drives out the opinions which are the source of the greatest turmoil for men's souls" (*Ep. Men.* 132=IG I-4).³⁶ And what is the significance of "the greatest turmoil for men's souls"? It lies in their distraction from the *telos*, for turmoil is the antithesis of tranquillity (*ataraxia*).³⁷

What is required, then, in a word, is *phronesis*, the practical wisdom which supersedes even philosophy, and which stands, along with justice and honour, in a relation of mutual entailment with respect to man's *telos*:

Prudence is the principle of all these things and is the greatest good. That is why prudence is a more valuable thing than philosophy. For prudence is the source of all the other virtues, teaching that it is impossible to live pleasantly without living prudently, honourably, and justly, and impossible to live prudently, honourably, and justly without living pleasantly. For the virtues are natural adjuncts of the pleasant life and the pleasant life is inseparable from them. (*Epicurus, Ep. Men.* 132=IG I-4)

Here we have a passage which shows the way in which "sober reasoning" is therapeutic: in seeking out the reasons for every choice and avoidance of pleasure and pain, it chases away the kinds of choices which are based on faulty opinion, the true source of our anxiety (since faulty opinion leads to choices which bring us pain).³⁸ Prudence also shows the importance of all the other virtues as means to attaining the *telos*.

³⁶That reason has a role to play in the prudential selection of pleasures -- that is, desires to be fulfilled, one's moral decisions -- is evident from Epicurus' *KD* 16: "Chance has a small impact on the wise man, while reasoning has arranged for, is arranging for, and will arrange for the greatest and most important matters throughout the whole of his life" (IG I-5).

³⁷ Annas (1993:190) comments on the kinds of belief which lead men to anxiety: "What then are empty beliefs? They are at least false, but the notion of *empty* implies more than this. There is an established idiom in Greek in which 'empty' is used for what is futile or pointless, and so an empty belief is not a simple factual error but a mistake which renders your efforts pointless, sidetracking your life away from the right way to happiness. Empty beliefs then are errors which are harmful and dysfunctional for the agent."

³⁸Hadot comments on attaining the good: "The method for achieving this stable pleasure consists in an *askesis* of desire. The reason people are unhappy is that they are tortured by 'immense, hollow' desires, such as those for wealth, luxury, and domination" (2002:117).

Prudence is, like philosophy, a spiritual exercise, for it is a practice which elevates the practitioner, raising the disciple ever toward that spiritual perfection possessed by the gods, yet attainable also by the sage. And the practice required of the disciple is extolled by Epicurus in the closing lines of the *Letter to Menoeceus*:

Practise these and the related precepts day and night, by yourself and with a like-minded friend, and you will never be disturbed either when awake or in sleep, and you will live as a god among men. (*Ep. Men.* 135=IG I-4)

Thus, in spite of contention regarding various details of Epicurean pleasure, the words of Epicurus himself are both the most important source and, at the same time, clear enough in their essence to allow the Epicurean disciple to live a simple life in accordance with the emblem of that life, the *tetrapharmakos*, and to accede to the pleasure of the gods.

But *phronesis*, the most important practice and "principle of all these things", implies the practice of other spiritual exercises which help the disciple toward sagehood.

5.4 Spiritual Exercises on Pleasure

The spiritual exercises practised by Epicureans for attainment of their ultimate goal, *ataraxia*, emblematised in the *tetrapharmakos*, were multifarious. In order to easily attain good, they followed the advice of the Master, who, in his *Letter to Menoeceus*, summarised the essential precepts. In Chapters 3 and 4 we discussed various spiritual exercises oriented towards dispelling fear of gods and fear of death; and in this chapter we have examined the simple life and prudence as forms of *askesis*. We now turn to other exercises which are of value to the Epicurean disciple in relation to the third and fourth remedies of the *tetrapharmakos*: "Good is easy to attain" and "Evil is easy to endure".

5.4.1 The virtues

It is clear that for Epicurus the virtues are instrumental in the pursuit of pleasure. This does not mean, however, that they are not of great significance, for he makes it clear that the virtues are to be integrated into the fabric of the disciple's life *if* they lead to the *telos*. Insofar as they do not, they are worthless, just as philosophy that does not heal is of no value to man: "One must honour the noble, and the virtues and things like that, *if* they produce pleasure.

But if they do not, one must bid them goodbye" (Ath., *Deipnosophists* 12.546f=IG I-37).³⁹

The therapeutic role of the virtues is attested by Epicurus: "The virtues too are chosen because of pleasure, and not for their own sakes, just as medicine is chosen because of health..." (DL 10.138=IG I-9). Thus, the virtues can heal through pleasure and lead men to the *telos*; in this, and nothing else, consists their justification as a spiritual exercise contributing to the improvement of man, and it is enough.

5.4.2 *Justice as security*

As with the virtues, justice is good insofar as it leads the Epicurean disciple toward the *telos*. A just life is good, says Epicurus, and is "most free from disturbance", whereas an unjust life is bad -- not in an intrinsic manner, but -- because it is "full of the greatest disturbance" (KD 17=IG I-5). We have already seen, at *Ep. Men.* 132, the famous Epicurean pronouncement on the relation between the *telos*, on the one hand, and prudence, honour, and justice, on the other: "[I]t is impossible to live pleasantly without living prudently, honourably, justly, and impossible to live prudently, honourably, and justly without living pleasurable. For the virtues are natural adjuncts of the pleasant life *and the pleasant life is inseparable from them*" (IG I-4; my emphasis).⁴⁰

Thus the Epicurean is honest and just and prudent because these things are the *sine qua non* of the pleasant life, just as the pleasant life is the *sine qua non* of these things. And the exercise of justice, too, is a spiritual exercise precisely because of this: it is a practice which must be carried out diligently by the Epicurean disciple who hopes to advance on the path to sagehood.

5.4.3 *The dance of friendship*

The subject of friendship among Epicureans has generated a large literature,

³⁹With respect to honour, Epicurus has this to say: "I spit upon the honourable and on those who vainly admire it, whenever it produces no pleasure" (Ath. *Deipnosophists* 12.547a=IG I-151).

⁴⁰Epicurus says: "The laws exist for the sake of the wise, not so that they will not commit injustice but so that they will not suffer injustice" (Stob., *Anthology* 4.143=IG I-154). We have already noted Epicurus' derision of the "honourable" which does not lead to the good; see also KD 14, 31-34; *Sent. vat.* 70.

particularly concerning the question of its instrumental nature.⁴¹ Annas (1993:243) describes in outline the nature of Epicurean friendship:

They regarded it as best to live in small communities like Epicurus' own Garden, and while this did not exclude arrangements like marriage, it is clear that an individual's affection was spread further than was normal Greek practice. Instead of the usual partition of a small area of private, family life in which affection was expressed, and a public life in which political alliances were made (by men, at least), the Epicureans rejected public life and enlarged the private area of affection. Thus what we think of as the private emotions were extended further than a small family circle. And a natural result of this would be a downplaying of the importance of intense and exclusive relationships.

Both the extension of affection and the downplaying of intensity and exclusiveness of relationships would function naturally as an augmentation of security for the members of the Epicurean community.

The peculiar sort of instrumental value of friendship among Epicureans is related by Cicero in the following manner:

And just as hatred, envy, and contempt are inimical to pleasures, so friendships are not only the most trustworthy supports for our pleasures, but they also produce them, as much for our friends as for ourselves. We enjoy friends not only while they are present with us, but we are also elated by our expectations for the immediate and for the more distant future. Because we cannot possibly secure a stable and long-lasting pleasantness in our life without friendship, and cannot maintain friendship itself unless we cherish our friends just as much as we do ourselves, it follows both that this kind of thing does occur in friendship and that friendship is linked with pleasure. For we rejoice at our friends' joys just as much as at our own, and grieve just as much for their anguish. (*Fin.* 1.67=IG I-26)

In the face of this we are led to ask whether friendship is lessened in any way by virtue of its being a means to *ataraxia*, if this is the *only* means of securing *ataraxia*. Furthermore, we may also ask whether any friendship can be stronger than one in which friends rejoice at each other's joys and grieve at each other's pains. Or we may ask what can be more fitting than the behaviour of the Epicurean sage who "will have the same feelings for his friend as for himself and will undertake the same labours for the sake of a friend's pleasure as he would undertake for the sake of his own" (Cic., *Fin.* 1.68=IG I-26).

Thus it is not merely the *ataraxia* resulting from security of friendship, but the kinetic pleasures of discussion, the joys of seeing friends again, etc. which make a pleasant life.

⁴¹ Annas (1993:237) characterises a major problem which has occupied scholars: "A theory that starts from the thesis that my final good is pleasure, where this is construed as my own pleasure, experienced bodily pleasure or deriving from this, nonetheless insists that I can and do feel genuine other-concern, and that the relationships deriving from this are a most valuable part of my life. How can this come about?" See also discussions of Epicurean friendship in Rist (1972), Long (1986a), Mitsis (1988), Stern-Gillet (1989), Sharples (1996), and Erler and Schofield (1999).

Friendship, therefore, is a spiritual exercise *par excellence*, for it permeates the entirety of the disciple's relationships within the Epicurean community, it consoles him in his anguish (making evil easy to bear), and it spreads about him a mantle of joy (making good easy to attain). It dances around him, as around all men, awakening him to blessedness.⁴²

5.4.4 Memory and anticipation

We have already seen the power of memory as a spiritual exercise: memorization of precepts, the sweetness of memories of departed friends, memories of golden days; let us add to the memory of past events the anticipation of future pleasures.⁴³ Warren (2001:179) suggests how anticipation functions as a spiritual exercise both in bringing joy to and eliminating pain of the Epicurean disciple:

The confidence that the Epicurean will experience these pleasures makes the Epicurean experience a lack of anxiety in the present. Just as the Epicureans' acceptance of various doctrines concerning the far future -- namely that death is annihilation and there is no post-mortem judgement and punishment -- is supposed to bring about present peace of mind, so the very promise that he will experience the pleasurable episodes for which he plans contributes to a present feeling of pleasant security. So an Epicurean can generate such katastematic pleasure through his confidence in future kinetic pleasures.

Here we have another spiritual exercise capable of increasing, through "confidence in future kinetic pleasures" the sweet katastematic pleasure of tranquillity.

5.4.5 Avocatio-revocatio

Avocatione a cogitanda molestia et revocatione ad contemplandas voluptates.

Calling the mind away from thinking about things that disturb us and calling the mind back to the contemplation of pleasure. (Holloway 1998:90)

As with the first and second remedies of the *tetrapharmakos*, the third and fourth remedies are amenable to the balm of *avocatio-revocatio*, or the turning of the mind away from unpleasant thoughts to pleasant ones. We have seen that *avocatio-revocatio* can function as an essential aspect of one's everyday thinking, as a *therapeia* to be used upon encountering unpleasantness that refuses to yield peacefully, and ultimately, as a final resort when other

⁴² See *KD* 27, *Sent. vat.* 28, 34.

⁴³ Cicero adumbrates the pleasures and torments attached to memory, contrasting the sage with the fool: "But just as we are thrilled by the expectation of good things, so too we are pleased by the recollection of good things. But fools are tortured by the recollection of bad things, while wise men enjoy past goods kept fresh by a grateful recollection" (*Fin.* 1.57); see also *Sent. vat.* 19.

exercises fail to secure the desired tranquillity. The use of the technique of *avocatio-revocatio* provides to the Epicurean disciple evidence of his own power (as attested by Epicurus at *Ep. Men.* 133) to shape his life, independently of chance circumstances. It is Epicurean *askesis* capable of encouraging, on behalf of the disciple, the attainment of good and the averting or enduring of evil.

5.4.6 *The first two remedies*

It is appropriate at this point to remind ourselves, in retrospect, of the effectiveness of the first two remedies: *Nothing to fear in god*, and *Nothing to feel in death*. As we have seen, there are good reasons for the Epicurean disciple to retain confidence in these dicta. This very fact is itself sufficient to strengthen the will to accept the validity of the third and fourth remedies. Why? Because the first two remedies deal with man's *greatest* fears. This being the case, it follows that when such fears have been dispelled, attaining the good he seeks and enduring the evil he confronts will be rendered easier; this becomes evident when we consider that man's greatest fears represent, in the absence of the first two remedies, an absolute bar to *ataraxia*, for *ataraxia* cannot be approached in anguish, its antithesis. Thus, while not sufficient as a basis for the disciple's attainment of the *telos*, the vanquishing of man's greatest fears is a necessary precondition for its realisation; in conjunction with the spiritual exercises directed specifically towards attainment of pleasure and avoidance or endurance of pain, however, the therapeutic power of the first two remedies of the *tetrapharmakos* becomes sufficient to enable the disciple's confidence in the third and fourth remedies. The resultant confidence in the *tetrapharmakos* as an emblem of Epicurean ethics elevates the disciple toward sagehood:

For who do you believe is better than a man who has pious opinions about the gods, is always fearless about death, has reasoned out the natural goal of life and understands that the limit of good things is easy to achieve completely and easy to provide, and that the limit of bad things either has a short duration or causes little trouble? (Epicurus, *Ep. Men.* 132=IG I-4)

The Epicurean answer, of course, is no one.

5.4.7 *Epicurean communal psychagogy*

Further evidence of the practical orientation of Epicureanism, and of the open nature of Epicurean interpersonal relations, comes in the form of Epicurean communal psychagogy,

an extension of the spiritual exercise of friendship. *Psychagogy*, or the "mature person's leading of others", also characterised as the "manner of leading the soul through words", was an integral part of Epicurean practice (Glad 1995:17). Epicurean communities strove to improve the individuals within, leading them gradually towards sagehood through correction of faults or weaknesses. Four modes of Epicurean correctional practice were recognised: self-correction; correction by others; members reporting errors to teachers and being corrected; and reciprocal correction by the wise (Glad 1995:132).

Referring to Philodemus' work, Glad (1995:124) notes that the first fragment in *On Frank Criticism*⁴⁴ "draws attention to the participatory nature of Epicurean psychagogy: 'On the occasion when someone fails in perceiving errors together or in discerning that which is useful, he/she arouses distrust' (1.1-4). Error is no solitary affair; neither is its correction. The Epicurean ideal of friendship expected participation of its members in the evaluation and correction of each other". The Epicurean disciple's progress is thus inextricably linked to trust. Disciples are encouraged to admit voluntarily their weaknesses to teachers and fellow students, in order that they can be corrected.⁴⁵

Philodemus in *On Anger* stresses the dual goal of character reform and theoretical inquiry, as well as warning of the inhibiting power of anger as a barrier to "the good of joint inquiry" and to correction by teachers and fellow students: "Reform of character requires thus an emotional change and active participation of all" (Glad 1995:126). The *sine qua non* of transformation of character, a prelude to wisdom, is therefore openness: "Concealment is discouraged; openness encouraged. One should bring errors into the open, so that they no longer remain hidden and can be corrected. The benefits of such an openness outweigh any

⁴⁴ Philodemus' *On Frank Criticism* is but one of a number of ancient psychagogic works. Among others, we might mention Diogenes of Oenoanda's inscription, the Pythagorean *Golden Verses*, and the Sermon on the Mount; Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* (originally entitled "To Himself") was intended as a psychagogic work for Marcus himself, though it has become much more than that -- see Pierre Hadot's *The Inner Citadel* (1998). For moral exhortation, generally, with types exemplified through readings from ancient sources, see A. J. Malherbe (1986).

⁴⁵ Thom (1995:78) points out that there are two perspectives within psychagogic practice: "the perspective of the teacher-guide, or ... that of the recipient, the student. In the case of the former, the focus is on the teacher's responsibilities, on procedures to be followed in guidance, on considerations to be kept in mind so as not to discourage the student, on the potential assistance given by fellow-students, and so forth. In the case of the student, psychagogy has to do with the principles the student has to internalize and apply in his life, and the various practices and exercises he has to perform to mature morally and spiritually".

conceivable setback" (Glad 1995:128). And not only the teacher is in a position to correct errors of the Epicurean student, for some are corrected by students who have encountered similar experiences, for at times they are most aware of fellow-students' faults.

It is obvious, then, that the benefits of Epicurean communal psychagogy are such as to encourage the disciple's conviction that the good can be attained and that evil can be endured; for the reform of character spoken of is precisely a transformation in the direction of a being at one with the essence of the *tetrapharmakos*.

With respect to the third and fourth remedies, Glad (1995:129-30) stresses also the salvific nature of Epicurean communal psychagogy when he notes that "Philodemus, similarly to Diogenes of Oenoanda's description of the purpose of his colonnade two centuries later, speaks of the reciprocal practice of benefiting each other in salvific terms. In this he follows the common parlance of moralists of the period. The students mutually perceive their sins in order to gain salvation; they 'support' and 'save each other'". For Epicureans, the saving can be from only one thing: evil, or pain; once saved from this, the disciple experiences only the greatest of pleasures.

5.5 Four Questions on the *Telos*

We began this chapter with four guiding questions, to which we may now suggest summary answers.

- a) *How can we know that pleasure is the telos?* Epicurus tells us we know by virtue of *feeling* (which, like all sense-perception, is a source of truth) that pleasure is the good. We do not make an inference from factual to normative statement; we do not require sophisticated argument; we perceive the equivalence directly, as we perceive the heat in fire. And if it be the case that, as Purinton (1993:301) says, "unlike kinetic pleasure, which is directly sensed to be good, painlessness is only recognised to be good upon reflection", this is because Epicurus appears to maintain that, as the root of all pleasure is the pleasure of the stomach, we *conceive* the good through sensuous (i.e., kinetic) pleasure, and then reason our way to the katastematic pleasures of *ataraxia* and *aponia*: "For the stable condition (*katastema*) of the flesh and the reliable expectation concerning this contains the highest and most secure joy, *for those who*

are able to reason it out" (Plut., *Suav. viv.* 1089d=IG I-36; my emphasis). Perhaps *ataraxia* is adequately characterized as "... a lucid tranquil state of pleasant idleness" (Preuss 1994:170), which surely can be experienced, though not as a "feeling" or "sensation", but rather as a conscious awareness of our own state of imperturbable being.

- b) *What is the relation between katastematic pleasure and kinetic pleasure?* Epicurus tells us that there are certain kinetic pleasures which are natural and necessary (e.g., food, water, basic comfort); the fulfilment of desires which are not natural will bring more pain than pleasure; and fulfilment of those which are natural but not necessary must be always subjected to a prudential consideration of consequences with respect to the *telos*. In spite of controversy over issues such as whether kinetic pleasure always supervenes on katastematic pleasure, or even the problem of discerning the precise identity of each of the two categories of pleasure, it is nonetheless agreed that, for Epicurus, katastematic pleasure is supreme, and, in the form of *ataraxia* and *aponia*, is our true goal, for only these can bring men close to the blessedness of the gods.
- c) *How do pleasure and pain function ethically within Epicureanism?* Morality is a purely human affair: there is nothing given from above, save the example of the gods. Epicurus tells us that only "sober reason" through which we are able to calculate the consequences of our actions can serve as a guide to the pleasant life, on which prudence also brings virtues, justice, and friendship to bear. Prudence, therefore, is, as Epicurus tells us, "the principle of all these things and is the greatest good" at our disposal for seeking our way towards our goal, a pleasant -- which is to say, good or flourishing -- life.
- d) *How do Epicurean spiritual exercises contribute to the attainment of good and the averting or enduring of evil?* Epicurus tells us that practice of the precepts will render us immune to disturbance, will bring *ataraxia* and the life of the gods ever closer. The Epicurean communal psychagogic experience reifies this message through open reciprocal correction of faults directed towards improvement of each disciple -- and, therefore, by extension, the community -- and also through theoretical dialectic and inquiry. The Epicurean disciple begins as practitioner of basic spiritual exercises such

as memorisation of precepts, practice of virtues, and study of physics, but ends as sage for whom life itself has become, in all its aspects, a singular spiritual exercise.

Therefore, we see that, in spite of the contentious nature of modern scholarly debate on Epicurean pleasure, for the attainment of good and avoidance or withstanding of evil all we need to know is that by using "sober reason" to "search out the reasons for every choice and avoidance", we can achieve *therapeia* and *consolatio* and can thereby approach the eudaimonistic life of the gods -- attaining the ultimate pleasure and avoiding (and, when necessary, enduring) pain. Thus, Epicurean ethics is essentially straightforward: to live a good life, a eudaimonistic or flourishing life, man must not dissipate his energies seeking unnecessary or unnatural desire-fulfilment, but rather he must seek (in addition to the natural and necessary requirements of his existence, which tend to preserve his health and bring him *aponia*) the highest pleasure, *ataraxia*. This is the fundamental pleasure of the gods, who serve as the supreme model for man.

Man's material needs are easily met -- a modicum of simple food and water, clothing and shelter; beyond that, security -- especially that which is a consequence of friendship, justice, and virtue -- and the low profile of withdrawal from public affairs to the Garden. What is needed to attain this is *phronesis* (prudence), honed to sharpness by *askesis* (spiritual exercises), and bolstered by a psychagogic community of mutual aid. Thus man matches, in principle, the life of the gods, and accomplishes this in spite of the seeming disadvantage of finitude.

CHAPTER 6

PHILOSOPHY OF CONSOLATION?

An Epicurean good life is a life of pleasure taken in mere existence for its own sake, a pleasure which is the very opposite of boredom and despair, the very opposite of a fearful, troubled life of toil and duress. It is a simple life lived by a self-complete individual in friendship with other such individuals. And it is a mortal life lived in the face of death, which removes it from the everyday temptation to pettiness and greed. It is life lived in a kind of garden oasis in a world which is a brute fact, a spiritual desert without a trace of divine intent. (Preuss 1994:243)

Is Epicureanism, then, truly a philosophy of consolation? Have we succeeded in our stated goal in Chapter 1 of "attempting to show how a specific Hellenistic philosophy, Epicureanism, complemented its materialist, non-teleological ontology with a set of spiritual exercises intended to prepare its disciples to live a happy life within a clearly defined moral context"? Contentious issues remain, to be sure, some of which may never be resolved to the satisfaction of all Epicurean scholars: here we may recall the "thicket of jargon" surrounding the Epicurean gods and the "puzzling pieces of evidence provided by our sources" (Purinton 2001:181, 187); or the irreconcilability of the Epicurean view of death, and the good (particularly, the *complete*) life, with the perspective of deprivation theorists, as a result of "differing conceptions of the human good" (Braddock 2000:48); or again, the problematic epistemological status of Epicurus' designation of *feeling* as a criterion of knowledge with respect to man's *telos*; or the exact constitution of, and relation between, *katastematic* and *kinetic* pleasure.¹ However, in spite of such difficulties there is much agreement among Epicurean scholars on more general features of Epicurean ethics.

We have seen, for example, that the ultimate lessons of Epicureanism are indeed embodied in the *tetrapharmakos*, the "celebrated Epicurean 'fourfold remedy'" (Long and Sedley 1987:156): Nothing to fear in god; Nothing to feel in death; Good is easy to attain; Evil is easy to endure. And we have also seen that the Epicurean disciple who engages in the serious practical philosophical activity of transforming himself day by day, moment by moment, internalising the *tetrapharmakos* and other Epicurean precepts and engaging in the spiritual exercises associated with each strand of the emblematic fourfold remedy, guided always by *phronesis*, is capable of sharing the supreme *katastematic* pleasure of the gods, *ataraxia*, and of enhancing also the likelihood of its bodily counterpart, *aponia*.

¹See Rist (1972), Purinton (1993), Preuss (1994).

For the Epicurean disciple who sets out on the ascending pathway to sagehood, accepting pleasure as man's *telos*, and accepting also the atomistic physics of Epicurus -- in accordance with which man, like everything in the cosmos (except the gods) is a material entity subject to dissolution -- yet who is bolstered at every turn by the spiritual exercises which flow from the *tetrapharmakos*, there is indeed nothing to fear in god or in death, nor is there difficulty attaining good or enduring evil.

The effectiveness of *askesis*, or spiritual exercises, within the Epicurean community in providing *consolatio* to the followers of a materialistic, non-teleological philosophy is apparent not only in the rationale for the performance of such exercises, but in that they were used for centuries by all the Hellenistic schools. The Epicurean success in this respect is attested by the existence of Epicurean schools consisting of "many thousands of committed followers, all over the ancient Mediterranean world, in cooperative communities that lasted for hundreds of years" (Hutchinson 1994:xv).² Relative to the other schools, the Epicureans fared particularly well in this respect, for they "apparently almost never switched their allegiance to other philosophical systems, whereas other schools regularly lost students to the Epicureans. Why? Perhaps because the Epicureans found that their system made excellent sense" (Hutchinson 1994:xv).³ This basic truth about Epicureanism strongly suggests that Epicureans were able, to a significant extent, to supplant existential and circumstantial anguish with happiness (*eudaimonia*) through tranquillity (*ataraxia*) and, in spite of human mortality, to live a good life; for the sage, this meant a *complete* life, in no way short of that lived by the gods. For this latter claim, there is further evidence in the form of Epicurus' *Letter to Idomeneus*, preserved by Diogenes Laertius:

I write this to you while experiencing a blessedly happy day, and at the same time the last day of my life. Urinary blockages and dysenteric discomforts afflict me which could not be surpassed for their intensity. But against all these things are ranged the joy in my soul produced by the recollection of the discussions we have had. Please take care of the children of Metrodorus in a manner worthy of the good disposition you have had since adolescence towards me and towards philosophy (IG I-41).

Thus, the Master of all Epicureans, suffused with *ataraxia* in his last moments, and practising

²The Epicurean communities referred to "included household servants and women on equal terms with the men, which was completely out of line with the social norms of the time, but Epicurus believed that humble people and women could understand and benefit from his philosophy as well as educated men..." (Hutchinson 1994:xi).

³"Whereas the other philosophic schools underwent changes in the course of the centuries, examined their traditional doctrines, and brought forth new independent thinkers, Epicurean doctrine always remained faithful to itself" (Jaspers 1962:67).

the ancient exercise of *avocatio-revocatio*, closes his life in blessedness, savouring the kinetic pleasure of retrospective meditation while gently facilitating the continued welfare of friends and exhorting them to fidelity and kindness towards others and towards philosophy.

6.1 Discontent and Consolation in Our Time

We live in an age of chronic demand for self-help. Philosophers such as Bertrand Russell and, more recently, Mark Kingwell have written books on how to achieve happiness.⁴ The philosophical counselling movement and a plethora of self-improvement books, tapes, and courses of all kinds mirror the anguish of our time. As an indicator of the modern threat to all life on the earth, the philosopher John Somerville coined the word "omnicide" and, in 1983, he founded the International Philosophers for the Prevention of Nuclear Omnicide. One has to ask – and not without anxiety -- how it is even possible that the absurdity of a nuclear threat to human existence comes to be regarded as "normal", let alone the other many and various ways in which humanity is capable of ending not only its own tenure on the planet but that of other species as well. Whatever answers one suggests, it is obvious that the anguish of modern man is a serious matter.

From such considerations, the imagination is able to leap most readily not to Epicurean "friendship dancing around the world, awakening us to blessedness" but, more likely, to a vision of impersonal structures breaking asunder all traditional ties between man and nature, on the one hand, and man and man, on the other, supplanting cultures with the monolith of commodity consumption, which ultimately implies the consumption (or "using up") of the planet itself, life-support systems and all. Is this not sufficient cause for anguish in our time?⁵

Thus, without touching further on the manifold causes of modern anxiety and the consequent need for *therapeia*, we must ask another question: "Is it possible that Epicureanism has something to offer in the way of *consolatio* in the face of such anguish?" Or is it verging on the absurd to expect that an ancient philosophy from the Hellenistic period

⁴See Russell (1958), *The Conquest of Happiness* and Kingwell (1998), *Better Living: in Pursuit of Happiness from Plato to Prozac*.

⁵We could easily mention many other causes of contemporary anxiety, most particularly one which has ancient roots and which constitutes a major cause not only of anguish, but also of crime: poverty.

could be of any relevance whatsoever to the citizens of the twenty-first century? Apparently not. Pierre Hadot (1995:281) remarks: "From 1970 on, I have felt very strongly that it was Epicureanism and Stoicism which could nourish the spiritual life of men and women of our times, as well as my own.... Indeed, here at the end of the century -- and no one is more surprised at this than myself -- we are witnessing an increasing interest in these two philosophies on the part of the reading public. This is a remarkable phenomenon, hard to explain".

Hard to explain? Perhaps, and yet there is an underlying symmetry between the disconnectedness of the individual in Hellenistic times and in our own. The following passage describes a world unlike, though also like, the one we inhabit:

The great Hellenistic philosophers furnished guides to personal conduct in the day-to-day flow of an uncertain life ... they addressed themselves to those individuals, increasingly numerous, who felt themselves poorly anchored in the cosmopolitan Hellenistic world.... It is small wonder that both Stoicism and Epicureanism arose first at Athens, the point where the breakdown of civic loyalty and of old religious and social ties was most keenly felt. (Starr 1991:422-3)

The continuing reduction of the modern world of man to a commercial monoculture, in which desire itself becomes a manufactured commodity, produces a correlative disconnectedness and a debasement of the individual to an "atom of consumption".⁶ In such a world it is to be expected that the suffering individual will be a commonplace, and that this will be reflected in a corresponding demand for consolation. Yet, if philosophy is a concrete means of changing our perception of the world and our life (Hadot 1995:279), then those who practise the Epicurean mode of living will begin the process of transforming their lives in a manner consistent with the Epicurean conception of man's *telos*. This suggests that men and women from any historical period might benefit from the practice of the same spiritual exercises that have brought *consolatio* in the past: "Spiritual exercises do not correspond to specific social structures or material conditions. They have been, and continue to be, practiced in every age, in the most widely diverse milieus, and in widely different latitudes: China, Japan, India; among the Christians, Muslims, and Jews" (Hadot 1995:282). And, one might add, among agnostics, atheists, and Epicureans of our time.

In decrying the opposition and distortion to which Epicureanism was subjected in ancient times by philosophers, politicians, and Christians, Hutchinson (1994:xv) hints at an

⁶A phrase that has been used by Noam Chomsky in interviews and public lectures. On the manufacture of desire and assent, see Chomsky and Hermann, *Manufacturing Consent* (1988).

appropriate position from which Epicureanism might be approached today: "Epicurus developed a system of philosophy and even a way of living that deserve our respect and understanding, perhaps even our allegiance". One can certainly, as we have seen, grant one's allegiance to such a philosophy. One can also reject it unconditionally, as some ancients did -- the Sceptics and Plutarch, for example -- but one surely loses something in contemplating its complete rejection.

In the closing lines of his critical essay on Epicurus, Karl Jaspers (1962:111) comments on the value of Epicureanism:⁷

The accusation of paucity of content is mitigated when we contemplate, in all its grandeur, this thought and practice, how consequentially it was carried out, its radicality, its harmony with itself. Epicurus will be a guidepost forever. Even if he is rejected as a permanent guide, there are moments in life when his philosophy can serve us as a refuge in times of weariness, as a respite in our weakness, as a transitory means to keep us going...

This, coming from a critic sympathetic to the value of Epicurus' teachings even for non-Epicureans, evidences the high esteem in which Epicureanism has often been held from outside the school. But the Epicurean sages of the Garden never gave thought to abandonment of their chosen philosophy *qua* way of life, for it was in its essence a *therapeia* that guided them to *ataraxia* and, hence, to a eudaimonistic life. It was, for them, the philosophy of consolation *par excellence*.

⁷See Jaspers, *The Great Philosophers*, Vol. 3 (1962).

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