

## The Epicurean and Skeptic Ways of Life

### 5.1. Introduction

Despite their many individual differences, for all the philosophers we have discussed in previous chapters—Socrates, Aristotle, and the Stoics—a devotion to reason lies at the center of the best way of life. The same is true, of course for Plato and, as we will see in the next chapter, for the tradition of Platonism, based on Plato's works, that came to dominate philosophy in late ancient times. For these philosophers, the best life is not merely the one that philosophical reason explains and justifies to us. Reason also guides people as they go about leading that life, in that they act as they do for reasons, drawn from philosophical thought, that they are prepared (up to some point) to explain and defend, so that the reasons that they act upon derive from their own reasoned understanding—they are not taken over “on faith,” or by just following a pattern laid down by some guru. But, in addition, all these philosophers hold that human reason is a preeminently valuable power, and especially worthy of our adherence, indeed our devotion, because of its divine origins and/or its affiliations to the divine. It is because of this high status assigned to reason that all these philosophers—they constitute the “main line” of the ancient philosophical tradition—agree, in their different ways, that engagement in philosophical argumentation and investigation is an essential component of the best life (or, for the Stoics, an incidental, but necessary, and especially good, one, exhibiting to the highest degree the value of order in complexity). This connection to the divine is part of the reason why, in their different ways, for all these philosophers, philosophy does not just

authoritatively specify some way of life as best for us, but the very practice of philosophical study and inquiry is included within the best way of life.

Neither Epicurus (and his many followers) nor the ancient skeptics, both Academic and Pyrrhonian, accept this conception of human reason, as having divine affiliations that give it some unique power and value. They do not accept, with these mainline philosophers, that human reason has powers of insight and judgment sufficient of themselves to go behind appearances and reach a divinely ordained truth about reality, so as to decide authoritatively about human good and bad, and to discover the true scheme of values for a human life. I reserve further discussion of the skeptics' attitude to reason and its value to later in this chapter.<sup>1</sup> As for Epicurus, he adopts a conception of reason as a purely naturally arising power of humans (and, with limitations and gradations, of some other animals, as well) that is firmly grounded in, and strictly limited by, our powers of sensation and feeling.<sup>2</sup> It has no authority whatsoever except what derives from these sources. Ultimate "truth" is found only in sensation and in naturally unavoidable feelings of attraction or aversion.<sup>3</sup> Where questions of good and bad and how to act are concerned, reason and philosophy are limited to working out, from those bases, correct ways of thinking and feeling, both about particular objects in particular circumstances and in general theory. Reason itself properly consists simply in exercises of memory, and of restrained, wary generalization from sensory experience to what cannot be observed (e.g., the world of atoms, which Epicureans hold forms the basis of all reality)—it has no powers of independent insight into the truth.<sup>4</sup> It has no possible legitimate ambitions to reach some divinely given "essences" of things, by starting from such sensory inputs and working upon them with some inherent, divinely affiliated, powers of insight into divinely constituted reality. In Epicurus's world, there is no cosmic reason, of either a Platonic or Aristotelian or Stoic sort, for human reason to have affiliations to.<sup>5</sup>

Correspondingly, reason becomes just another animal power belonging to our animal nature. It is not something that raises us, as we plan and lead our lives,

<sup>1</sup>See sections 5.5–5.7 below.

<sup>2</sup>For information about our sources of knowledge of Epicurus's philosophy, see endnote 28.

<sup>3</sup>This is the burden of Epicurus's doctrine of the "criteria of truth"; see Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, sect. 17.

<sup>4</sup>See Frede, "An Empiricist View of Knowledge: Memorism," pp. 225–50, discussing the views of medical theorists belonging to the "empiricist" school of medicine, as well as Epicurean theories.

<sup>5</sup>That does not mean that he accepts no gods, but, as we will see, Epicurean gods have no cosmic function. They are to be conceived as rational animals of the same sort as we, with no greater powers—except that, as it happens, they are to be conceived as never dying.

above the rest of the animal realm, in ways that are crucially important, from the cosmic point of view, as we have seen for Aristotle and the Stoics. The world for Epicurus is a totally material one; everything in it is not just bodily (as for the Stoics), but constituted from material atoms. Such order as the world contains, such natural laws as there are governing the behavior of material stuffs and types of object, living or inanimate, result from random ways in which atoms swirling in the void happened to come together in the formation of our given world, and to hold together in sustaining it in existence. Atoms just happen to come together to form the particular world we live in (there are others), with its particular emergent laws and principles of operation. In order to learn what these may be, there is, therefore, no recourse except to sensory observation and memory of that world, and of how it can be seen to operate, plus modest extensions from that through cautious generalization, so as to cover parts of the world one has not had any sensory experience of, because of distance away or subperceptible size. This capacity for retention of experience by memory and for mundane generalization to what may not have been, or even cannot be, experienced, is what human beings possess under the name of reason. This name, so freighted in the mainline tradition with divine, superhuman pretensions, is applied in Epicurean theory to a diminished, modest set of human animal functions.

This “empirical” understanding of human reason, as opposed to the main line “rationalist” one,<sup>6</sup> led Epicurus to a vision of the best human life as one authorized by reason (as he understands reason), and lived through guidance by reason. But with his reduced and modest conception of reason, he could make no special place within the best life for the practice of philosophizing, of philosophical thinking and understanding, as something to be prized as part of our highest good. Reason was valuable simply because of how it enabled us to get around more effectively in the world, and for figuring out (I will say more about this just below) how we should organize and lead our own lives, in view of what we can learn from our sensory experience and innate patterns of feeling. But its value was wholly instrumental. This was as true of philosophical as of any other sort of legitimate reasoning.

<sup>6</sup>The contrast between empiricism and rationalism in philosophical theories of epistemology is best known to us nowadays through our study of the philosophers of the early modern period—Descartes and his successors, on the British Isles (the “British empiricists”) and the continent of Europe (the “Continental Rationalists”). However, the terminologies of “empiricist” and “rationalist,” and the two associated attitudes to reason and its bases and powers, go back to debates among medical writers of the third century BCE. See the discussion in Frede, “An Empiricist View of Knowledge: Memorism,” p. 225.

Thus the Epicurean way of life, a distinctive and even socially prominent way of living for several centuries after Epicurus's death, depended crucially upon his own philosophical arguments and conclusions—as with Aristotle and the Stoics. But it did not require a full mastery of those, as a prerequisite to living the Epicurean life of virtue and happiness. As we will see, so long as one kept a grasp of the fundamental doctrines of Epicurean theory well fixed in one's memory, one could live virtuously and happily on the basis of the knowledge that that organized set of memories would provide. Thus the Epicurean life, the life in which the Epicurean philosophy is lived, does not include the third component I have identified as belonging to Socrates's initial conception of philosophy as a way of life. It did not make the active engagement in philosophical study and inquiry itself in any way an essential part of the best life. Epicurus, with his reduced conception of what reason is, takes a further step beyond the Stoics, in reducing the importance to the well-lived life of philosophical study and inquiry. As we saw at the end of the last chapter, it is needed in any Stoic life at least incidentally, as a means of sustaining one's happy life activities of virtuous behavior, and, besides, it has a high value in itself, as an outstanding example of highly ordered, complex, mental activity, deserving of high rank among preferred activities in which to engage. But for Epicurus, as we will see, active engagement in philosophical analysis and argument is not necessary, even in order to achieve the Epicurean knowledge of the human good and of human life that the Epicurean life does require, and on which it is based.

## 5.2. Epicurus's Theory of the Human Good: “Kinetic” and “Katastematic” Pleasure

Everyone today who knows Epicurus's name knows that Epicurus had a high regard for pleasure. In fact, as he seems to have thought, experience teaches us that pleasure is the only thing in human life that has value just in itself. It is the only thing that, by and in its own nature, is a good thing. Thus he was a hedonist in ethical theory.<sup>7</sup> Cicero reports as the “beginning” of Epicurus's ethical doctrine his famous “cradle” argument. This deduces that pleasure is the highest, and only intrinsic, good from what we adults can allegedly see going on in the instinctive

<sup>7</sup>On normative versus psychological hedonism, see endnote 29.

behavior of all newborn animals.<sup>8</sup> The subsequent discussion in Cicero makes one think, however, that Epicurus did not in fact offer this as a sound argument proving this conclusion.<sup>9</sup> Rather, the appeal to newborn animals' behavior was meant as a sort of reminder to us adults of what Epicurus thinks we in fact know, and instinctively knew already immediately after birth, as soon as we experienced any desires at all, and got them satisfied. We do know this, even now, however much our culture, through our upbringing, has made us forget or deny it, Epicurus insists. Our feeling of desire, from the outset, he thinks, was a feeling of attraction to pleasure anticipated in the desire; in satisfying the desire we felt delight in pleasure, and therein felt pleasure to be good in itself, and in fact to be our highest good, because we felt, so to speak, intrinsic goodness as simply amounting to pleasantness. Those naturally arising feelings of pleasure in the satisfaction of desire tell us (authoritatively, Epicurus thinks) that pleasure is our "natural good," as he describes it.<sup>10</sup> As adults, we only need to attend to what nature (our nature) was telling us when initially we felt desire and experienced its satisfaction, and what it continues to tell us, precisely in our current experiences of having these feelings, if only we will listen. If we do, we will overthrow our culturally prejudiced downgrading of pleasure as a value, and come to know self-consciously what we already knew implicitly at the beginning, in desiring and pursuing things, and what we continue to know implicitly even now. We will recognize that pleasure is our only intrinsic good.

Unfortunately, we come to hide this knowledge from ourselves in the course of our upbringing. By introducing new and different ideas about our good from this "natural" one, our socialization corrupts us with a corruption that newborns are necessarily free from. That is why the "argument" from the cradle can have its

<sup>8</sup>See Cicero's *On Ends* I 29–30 (also, much more briefly, Diog. Laert. X 137 and Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* III 194). For more on the "cradle" argument, and whether, as Epicurus thinks, his highest good has to be the only intrinsic good, see endnote 30.

<sup>9</sup>Considered as an argument to that conclusion, it is pretty feeble. The Stoics, arguing not from observation, but from their first principles concerning nature and its operations, claim that the "first impulses" of newborns are for self-preservation (newborns have an innate sense, as yet completely inarticulate of course, of themselves as living things of a particular sort, with certain limbs and organs and certain needs, and an innate desire to sustain themselves as things of that sort). They add that if anyone thinks the first impulse is for pleasure, they are mistaking something that is first experienced after desires begin to be satisfied, as a subsequent by-product to obtaining the object of the desire (viz., self-preservation). See Diog. Laert. VII 85–86. The major premises of the Epicurean argument (that newborns go for pleasure as their ultimate good) is, therefore, not only disputed, but in itself quite uncertain. Certainly, one cannot have direct empirical evidence that with newborns that is how it is. No one remembers what they felt and perceived in the first moments after birth.

<sup>10</sup>See *Principal Doctrines* 7, *Letter to Menoecus* 129, 133.

restorative effect: it brings us to identify with the “child” within us, stripping away from our experience of desires all these later accretions, and enabling us to experience desires in the same way as newborns (allegedly) do, as desires for pleasure and not for any culturally recommended things instead (virtue, power, learning—cultural accomplishments in general). As we grow up we are taught to disparage pleasure, particularly bodily pleasure, because of our need, evident to our parents, to learn to postpone gratification. A timeworn technique in this process is to try to get children to think of, and desire, their health, or other valuable things, as good in themselves, and as more important goods than any immediate pleasure. In this process we tend to forget that (as Epicurus insists) any other such good, more important though it certainly may be than a given immediate pleasure, is itself of value only for helping to secure later and greater pleasures, which are of course immediate ones at some later time or other, namely, the times when they occur. Attending to what Epicurus tells us about the desires of infants (and other newborn animals) allows us to recover, and hold self-consciously onto, that original knowledge of pleasure as our highest good. Knowing that, and keeping the knowledge of it centrally in mind, we can conform our desires to it by self-consciously desiring nothing but pleasure for its own sake, and making sure that anything else we also desire, we desire as and because it helps to produce pleasure, in the present or on some future occasions.<sup>11</sup>

Anyone who knows a little more about Epicurus than just his name knows also that he held quite unusual views about when we are (or are not) experiencing pleasure, and, in particular, about when the pleasure we experience is at its greatest (because purest, or most unadulterated). There is a great deal of confusion in our sources about just what Epicurus’s ideas here were, and how he thought he could argue successfully for them. Cicero, for example, makes much, in both his positive presentation of Epicurus’s theory and his derisive criticisms

<sup>11</sup> Although our sources do not make this seem to have been a major topic for Epicurus, he, like the Stoics, adopts the Socratic rather than the more complex Platonic-Aristotelian view on the varieties of human desire. He too assumes that all desires are judgments of reason as to the value of the thing desired: evaluative judgment produces or by itself constitutes the motivating impulse in every case of mature human desire (or aversion), and every voluntary action. There are, in that sense, no nonrational desires that would need to be stripped away, before this reform could take effect in the life of a person brought up, as virtually all of us are, to desire other things than pleasure as good in themselves. Those erroneous desires (as Epicurus thinks them) were themselves nothing but evaluative judgments; once the knowledge that pleasure is the sole intrinsic good is firmly in place, they simply cease to occur. In that sense (through changing our minds, and holding different evaluative views), we have the power to make ourselves desire pleasure as Epicurus’s tenets tell us to, and to prevent ourselves from experiencing any desires not in conformity with them.

of it, of the two kinds of pleasure that he alleges Epicurus maintained that there are. One of these, Cicero says, we are all quite familiar with, and everyone will grant that these experiences correctly count as experiences of “pleasure.” This is what we feel for example in the pleasures of sex, or, less dramatically, when we enjoy the taste of our food in eating it, or feel the warmth of the sun on our bare arm on a cool day. And there are analogues when what we enjoy is some experience or activity of the mind, rather than the body. The other supposed *kind* of pleasure is just an arbitrary renaming, Cicero charges, of a certain other state of consciousness (if ever we could experience it). This would be a state of consciousness in which we were undergoing neither any such (genuinely) pleasurable experiences, nor any opposite feelings of pain or discomfort, physical or mental. Epicurus, on Cicero’s account, classed as a second kind of pleasure this mere bodily-cum-mental condition of the complete absence of both pleasure (of the first sort—the only sort there actually is, according to Cicero) and pain. For short, on Cicero’s account, Epicurus paradoxically and illegitimately also counted the total absence of both pleasure and pain as pleasure!

Cicero is wrong about this, however, and we cannot understand and appreciate the full force of Epicurus’s ideas about the human good without seeing clearly where Cicero goes wrong. It seems clear enough even from evidence that lies somewhat submerged within Cicero’s own account, that Epicurus did not intend to distinguish pleasure into two *kinds* at all.<sup>12</sup> Instead, he distinguished two significantly different types of circumstances or conditions in which, he claimed, a single type of feeling (of pleasure, he argued) arises, and on which it is conditioned in the two different sorts of circumstance. In the first set of circumstances, the feeling of pleasure comes into being because of, and in accompaniment with, bodily and psychic *movements*: the movements in the flesh (sometimes rapid and intense, in other cases smooth and gentle) in sexual intercourse, or when swal-

<sup>12</sup>Torquatus, Cicero’s Epicurean spokesman, initially presents “katastematic” pleasure (for this terminology, see just below in my main text) as the pleasure “which is felt when all pain is removed,” and he adds that “when we are freed from pain, we take delight in that very liberation and release from all that is distressing” (*On Ends* I 37, trans. Woolf). In suggesting that the pleasure being indicated here is just a feeling of relief from prior distress, Torquatus and Cicero are inaccurate and misleading (as I will argue), but it is clear from this quotation that Torquatus intends to count as pleasure some feeling that being rid of pain causes in us, or sets free in us. He is not counting the bare condition of absence from pain, itself, as a pleasure: that is only, for him, the cause of this feeling. It is in that sense that one must understand Torquatus’s repeated statements, beginning already in I 37, that “every release from pain is rightly termed a pleasure.” Cicero’s attack on Epicurus’s recognition, or attempted establishment of, katastematic pleasure turns wholly on the misconstrual of Torquatus’s and Epicurus’s view as simply claiming that absence of pain, just in itself, is a pleasure. Epicurus is not proposing the condition of absence of pain as a kind of pleasure, but as one distinct kind of circumstance or cause of a certain feeling, the feeling of pleasure.

lowing one's tasty food, or even when the sun shines pleasantly on one's bare arm, together with the accompanying movements in one's sensory awareness of these events (in some cases, movements of lively excitation). (There are analogues in cases of mental, non-bodily-pleasurable movements: for example, excited movements in your thoughts when you've just learned something that you've eagerly been seeking.) In such a case, the pleasure can be called, in English, a "kinetic" pleasure, as Epicurus apparently did, using adverbial phrases employing a Greek word for "movement."<sup>13</sup> But here the term "kinetic" is not applied to the pleasure in such a way as to indicate an allegedly distinct *kind* of pleasure. Rather, this term marks a special circumstance—that of bodily and/or psychic movement, sometimes quite lively and excited—in which a single sort of feeling comes into being, the one that Epicurus identified as our highest good and called pleasure. This is the same feeling that he took newborns to experience as good in itself and as the highest good. It clearly is, as Cicero says, something we are all familiar with, and that we can all agree with Epicurus in recognizing as a feeling of pleasure.

To grasp and appreciate the second set of circumstances for the arousal of allegedly the same feeling, we need some background considerations concerning human psychology. Epicurus held that waking awareness (which is essentially a general sensory awareness of ourselves and of our openness to perception of our environs) must always possess some hedonic tone, as one could put his point. Either one's consciousness is afflicted by painful or distressed states of feeling, or accompanied by a feeling of pleasure, or, of course, perhaps by both at the same time. This does not seem an unreasonable generalization from what we retain in memory about our states of awareness when we experience them. They always do seem to be other than hedonically neutral in the way we experience them. It seems, really, that there is no possibility of waking awareness, for a human being or other animal, that is experienced as in no way either good or bad, but just flat and neutral. Feelings of liking or disliking, welcoming or rejecting what we experience, just seem integral to waking awareness like ours, an awareness of ourselves and of our openness to outer experience—whether or not our consciousness is being currently acted upon by outside stimuli. This means that even when one is completely free from all the sorts of bodily and psychic movements in which kinetic pleasure (or the corresponding pain) arises—when one's awareness of

<sup>13</sup>See *κατὰ κίνησιν* ("on the basis of movement") in Diog. Laert. X 136, quoting from Epicurus's work titled *On Choices* (*περὶ ἀρέσεων*); other writers in this context sometimes use instead *ἐν κινήσει* ("in movement").

oneself and of one's openness to sensory movement is accompanied by no excitements of feeling, and there are no movements in the body or the mind of which one is currently aware—one must nonetheless be in a state of feeling of some level and kind of hedonic tone. In fact, it seems evident that such a condition of awareness must be one of completely positive hedonic tone; any pain or other negative feeling would seem to require some movement in one's awareness itself, perhaps one deriving from some movement felt in the body. An awareness altogether without any feeling of movement, psychic or bodily, would have to be somehow pleasant, because it would be completely relaxed and undisturbed.

In fact, what we are talking about here will be an awareness of one's living organism in repose, that is, in its naturally self-maintaining condition of active readiness for sensory engagement, on the basis of a complete absence of physical deficiencies (which would cause bodily movements of a negative sort, giving rise to excitations of pain). It would be a condition of no pleasure and no pain classifiable as kinetic, but it would by no means be a condition of no pleasure and no pain at all. It would in fact be a condition of pleasure arising from the simple, undisturbed, undistracted, awareness of oneself, and of one's openness to the world through specific sensory inputs, but without being currently engaged with any. It would be an active awareness of one's constitution as a particular sort of animal—a constitution for such sensory engagement. And, as I mentioned, one would not be experiencing this pleasant awareness unless one's condition were one of normal healthiness and ongoing natural functioning: if one's condition were not such, one would be experiencing some disturbing movements in one's consciousness—unhealthy or disturbed and distorted functioning is just what does cause kinetic pain. Accordingly, to pleasure arising in this second set of circumstances for the arousal of pleasure, Epicurus gave the name "katastematic," drawing upon a Greek term for a condition or state, or for the constitution, of a thing.<sup>14</sup> It is called "katastematic" not so as to indicate a special *kind* of pleasure, any more than kinetic pleasures are a kind of pleasure, but rather so as to draw attention to the special *circumstances* of pleasure's arousal, on which it is condi-

<sup>14</sup>Rather than attempt a translation of the Greek word here in question (*καταστηματικός*, used in one fragment we possess from Epicurus's own work, quoted by Diog. Laert. X 136), I simply offer a transliterated version of it in my discussion, as if it were an English word. For the connection of this adjective to the stable constitution of our organism, see Plutarch's quotation from Epicurus's *On the End* in his anti-Epicurean essay *That a Pleasant Life Cannot Be Led on Epicurus' Principles*, 1089d. One common translation, "static," is very seriously misleading and should be avoided. The *katastematic* pleasure is taken in an active awareness of one's constitution (if you like, of one's stable, ongoing "state"). It is a pleasure in something stable and balanced, but not thereby anything itself static, as opposed to dynamic.

tioned, in the case of this pleasure. We could describe this pleasure as pleasure in the awareness of the healthy functioning of one's own natural constitution, physical and psychic.

In presenting Epicurus's conception of *katastematic* pleasure so far, I have idealized it, so as to bring out clearly its essential character. I have spoken of a pleasure in or from one's awareness of one's healthy natural constitution, regarded in abstraction from other objects of awareness—ones brought into consciousness through sensory input from outside. But of course this awareness, and its pleasure, can perfectly well be present even while one is not merely open to such sensory inputs, as depicted in the abstract account I have given above, but actively engaging oneself in receiving them. Indeed, the pleasure of this awareness can be present even while one is engaged in consequent pursuits and actions of a complex kind, all guided by such perceptual reception. For example, people in this condition of pleasant active awareness, experiencing no sources, bodily or mental, of kinetic pleasure or of pain, might fill that awareness by attending to something that interests them that is taking place in their environment. They would then continue to experience *katastematic* pleasure, but now *katastematic* pleasure focused upon and in part derived from those events and their own focused experience of them. Provided that such additional functions of focused awareness, sensory or mental, do not inhibit or impair what one could call one's *katastematic* awareness itself, then *katastematic* pleasure is perfectly possible outside the idealized conditions in which I have introduced and explained Epicurus's idea. One can have *katastematic* pleasure in, or including, activities of sense and/or thought, when those activities derive from the exercise of a *katastematically* pleasant state of consciousness. I will return to this important point shortly.

Our sources do not indicate on what basis of empirical argument Epicurus adopted the complex analysis concerning human psychology that I have just sketched, and proposed his theory of the nature of pleasure as a particular sort of feeling that humans and other animals experience in their awareness of their healthy and undisturbed natural state. In our sources it is presented, at best, tricked out with ancillary and confirmatory observations, but not with direct arguments or other sorts of appeal to evidence. We are not told how Epicurus thought other reasonable and open-minded people might be legitimately persuaded of its truth. Like so much of our evidence about Epicurus's ethical views (by contrast with his physical doctrines), what we learn on this topic consists very largely in reports of his doctrines, delivered as if from an oracle. Apparently,

Epicureans were supposed to accept Epicurus as a great genius, the savior of humankind through his insights, which were to be simply taken in gratitude, and used by them in planning and leading their lives. They were not required to inquire into any reasons that might be offered in explanation and defense: they needed only to give them their credence, and all would be well with them and their lives. I will return in the next section to this aspect of Epicureanism.

It is not difficult, however, to sketch how (in accordance with his understanding of the human mind and its legitimate functions) Epicurus arrived at this doctrine, as a carefully prepared generalization from his own varied experiences of pleasure—and, he assumed, other people's too, if only they would attend to them with an open mind. He seems to have regarded in this way his account of pleasure as a single state of feeling, of which we can be immediately aware, and such that in being aware of it we can know its goodness immediately, simply by perceiving it. But we can observe, he thinks, that this state of feeling has two quite different sources: certain perceived movements, especially the more active and excited ones, in body and mind, on the one hand, and our simple awareness of ourselves as sensory and thinking beings, when awake and functioning in normal health. In popular speech and the common understanding, people do not regard the pleasure that, as newborns, they knew as good in itself and indeed as the highest good, as the same feeling (differing only in strength or other incidental features) that they have when they are in (approximately) the conditions Epicurus specifies for the arousal of *katastematic* pleasure. But that is no obstacle. It may well be that people restrict talk of pleasure only to the excited states of feeling that they imagine newborns feel when getting pleasure from eating when ravenously hungry, and other similar ones open to us as adults. It may be that they talk of the feeling one gets in repose and freedom from all such exciting experiences (whether painful or pleasurable) as something quite else, not "pleasure." That simply shows how we become corrupted in being brought up in communities with misguided sets of values—all, not surprisingly, accompanied by culturally acquired conceptual apparatus that backs them up. Careful and controlled inference from what we do experience shows, he thinks, that the feeling in both cases is the same feeling—of pleasure—differing only in strength or other incidental features (intensity, for example, which is notably present in many kinetic pleasures but apparently absent from *katastematic*).

I mentioned above that, armed with this analysis concerning the two sources of pleasure, Epicurus went on to count the *katastematic* pleasure as the greatest that can be experienced. What leads him to that conclusion? To begin with,

katastematic pleasure is purest, because one's awareness is then free of any and all disturbances that cause pain, distress, or discomfort (bodily or mental): one's pleasure is accompanied by, and diminished or distracted by, no pain at all, the contrary and opposite of pleasure. But, equally important, in the idealized state I presented it in above, all *pleasurable* excitations, and even milder pleasurable movements, are also absent. Pleasures involving excitement coming from intense desire (which is a common sort of excitement in these cases) do certainly involve the feeling of pleasure, but it is compromised by the stressful state of mind always associated with intense desires. In such a case, the pleasure (even if experienced as intense, for example, in sexual orgasm) is one thus mixed with pain (i.e., with the stressful feeling of need and still-frustrated dissatisfaction that immediately precedes and even accompanies them).<sup>15</sup> Hence, in being free also from all kinetic pleasures, the katastematic pleasure of complete repose is also free of pleasure that is impure, because bound up in the way such intensely desired and intensely experienced pleasures are with the discomforts of stress. Because of katastematic pleasure's uniquely guaranteed purity, it is in that pleasure that we would achieve the goal we would set before ourselves in accepting Epicurus's theory of the good, and in desiring pleasure as our highest good. It is only then that we experience in a pure and unadulterated way what is good, and what we feel to be good, about pleasure. Having, so to speak, the full presence of pleasure—the good—open to us in our consciousness, we are then in a condition of pleasure in which the pleasure and good that is experienced could not be exceeded. It can, if we are lucky, be stretched out into the future. But the experience of pleasure that we have in such circumstances cannot be exceeded, in quantity or level of pleasure experienced, at any other time, under any other circumstances. When experiencing katastematic pleasure, we experience pleasure, and derive for ourselves what is good in pleasure, at its fullest. Nothing is missing of or about pleasure and about its value for us, that we could hope to attain at any other time or in any other circumstances.

If people commonly think that it is greater intensity of pleasure, as experienced at some moment, that brings the greater quantity of pleasure, that is just another harmful confusion, induced by our upbringing in misguided cultural communities; true philosophy, Epicurus argues, shows the error of any such view. Philosophy shows that extreme intensity of pleasure is caused by the stress-

<sup>15</sup> Plato's *Philebus*, which of course was available to Epicurus when he was working out his theories, is the classic source for this sort of analysis of desire for kinetic pleasure.

ful intensity of the desire at work in its pursuit, which in turn causes the excited psychic movements that give rise to it. Because of the pain or distress caused by the intense desire, the pleasure is mixed with pain, and its intensity is no more than a consequence of the fact that one's state of consciousness, in experiencing the pleasure, is mixed in that way. To take intensity as a measure of quantity of pleasure is just a delusion. What we should be interested in, and should use in organizing our lives, is how to achieve the greatest actual quantity, the highest level, of pleasure—both at each moment, so far as that might be possible, and for the longest time. That highest quantity is reached when we achieve katastematic pleasure. In that condition we experience as much pleasure, at a single moment, as it is in the nature of things possible to experience. For that reason, Epicurus made the goal of a well-lived life—that is, of a life successfully aimed at pleasure as the highest good—to live always, so far as possible, in the katastematic condition of freedom from all pain, bodily or mental, and from all pleasures, too, that is, ones that bring distress with them to any significant degree. Such pleasures, based in harmful intense desires, prevent or destroy katastematic pleasure.

One can, of course, as I said above, experience katastematic pleasure not just while enjoying one's healthy state of consciousness in a state of repose, but also while engaged in all sorts of activities, led by desires for their particular further pleasures—that is, for the experiences of pleasure to which they give rise—and while experiencing such further pleasures. This is, for the Epicurean theory of happiness, a crucially important point. All of the additional pleasures will, I take it, be kinetic pleasures: they will be pleasures deriving from movements in body or mind of which we are conscious.<sup>16</sup> Some of them may, and presumably will, be at least somewhat mixed with pain, as the extremely intense ones are, but not because, as with the latter, the pain is self-inflicted through pursuing the pleasures with a pointlessly intense, stressful, desire. Here one may think of such normal, frequently recurring pleasures as those of eating when hungry, hunger being a distressful state, though only mildly so when the hunger is relatively slight and not prolonged. But others may be completely free of distressed desire, as I will explain below. Epicurus speaks here of “variation” in one's pleasurable consciousness, and, in considering the Epicurean way of life, his doctrine of this variation is a crucially important one for us to grasp.<sup>17</sup> Those who successfully follow Epicurus's doctrines about pleasure as our highest good, and the only thing good in

<sup>16</sup>So Cicero implies: *On Ends* II 10.

<sup>17</sup>See *Principal Doctrines* 18 and 9; Cicero, *On Ends* I 38.

itself for us, achieve katastematic pleasure as an ongoing pleasurable awareness of their own healthy, well-functioning natural constitutions as sentient beings. This may be threatened by physical or even mental illness (conditions that are out of one's direct control); I will say something shortly about how for Epicurus such threats are to be dealt with, or managed. But leaving such threats aside for the moment, we can consider this pleasurable consciousness as a kind of platform on which to settle the whole pattern of one's feelings and desires, in relation to all the things that concern one in life. It is in this way that one introduces variations into one's pleasurable katastematic consciousness, once that is achieved and sustained. One settles onto this platform desires for a whole array of kinetic pleasures, derived from a large variety of activities involving different agreeable, but mostly distress-free, movements of body and mind.

The most important thing, Epicurus thinks, in achieving this constant and continuing pleasurable awareness, is not to create desires in oneself that, because of their intensity and peremptoriness, lead inevitably (and needlessly) to pain and distress that are great enough (both in experiencing them, and in case the desires end up being frustrated), so as to undermine one's katastematic pleasure, altogether or to a significant degree. Epicurus calls such desires "empty" or "groundless," because they rest on what his theory reveals as groundless evaluative opinions about the things they are desires for, as sources of pleasure.<sup>18</sup> He speaks here especially of infatuated desires, or addictions, as we sometimes speak of them: desires for certain (as he calls them, extravagant) foods or drinks or for other practices, for example, for sex of certain sorts or with certain particular people. As to empty and groundless desires for sex, we can think especially of desires based in one's having fallen in love, where that means an attachment that makes one feel that one's life will be ruined, cannot go on in any way happily, without one's being with and having sexual relations with the loved person. For a different example, suppose you like lobster quite a lot; it is one of your favorite foods, something you dote on. In light of that, you might, on some occasion, conceive a desire for a lobster dinner (you might create this desire in yourself, as Epicurus will say) that is so intense and peremptory that, when you go to the restaurant and discover that they are fresh out of these crustaceans, you become quite upset, thoroughly disappointed and frustrated. You had been planning on lobster, you had anticipated with relish all day long the pleasure of eating it: you

<sup>18</sup> See *Principal Doctrines* 29 (the content of which is stated somewhat differently, and better, in *Letter to Menoecus* 127) and 30, with the important scholium to 29 printed in most translations.

now feel and think that you *need* lobster for your dinner. You cannot enjoy the meal that you go on to have anyhow (since, after all, it is dinnertime and you are hungry): no substitute will do. (“Crayfish? Crab? Atlantic salmon? Foo.”) Now, this gourmand’s way of desiring a lobster meal on such an occasion is not just material for a comedian’s skit. It is emblematic of many of the desires that make up the emotional life of many people. They, like him, are out of sorts, if what they want is denied them, or even while desiring it in the first place. Their way of desiring things is needlessly intense and peremptory. By desiring something in that way, they undermine and make impossible the katastematic pleasure that they previously experienced, or would have been able to experience if they had not had desires of this sort. These desires are self-defeating, if one conceives one’s desires, as for Epicurus one ought to, as aimed ultimately at the highest good—at pleasure, not just of some moment, but at every moment over a whole lifetime.

Instead, even if one does have favorite foods or drinks (that is perfectly natural, after all), or ways of having sex or people to have it with, or other favorite practices or activities, one can desire them without the intensity, or the peremptoriness, that marks desires as groundless and empty. That nonintense, nonperemptory way is how one will desire them, if one takes seriously Epicurus’s analysis of the nature of pleasure, and recognizes katastematic pleasure as one’s highest good. In that case, one will treat all such favorites as among one’s preferred ways of satisfying naturally arising hunger or thirst or sexual desire, or of spending one’s time interestingly and with satisfaction, both at work or in other obligations, and at leisure. But one will recognize that the pleasures that can be gotten from these favorites, if experienced, are only variations—preferred ones, to be sure—on one’s state of consciousness in enjoying one’s katastematic awareness of one’s healthy normal condition or constitution as a sentient being. That is, these pleasures are only preferred variations on one’s highest good of katastematic pleasure. One’s katastematic pleasure is not increased by the addition of the pleasure of enjoying the favorite food or activity, and one is not deprived of that highest state of pleasure by, as it may happen, being blocked from having that added pleasure on some occasion when one particularly wanted it. With enough reasonable ingenuity in planning one’s life, there are plenty of other undisturbing ways and things to eat or drink, or ways to engage one’s energies in some activity of sufficient interest to oneself, so as to keep up an active life without succumbing to boredom (that, of course, is a severely distressing condition, and would detract from one’s katastematic pleasure), even if one were deprived on some occasion, or even often, of one’s favorite ways of getting pleasure. One can

always eat or drink something else healthy and tasty enough to be satisfying, or, as the case might be, one can engage in some other interesting enough activity, in place of the one that has been prevented or interrupted. All the pleasures that these other ways of engaging oneself provide are alternative variations, not perhaps among one's favored ones, but good enough nonetheless—anyhow, in a pinch. Their availability makes it entirely misguided to desire one's favorites in the way that my gourmand desired his lobster, and that many people desire just about everything they desire.

All such variations (whether favored ones or not) are, as I said, particular kinetic pleasures that are “additions” to the katastematic pleasure. I place scare quotes around that word here because these do not *increase* the pleasure in one's overall state of mind. As I have explained, pleasure is a single type of feeling (it is not necessary to think of it as a sensation, as if always coming from bodily processes that affect consciousness through sensory stimulation). To vary the pleasure that you are constantly experiencing if you are living well and happily—that is, the one that is based in katastematic awareness—is to bring it about that that pleasure now comes to have among its sources also the particular movements in the soul (often associated with further movements in the flesh of the body) that give rise to the pleasure of the food or drink or of the other activity that you then engage yourself with. The pleasure does not increase, but it comes to have new, additional sources, and in that sense one experiences a second pleasure, the pleasure from that source, deriving from the focused use of one's pain-free and pleasurable awareness of one's sentient self. These additional sources of pleasure are among your favorite ways of engaging yourself, or else, when circumstances and availabilities make that difficult or impossible, less favored but nonetheless perfectly satisfactory ones. In either case, the result of varying the basic, katastematic, pleasure with some kinetic variation is an experience of pleasure that has its own particular character: the awareness of the kinetic activity as part of the source of the pleasure on that occasion, colors it with a particular character, different ones for each. The pleasure a fully accomplished Epicurean gets from a meal of lobster differs in its felt character from that of listening to a symphony, or reading a book. But even the less interesting ways of engaging yourself help to reinforce and keep up one's katastematic pleasure, by giving sustained pleasure in the active use of your healthy human constitution and consciousness.

Nonetheless, it is through having learned to enjoy and take a vital interest in a number of what are for the given individual favorite ways of varying one's pleasure that, for Epicurus, the happy life is to be attained. This is a fundamental

point for Epicurus in working out his theory of human happiness. What you can look forward to with zest, as you contemplate and form expectations for tomorrow, and what sustains your ability to continue feeling katastematic pleasure throughout your days, are these favorite pursuits. If deprived of them, to any significant degree, for a time or on some occasion, one can, as Epicurus emphasizes, still find ways not to fall into pain or distress and lose one's grip on pleasure. But that is a second-best situation, and one that might very well become impossible to maintain, if it continued for a long time. Having the spice of favorite variations on pleasure in one's life makes it stably and securely worth living; one may manage without them, but one does not want to live that way. Any ordinary well-lived Epicurean life will be full of vitality and interest, because of the regular and continuing presence in it of such favorite ways of engaging one's consciousness of one's active nature. It is important to bear in mind that, although all the sources of these variations, whether favorite ones or not, are of the kinetic type—consisting in movements of mind, and usually of body, too, rather than in the repose of katastematic pleasure on its own—not all of them are *mixed* pleasures (involving some degree of distress or pain), though of course some of them will be, in particular the pleasures of eating favored foods when hungry. The pleasure of eating food, whether it is a favored food or not, when hungry is, as I explained above, a mixed pleasure, because the experience of pleasure then is mixed with the experience of the pain of need for the removal of the distress of elevated hunger. Most crucially, none of them are mixed to such a degree that the desire for them, which motivates and guides the experience of them, is characterized by intensity and peremptoriness: in the happy Epicurean life, groundless and empty desires are totally absent.

It is admittedly impossible not to feel bodily, and even mental, discomfort, to some degree, if one is hungry or thirsty, or sexually deprived for any sufficient period of time. Such naturally arising desires, which lead to such discomfort if unsatisfied, Epicurus classifies as not only natural ones (and therefore perfectly acceptable in a well-lived life) but also necessary: they arise inevitably in all of us at intervals, and if they go unsatisfied bodily pain and discomfort of a demanding and very distracting sort are also soon inevitable.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the experience of hunger or thirst, or other natural and necessary desires, always carries with it some degree of discomfort—that is one way that nature ensures that we take proper

<sup>19</sup> See *Letter to Menoecus* 127 and *Principal Doctrines* 29. For further discussion, see Cooper, "Pleasure and Desire in Epicurus," pp. 498–508.

care of our bodily needs. Hence in enjoying eating or drinking when hungry or thirsty (the normal circumstance for having these pleasures), and in having other similar enjoyments, one cannot avoid having a mixed pleasure. That is why a prudent Epicurean will take care, to the extent possible, to avoid ever becoming extremely hungry or thirsty or sexually deprived. (I will have something to say below about what one can do to maintain one's katastematic pleasure if, despite one's best efforts, one does fall into a condition of extreme need, causing serious distress, or into bodily pain caused by disease or physical injury.) Some of many people's favored activities (e.g., running, or other strenuous exercises, or games) also inevitably involve pain and discomfort, mixed with the pleasure. That need not disqualify them from inclusion on good Epicureans' list of planned-for variations of their pleasure. The pain mixed into the experience may be of such a sort as to be tolerable, as one consequence of the overall movements of body and mind that give rise to the pleasure of variation. What matters most—but this matters crucially—is that the commitment people have to these as favorite ways of enjoying the exercise and functioning of their natural constitutions should not be accompanied by the sort of intense and peremptory desire to engage in them that immediately and necessarily undermines their katastematic pleasure. Also, of course, an activity involving pain or distress in the mixed pleasure that it gives rise to, that is so great that the pain is inevitably very distracting, and therefore significantly undermines, of itself, one's katastematic pleasure, would have to be dropped from the list. And, of course, it should go without saying that in all one's choices, whether of food and drink or of activities of whatever sort to engage in, one must, in deciding on a pleasure of the moment, take rigorously into account possibly countervailing consequences for pleasure in the future, or for being beset afterward by unmanageable pain.

Many, or even the vast majority, of the favorite pleasures of variation in any normal human being's life will not be mixed with pain in any of the ways I have mentioned, though they too will be kinetic pleasures. If one is fond of music (either for playing or singing oneself, or for listening to), the pleasure is of the sort "which stirs our nature with its sweetness and produces agreeable sensations in us," which is Cicero's first characterization of what he later calls pleasure "in movement."<sup>20</sup> The organ of hearing and the central organ for sensing are stimu-

<sup>20</sup> *On Ends* I 37, trans. Woolf; for "in movement" see II 8ff. If my interpretation of Epicurus's theory is right, Cicero gets the order of causation backward here. It's not the pleasure that causes movements or produces sensations; the movements that stir our nature with sweetness thereby produce the pleasure, by

lated with smooth and orderly movements, which give rise to smooth and pleasant movements in the soul or mind, so that the pleasure we experience is aptly characterized, as Epicurus and Cicero both characterize it, as a kinetic pleasure, or pleasure in movement or movements (bodily and psychic). Yet these are not in any way disturbing or distressing or painful movements; the pleasures they cause are not mixed pleasures at all. The same holds, in most cases, for the pleasures of conversation with friends, or of reading and studying, or going to the theater, or even of watching television (provided the program's subject or the images conveyed are not distressing in themselves). The pleasures of caring for a garden, or of all sorts of social games and interactions (the ones that are pleasant, I mean) are similar. All these combine physical activities with ones of mental engagement, and those activities give pleasure through the pleasant character of the psychic movements—the feelings—to which they give rise.

Although Epicurus describes *katastematic* pleasure as experienced in the absence of pain or discomfort in the body and of mental distress, he does not, as I will explain shortly, hold that a person must cease to experience *katastematic* pleasure, if there is pain in the body, even, possibly, quite serious pain. Mental distress, at least if at all significant in degree and extent, is another matter. That does undermine the feeling of well-being and well-functioning that is at the core of the *katastematic* pleasurable self-awareness. But it is also something that (on Epicurean principles) we can rid ourselves of, if we understand correctly and well why being severely distressed or upset is never justified, and indeed why mental upset is nothing but self-inflicted harm. Bodily pain and discomfort, by contrast, are often not something we cause directly in ourselves, or that we can rid ourselves of simply by thinking straight about what is good and bad for us (in any event, thinking straight might be difficult, under some circumstances of pain). Epicurus claims, and stresses, however, that, even if one is in extreme pain, one's overall state of mind can be one of pleasure, that is, *katastematic* pleasure, varied by some suitable kinetic ones. This is so partly because, as he himself is quoted as saying on his deathbed, one can “array in opposition” to the pain (or, in Cicero's translation, “counterbalance” it with) extremely pleasant memories of past pleasures, both *katastematic* pleasure and kinetic ones that varied it.<sup>21</sup> In Epicurus's

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producing certain sensations. This is typical of Cicero's *lax* concern to understand Epicurus's theories with precision.

<sup>21</sup> At *On Ends* II 96, Cicero translates from a letter that Diogenes Laertius quotes (X 22) as having been addressed to Epicurus's friend Idomeneus on what Epicurus said in the letter was his last day. He had been suffering for some days from severe bladder disease.

case, these were recollections of philosophical discussions in his school and its garden with friends and colleagues. But one can also distract oneself from the pain, often enough, simply by engaging one's consciousness in favorite activities still available despite the pain and injury or illness. The resulting kinetic pleasures can serve to sustain, as they vary, your katastematic pleasure. The pain may remain, but it recedes into the background of your consciousness, which is focused instead on, and occupied by, the kinetic pleasures you draw upon as variations of your katastematic pleasure.

It also can aid one in such emergencies, Epicureans thought, to keep repeating to oneself (obviously, as an item of belief) a celebrated abbreviation of one of Epicurus's most famous *Principal Doctrines* (however wildly overoptimistic), concerning bodily pain: "Short if it's severe; light if it's long."<sup>22</sup> Apparently Epicurus felt it important to claim that, on his principles, it is just as possible for someone to live in continuous happiness, right up to the end, as for Aristotelians and Stoics. Even if that is not always so (because bodily pain can be so severe for so long that no one can sustain katastematic pleasure in the face of it), it does seem fair to claim, as Epicurus does, that, on his account, we do have psychological resources sufficient to sustain our katastematic pleasure, and so our grasp on our highest good, even under many of the most threatening conditions of painful illness, disease, and injury. True, perhaps things can get so bad that one loses the capacity to retain one's pleasurable state of self-awareness even by attempting whatever variations on it one can manage. But the important point is that Epicurus sets up for human life an objective that does not, for most people most of the time, lie beyond human capacities. An Epicurean way of life seems quite possible, humanly speaking, despite the uncontrollable risks we all face of illness, injury, and pain, and despite the (thankfully rare) circumstances when illness so defeats even the strongest-minded among us that continuing to live happily and overall pleasantly is simply no longer even possible. When that happens one can, and should, just end one's life, Epicurus points out. No one has to live unhappily, at least not for long.

The Epicurean life, then, is one of continuous katastematic pleasure, sustained through the constant variation in the active employment of one's natural powers of sense and thought in favored activities, a life in which one engages these natural powers in ways that one finds particularly interesting—or, in exigent circumstances, in other ways that might be available to one. It is a life of few exigent

<sup>22</sup>See Cicero, *On Ends* II 95; this abbreviates *Principal Doctrines* 4.

needs, since one is always ready to make do with a simple diet and lack of luxury, even if some of one's favored activities do require more than minimal life resources. It is a retired, private life, as we will see toward the end of the next section, spent in shared enjoyments within a close community of friends. One final point about the Epicurean life, as we have so far unfolded it, deserves emphasis. Epicurus, like Aristotle and the Stoics, directs each of us to be ultimately concerned in all our actions for our own happiness. Epicurus's theory of our highest good—notoriously, in fact—focuses upon our own pleasure, not on acquiring and exercising virtues. It is true, of course, that, on Epicurus's theory, we should seek always the *katastematic* pleasure given to us when we attend to our own sensory and mental constitution, as it is exercised under pain-free and undistressed circumstances; the Epicurean life is not one of sexual or any other sort of debauchery—indeed, it firmly rules out all such behaviors, because of the pervasive pain and distress they inevitably entail. Still, as we have so far examined it, an Epicurean's does appear an extraordinarily self-absorbed existence (as the Aristotelian's and the Stoic's lives are decidedly not). Does Epicurus really argue that we should each sink into a private world of our own, enjoying our own bodies and minds, with no other concerns? In the uncompromisingly egoistic Epicurean value system, how can there be room for any concern at all for other people—beyond, I mean, warding them off, or appeasing them, in case they might pose obstacles to ease of access to that private world? In fact, Epicurus argues that, when the nature of *katastematic* pleasure, and the natural requirements for attaining it, are taken into account, a life devoted to our individual pleasure turns out to be one not only full of deep personal friendships—it involves a shared life of common activities among one's friends—but one governed by the same virtues of temperance, courage, and justice, with all the concern for other people's welfare that at least courage and justice imply, that we find highlighted in the Stoic, Aristotelian, and Socratic ways of life. In the following two sections, beginning with the question of justice and the other virtues, I explain how Epicurus thinks this is so.

### 5.3. The Epicurean Way of Life: Virtue, Irreligion, Friendship

Following moral conceptions current in wider Greek culture, the philosophical tradition that Epicurus inherits recognizes four principal virtues: (practical) wisdom, temperance or moderation, courage, and justice. In turning now to con-

sider the way of life to which the Epicurean theory of the human good leads, the first thing to note is that, according to what Epicurus says, at any rate, the Epicurean life is a fully virtuous one. One of the virtues (practical wisdom) is a general virtue for thinking well about action in whatever context, the other three (courage, justice, and temperance) are virtues with specific application to different aspects of moral or ethical action or challenges in life. Epicurus's theory of the human good, examined in the previous section, tells us about the knowledge of human values that we need in order to live well and happily. Most fundamentally, this is, according to him, the knowledge that katastematic pleasure, varied suitably with kinetic pleasures, is our highest good. This corresponds, unproblematically, to the first of the four traditional virtues just listed: the state of mind constituted by the possession of this knowledge, when it is deeply ingrained in one's practical consciousness and in one's habits of feeling and desiring, is Epicurus's candidate for the virtue of practical wisdom (φρόνησις), traditionally recognized by Greek philosophers.<sup>23</sup> Hence, in that sense and to that extent, a well-lived Epicurean life will clearly be one governed by virtue. But what about courage, justice, and temperance? Are those also involved? Yes, or so Epicurus claims. He famously said in his *Letter to Menoeceus* that

practical wisdom is that from which all the other virtues grow, since it teaches that it is impossible to live pleasantly without living wisely, finely, and justly, and impossible to live wisely, finely, and justly, without living pleasantly. The virtues grow up in union with living pleasantly, and living pleasantly is inseparable from them.<sup>24</sup>

Unfortunately, except for justice, to which I will return below, we do not find in our sources for Epicureanism any worked-out account of how Epicurus explicated this claim, and how he defended it against obvious possible objections. Unlike for both Aristotle and the Stoics (with less differential detail than Aristo-

<sup>23</sup>Note that practical wisdom, for Epicurus, as for the rest of the Greek tradition, is not the same as mere knowledge (the philosophically well grounded ability to reason correctly about values and value questions). That is why, in the sentence of *Letter to Menoeceus* 132 immediately preceding the passage quoted just below in my main text, Epicurus says that practical wisdom is a more valuable thing than philosophy. Sextus Empiricus (*Against the Ethicists* 169) reports Epicurus as saying, “[P]hilosophy is an activity which by arguments and discussions brings about the happy life.” Practical wisdom is the firmly established reformation of one's habits of desire and feeling when the knowledge of philosophy's conclusions about life and about human values is grasped and held firmly in one's memory. So it is a better good.

<sup>24</sup>*Letter to Menoeceus* 132; also, in shortened form, in *Principal Doctrines* 5. The word translated “finely” here, καλῶς, is the same word Aristotle uses in claiming that the inherent goal for all virtuous actions, as such, is “the fine.”

tle provides), it appears that Epicurus developed no detailed theory of what (apart from justice) each of these moral virtues is, that is, of what the specific psychological state is in which a person is entitled to be called a courageous, or a temperate person, on proper philosophical consideration.<sup>25</sup> We just get the blank assertion that a pleasant life requires it to be a virtuous one, that is, a courageous, temperate, and just one (and one possessing such other moral virtues as there may be). In what follows I will attempt to fill this gap by drawing upon my account in the previous section of Epicurus's views on pleasure itself, and on the psychological dangers we face in pursuing it.

One important point should be clear already. If virtue, or any virtue, has any value for us at all, it must be entirely as a means to pleasure in our lives—in particular, of course, as a means to our attaining in the first place, and then sustaining, katastematic pleasure in our consciousness of ourselves as organisms and agents. Only pleasure is good in itself; so if virtues are good, too, they can be so only in this indirect and secondary way. For philosophers of the Greek philosophical main line, it would seem a flat impossibility that virtue could have only such value. For them, the very concept of a human virtue rules this out. For Aristotle and the Stoics, and Socrates and Plato too, the human virtues (under the names of those traditionally prized qualities just mentioned) were to be conceived as perfections of our very natures as rational beings; it is of their essence to be conditions under which our power of reason is brought to its fullest natural realization, and set in charge of our lives. As such, virtues were necessarily good in themselves, whatever further productive effects they might have for our acquiring and enjoying other things of legitimate independent value. For these mainline philosophers, being virtuous is, for us, what our being good, and so our own good, consists in. Likewise, acting virtuously constitutes our happiness. For such philosophers, a conception of virtue that gave it only the instrumental value

<sup>25</sup> Cicero provides for his Epicurean spokesman in *On Ends*, Torquatus, brief explications of how temperance and courage are, for Epicurus, closely linked to maintaining one's katastematic pleasure, but these explications do not seem to rest on, or reveal, any analysis or definition of either virtue in terms of its specific psychological constitution. See I 47–49. Even in Torquatus's account of how being a just person is necessary for a pleasant life (50–53), Cicero omits to report the theory of what justice is that we learn about from Epicurus's maxims (on this, see below). Cicero's whole account of Epicurean virtues shows signs of having been improvised by himself, drawing on various scattered bits of Epicurean theory, rather than worked up from any specific Epicurean text dealing with the topic of what the virtues are and how, given that, they are linked to happiness. His principal theme is to show that for Epicurus, the virtues, as popularly conceived, are in fact valuable solely as means to katastematic pleasure, and not at all "in themselves."

that Epicureanism gives it, would simply be an unacceptable (mis)conception of what virtue itself is.

The same may presumably be said also for what one might call Greek moral common sense. It is certainly a view that Cicero vociferously maintains as his own, and thinks belongs to the Roman elite's moral common sense. On that basis, he castigates Epicurus mercilessly for violating this view in his theories. Rather, from the point of view of the mainline philosophers, and that of common opinion, if this is how Epicurus proposed to value virtue, and to recommend it to people as part of the happy life of pleasure, then he was simply declaring to be of value something other than virtue—some surrogate, perhaps with some external resemblance to true virtue, but something altogether else. For Epicurus, in fact, to speak the plain truth, they would say, virtue was not merely not a good thing; it was something thoroughly bad: on his view it is a bad failure of understanding if one values virtuous behavior as a good in itself. And, indeed, on Epicurus's view, true virtue, as these people think it—as a good in itself—is bound up with—it is an essential and inseparable part of—a thoroughly mistaken understanding of human nature and human values, a thoroughly mistaken and harmful view about how human beings should conceive of themselves, and about how they should relate to other people, to their own pleasures, and to all their own concerns and pursuits in life. For Epicurus, such regard for virtue is based on the chimerical, morally puffed-up delusion that there is something of intrinsic value except pleasure. If virtuous behavior is an important good in life at all, as he and they evidently agree that it is, it cannot be conceived as having any such value. We must reconceive, and explain, virtue—its value, and the virtuous life—in some different way.

Many people in antiquity were prepared to reject Epicurean ethics as false, and to disparage the Epicurean way of life, simply because it did not allow for the intrinsic goodness of virtue and virtuous action. So strong was their intuitive sense that virtue is of higher value than pleasure or any other good. Since Epicurus's theory clearly had that unacceptable consequence, they thought, one could simply dismiss in advance, without seriously confronting them, Epicurus's reasons for thinking that pleasure really is our highest, and only intrinsic, good. I will set aside for now the question of the virtues' intrinsic value. I will return to it in the next section, after we have seen how Epicurus did think that what he was willing to call justice, courage, temperance, and other moral qualities played a central role in governing a well-lived and happy life. I will attempt to show that,

when all his philosophical views are taken into account, his theory does allow for something, from his opponents' perspective, surprisingly close to the sort of intrinsic value of virtuous action that their intuitions demand. Whether that would be sufficient to mollify them, I will leave an open question. But first, let us consider in its own terms Epicurus's theory of the moral virtues, and their place in the happy life.

Since, as I said, Epicurus seems not to have offered his own theories of the psychology—the specific attitudes and spirit of behavior—of the different types of virtuous person, we can begin by thinking of the various virtues simply in terms of the ranges of behavior that are associated with them in popular thought and ordinary concepts.<sup>26</sup> Thus temperance consists, in practice, we could say, in not overindulging in bodily pleasures of eating, drinking, and sex, and showing a general restraint when it comes to assessing the value of immediately available pleasure in relation to potentially damaging consequences. In popular morality, those who are seen to behave in those ways consistently are to be regarded as temperate, particularly if they seem to privately make a point of it. Courage involves not being dissuaded from tasks one reasonably sees as important merely because, as may happen, they turn out to involve threats of bodily harm or pain, or may even threaten one's own life. In particular, courage is shown when people refuse to betray family members, friends, or their country so as to avoid a personal threat of harm to themselves. Again, in popular terms, those who stand up to such tests count as courageous people, especially if they seem to make an unobtrusive point of doing so. As for justice, that implies first of all avoidance of criminal activities of all sorts—robberies, murders, financial fraud, abuse of office—and beyond those, lying and deceit and shirking responsibilities, cheating in games or in more important parts of life, or sharp dealing in one's business. Just people are ones who, while frequently enough seeing opportunities to benefit themselves in these ways at others' expense, regularly refrain from doing so, and unobtrusively make a point of refraining. The first question we need to address, on Epicurus's behalf, is whether or not his theory of happiness as continued katastematic pleasure can reasonably be claimed to imply that everyone has good reason to possess these qualities of justice, courage, temperance, and other associated virtues, understood simply in these behavioral terms.

Now, one could accept without much difficulty that living pleasantly (on the

<sup>26</sup>This seems to be Cicero's procedure in his discussion in *On Ends* I 47–54.

basis of Epicurus's theory of pleasure) involves constant and regular temperate behavior. It is clear that Epicurean practically wise persons will choose and act temperately as a matter of principle: they will see clearly why such habitual behavior is a good thing, and their temperate way of life will express that understanding, and be based upon a system of desires derived from it. They will understand that kinetic pleasure in general is of a very secondary value, as providing means of varying katastematic pleasure. They will understand that kinetic pleasures of an intense bodily kind (in eating, drinking, and sex), or involving extreme physical exertions, for example in getting the high that long-distance running is reported to give, are impure and bound up with pain in the very experience of them, and, very often, pain as a later consequence. The pursuit of such pleasures, often enough, also involves desires for pleasure that are mentally distressing states of mind. They will know that all pain or distress, physical and mental, has the potential either to disrupt totally one's katastematic enjoyment of one's natural capacities of sense and thought, or to place severe pressure on one's ability to hold onto it. Hence neither will they be given to excesses of bodily indulgence as a general part of their way of life, nor will they ever seek to vary their katastematic pleasure through an intense and unseemly pursuit of those, or any other, kinetic pleasures. If we conceive temperance solely in the popular behavioral terms specified above, then, there seems no doubt at all that, on Epicurus's theory, temperance is clearly required as one organizing component of a truly happy life. Temperance is necessary for happiness, conceived as continuous katastematic pleasure over a whole adult lifetime.

But will the Epicurean wise person regularly and on principle engage in actions recognized as characteristic of courage and justice? Here, I think, matters are really quite a bit less clear. Before attempting to answer this question, we need to recognize, and bear in mind, that, as I have argued in discussing the Socratic, Aristotelian, and Stoic philosophies, any ethical theory is entitled, as part of philosophy's authority for guiding our lives, to extend or trim and adjust our initial or intuitive conception of what truly is characteristic behavior for particular popularly recognized virtues. Thus Socrates insisted that justice required him to remain in prison and face his state-ordered fatal poison; Aristotle developed accounts of whole new virtues that in popular thought did not even have names; the Stoics redefined even the most prominently recognized virtues, so as to turn them away from being conceived as each concerning a different area of life, and into different aspects of the psychology of a virtuous approach to

*each* action, whatever the circumstances and in whatever area of life—eating and drinking and sex, or facing risks of harm in order to achieve more important goals, and so on.<sup>27</sup>

To begin with courage, then, Epicurus is entitled, in approaching the question of the place of courage in a happy life, to reconceive this virtue in terms that suit the quiet and rather retiring life that his theory argues is the best one for us. Even under the common conception, courageous people do not run foolish risks, and a distinction between courage and bravado is recognized; perhaps Epicurean courage would move quite a number of actions counted in the popular conception as brave ones off toward the foolhardy, bravado end of the spectrum. Nonetheless, the ineliminable core of courage is the willingness to risk serious harm to oneself, in one's own private longer-term interest, but notably also in the interests of one's family, friends, and country. Does the Epicurean conception of courage preserve this core? Well, what serious risks of harm or loss, at all, would an Epicurean run? Ordinary courageous persons think the threats they face are threats to something that is of real and important value to them (their property, their family's well-being, their country's continued dominance of trade, or simple dominion over a wartime enemy, or the avoidance of the woes of invasion by an enemy). Can Epicurus reasonably show that such value survives reinterpretation in terms of a tight relation to the courageous person's katastematic pleasure?

It is true, to begin with, that Epicurus tells us that bodily pain and injury (such as a courageous person may face and risk) can be endured, and that they do not necessarily undermine our continuing katastematic pleasure. But what reasons would there be for an Epicurean's risking pain or injury in the first place? There can be no doubt that having to put up with these pains, while exercising the skills of self-distraction and so forth that enable one to endure them, is an effort. Why risk having to do that? Further, on Epicurean theory, we do not need, or even have any strong legitimate interest in, any of our property or possessions—the sorts of things that courage is most typically exercised in order to defend. His doctrine is that all these are of use merely to allow or enable continued pleasure, and his doctrine also holds that we do not really need them, since we can maintain a pleasant life on very minimal resources. As he says, “[S]imple flavors bring pleasure equal to those of an expensive table, once the pain of want has been removed; bread and water [can] provide the highest pleasure.”<sup>28</sup> Is it

<sup>27</sup> See above section 2.4; section 3.6; section 4.9, and n. 86.

<sup>28</sup> *Letter to Menoecus* 130–31.

reasonable to run serious risks of harm to life or limb just in order to ensure a more constant availability of one's preferred and favorite variations on the katastematic pleasure? Or consider risks run to save other people's lives or injury to their property, and especially the more dramatic incidents of physical courage that take place in wartime. It is true that Epicurus perfectly reasonably insists that not life alone but a good and happy life of pleasure is worth having and continuing, and he can point to his doctrine (I have not mentioned it so far) that "death is nothing to us," because, being composed of atoms, both our souls and our bodies will disperse after we die, removing at the moment of death all possibility of any experience at all, whether of pleasure or pain, and all consciousness.<sup>29</sup> But will knowing these things encourage an Epicurean warrior to seriously risk dying for his country?<sup>30</sup> Why risk the permanent loss of pleasurable consciousness that death entails? What good would Epicureans think they would get from doing that, sufficient to make the risk worth running? It may well seem doubtful that they would see any.

But there is another consideration I have not mentioned so far, and this needs to be included, in order to argue with any hope of success, that courage (conceived in reasonable behavioral terms) is an integral part of the Epicurean happy life. Epicurus must maintain that our future security in seeking to maintain a life of pleasure is of supreme importance to us. We need to have, and to maintain, a reasonable prospect of continued security in having what we need, by way of material and human surroundings, so as to make the continuance of our katastematically happy lives possible (if we have achieved that status). We need to secure the ready availability to us of all the material and human resources we rely on to make our usual favorite activities and practices of life available. This, he could argue, does depend heavily on the stable projection into the future of all the structures of support for our lives provided by our property, families, friends, and country. Our lives will surely be severely disrupted if our normal expectations as to our customary daily circumstances are suddenly un-

<sup>29</sup> *Principal Doctrines* 2. See below, pp. 261–62.

<sup>30</sup> Cicero puts Torquatus, his Epicurean spokesman in *On Ends* I, through hoops (I 34–36; cf. 49) to explain on Epicurean grounds, and in the end not quite convincingly, his ancestor's famous courageous deed in fighting and killing a Gaulish warrior in single combat (see I 23). But that may only show Cicero's own lack of understanding or sympathy. It is true that, in this story, the brave ancestor survived without serious injury, so that he lived on (possibly quite happily), and got that benefit from his extraordinary effort, as Torquatus points out. But what if he had died? Would it have been worth the effort, from his personal point of view, properly considered in Epicurean terms, to make the attempt, in that case? If not, then it wasn't worth it in the actual case either.

dermined. If we lost all our property to some bully, or we saw our family destroyed, or we lost our friends through betraying them, or our country fell into the kind of disarray that befell Germany after the First World War, we would certainly face very severe strains, and difficulties in keeping our lives on an even keel. Perhaps Epicurus thinks that no human being, even the wisest among us, could in fact fail to fall into despair or at least suffer very great anxiety (sufficient to make katastematic pleasure no longer sustainable), as one faced the prospect of continued life under such circumstances: the need to make new friends, acquire substitute property, a new family, and so on, and the difficulty of doing so successfully. If so, then all the normally recognized courageous acts, even ones of facing death for country or family and friends, might arguably be found in the Epicurean well-lived life. And that would be so despite the fact that all these things are solely of instrumental value, for Epicurus, in relation to one's own state of happy consciousness, and therefore in principle substitutable for by replacement provisions in like kind.

The situation with justice is apparently more severe, though here again consideration of the important value of security in one's way of life helps to support Epicurus's claims. Justice requires that each person should pursue their own financial and material interests, and those of their friends and family, only to the extent that fair consideration of the interests of others permits. It is true that Epicurean agents place low value, in any event, on money and material resources. One does not need a lot of money or land or other resources in order to support, with reasonable confidence, as satisfactory a range of favorite pursuits as one could wish for; large resources would be needed only in order to satisfy appetites of an excessive and intense kind, harmful to one's happiness, and Epicureans rule such appetites out of court from the outset. So Epicureans would be free from any of the more extreme desires for money and other resources that cause the more spectacular injustices—robberies, murders, embezzlements, even petty thieveries or mere chiseling and sharp business practices. And, as we have seen, the Epicurean doctrine of the possibility of continued happiness, even without any resources beyond a bare minimum, can also legitimately be appealed to in favor of the claim that Epicureans will not do these or other acts of injustice, either: certainly, they will not think they absolutely need any of the things unjust action might get for them. But in addition, Epicurus, in his own theory of justice, emphasizes its role in providing for security of possessions, and thereby of the material means for sustaining life itself, on a mutually acceptable basis, among all those who live and work together in a community. He identifies justice as a

pledge or pact among members of society not to harm, and so not to be harmed by, one another.<sup>31</sup> And, following the commonsense ideas about just behavior and what it is to be a just person that I mentioned above, he insists that justice requires that one keep to the pact, pretty much come what may. The security against invasions of one's privacy and disruption of one's life by other human beings (an especially rich potential source of such destabilization) provided by such a pact, if effective, Epicurus thinks, is especially desirable from the Epicurean point of view. (I will come back to this point below.) If such an agreement is in force and generally respected, especially by those who do not share the Epicurean freedom from the pursuit of intense and expensive pleasures, it frees one from major grounds for worry. One can make plans for the short- and the longer-term future, in pursuit of continued katastematic pleasure, with assurance that it will not be disrupted by alien violence or other interference, and with confidence that material possessions and other means needed for one's favorite activities will be available, when called upon for varying one's katastematic pleasure.

On the other hand, the provisions of the pact need to be quite stringent, as I mentioned (and Epicurus clearly recognizes this). Otherwise—if people are free, under the agreement, to pursue their perceived interests to the detriment of others' when they are extremely needy, or when their own interests are extremely threatened, or when they think no one will know what they have done—this beneficial effect is significantly undermined. It is essential to justice that it requires people to adhere quite strictly to the rules defining the terms of the agreement, and that the terms be drawn in such a way as to favor peaceful retention of the privileges of a private life, and to bar outright physical harm to others. Here is where one may doubt whether accepting the Epicurean theory of value can provide the basis needed for being a just person, understood simply, as we have so far been understanding it, in behavioral terms. We can assume, for the sake of argument, that Epicurus's pact does specify as just actions pretty much all those characteristic actions of justice (and avoidance of unjust ones) that I mentioned above. But being a just person, on Epicurus's theory, requires accepting the terms of the agreement with full stringency. That means that one will never contravene these terms, even when one perceives one's interests as extremely at risk, or, especially, when one can be confident that no one will know what one has done, if

<sup>31</sup> See *Principal Doctrines* 31–33, and Lucretius V, 1011–27. Epicurus thus comes close to endorsing the theory of justice provisionally advanced by Glaucon and Adeimantus at the beginning of book II of Plato's *Republic*. That is presumably not an accident, or unpremeditated. Epicurus wants to revive and defend the egoist, quid-pro-quo approach to justice that Glaucon and Adeimantus want Socrates to knock down.

one behaves unjustly. Just persons must be ready to allow their own financial and other material interests to be overridden in cases where their interests conflict with the interests of others, if those others' interests prevail under the rules of justice. Both the Stoic and the Aristotelian theories of virtue permit Stoic philosophers and Aristotle to satisfy this condition: a just person, on their theories, recognizes that to have attitudes of regard for other people and their interests at this level of stringency, and to act from them, is good in itself. It is an immediate fulfillment of one's own nature's perfection to have these attitudes and to act upon them. It is true that in doing acts of justice, Stoic and Aristotelian just persons act for the sake of their own happiness, as their ultimate end, just as much as the Epicurean does. But their theories make it clear that, even under circumstances when one's own financial and material interests suffer greatly, or when one could avoid the self-sacrifice involved in acting justly, because no one would know what one has done, it is still for one's overall good to act justly. Whatever financial and material interests would be sacrificed cannot be worth the cost in one's own lost natural good of virtuous behavior if one should act the other way.

But, for Epicurus, happiness is just a continuing feeling in one's own mind. We can certainly grant that in order to maintain that feeling in existence we do not need much by way of financial or material resources. But Epicurean justice's emphasis on the importance of stability and security, as to whatever possessions and other resources for supporting one's active life one may have in place, attaches a positive value, for each person, in holding on to them, if not also in extending one's stock. And it must surely happen that, given one's special favorites among activities with which to vary that feeling, and the great importance, as we have seen it is, of being able easily to vary it, sometimes one will have quite strong reasons to cheat on the agreement. By doing so, with only a very modest degree of luck one will preserve or obtain resources needed to continue one's pleasure in a secure way, by helping to guarantee one's access to those favorite activities. Most notably, one may be quite sure, and reasonably so, that no one else will ever know what one has done, if one does an injustice in such circumstances. Justice—the stringency of the rules defined in the agreement—and self-interest may conflict. In such a circumstance, what can Epicurean theory say, except that in the pursuit of one's own happiness one must do the unjust act? But to say that is to recommend that one not be a just person. It recommends only that one act as if one were one, all the while being prepared, under some circumstances, to violate the pact defining justice. When and if such circumstances do arise, one will act unjustly, while hiding it from others, especially from those socially ap-

pointed to punish violators of the pact—such punishment, of course, being a bad thing, because of the serious obstacle to continued katastematic pleasure that we have to assume it will constitute.

Epicurus appears to attempt to avoid this conclusion by insisting that no one ever can be sure that any act of injustice that recommended itself under such circumstances would go undetected. He says (with quite ludicrous caution),

It is impossible for one who violates any of the things agreed to for the sake of not harming or being harmed by one another to be confident that he will escape detection, even if from the present time<sup>32</sup> [forward] he has tens of thousands of escapes. For it is unclear up to death whether he will in fact escape detection.<sup>33</sup>

The consequence is that one must never do any injustice whatsoever, even when one has good reason (from the point of view of one's own future pleasure) to consider doing it, and even when one is in fact very unlikely to be found out (and so to suffer punishment or other damaging effects). That is so because, Epicurus seems to think, once one does knowingly do an injustice, one's mind will be racked with fear of exposure, and its expected bad consequences, and this will do away with one's katastematic pleasure, or will too severely interfere with it.<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, it can never be the Epicurean right thing to do, knowingly to do any injustice. And so, Epicurean theory does, after all, Epicurus claims, offer a firm basis for holding that the practically wise person will also be a truly just one—not merely one who pretends to be, while harboring the intention to cheat if ever (however rare and special the circumstances would have to be) a justified occasion arises.

Surely Epicurus goes too far here. There surely are in everyone's life, if not plenty, at least some occasions when one could do something unjust knowing one would not be caught, and when one has some reason (acceptable from the Epicurean point of view) for doing it. A just person would refrain, nonetheless. Why would Epicurean wise people refrain in these cases? It cannot be fear of being caught, unless they are pathologically cautious—and of course no wise person could be subject to any sort of psychic pathology. It seems clear that they

<sup>32</sup>The manuscripts offer a choice of several different prepositions here. I read and translate ἀπό, with J.-F. Balaudé, in *Diogène Laërce*. Other choices, less suitably, would have the text say "at the present moment."

<sup>33</sup>*Principal Doctrines* 35.

<sup>34</sup>See *Principal Doctrines* 34 and *Vatican Sayings* 70.

would not hold back, or not by considering such reasons alone. To uncover a deeper reason why they might nonetheless refrain, we can begin by noting that Epicurus seems to think it right to place a very high premium on the stability of one's life, not just the security of one's possessions and other means to one's pleasures. The Epicurean ideal for human life is one in which each person works out for himself or herself, on the basis of their own experience and whatever appropriate opportunities present themselves, an individual mode of life that suits their particular personality and talents, in which they achieve and sustain *katastematic* pleasure over their adult lifetime. Each such life consists of an individually selected and assembled set of favorite activities ample enough to allow sufficient variation in the steady pleasure of enjoying one's natural constitution, so that life goes forward always smoothly and easily, without having to face sources of untoward stress and strain—unless some emergency falls, of the sort that can afflict any human life.

Once we have achieved this condition (which is not hard to do, Epicurus insists), the most important concern for each one of us is to stabilize this life by providing stability in its surrounding and enabling circumstances. Our concern is simply to sustain that given way of life, and the particular material and other resources on which it is based. We do not seek to expand our resources, or seek new ones needed for engaging in new activities, even if opportunities presented themselves to do so—whether or not we could expand our resources only by acting unjustly. Our whole concern is to have our way of life, whatever it is, stable and secure: all we want is to continue in the happy and pleasant life that we already have.<sup>35</sup> The point of the pact concerning justice, then, is to enable each of us to enjoy such a stable basis of life with confidence and security, at least so far as disruptions from other people in our community might be concerned—these being the principal sources of potential destabilization that we might face. (Natural disasters, of one's personal health or in the wider environment, are mostly beyond our control, and have to be endured as best we can manage, through the psychological strategies Epicurus specifies for distracting ourselves from their potential ill effects on our continued *katastematic* pleasure.) So the reason why an Epicurean wise person will never do any act of injustice, as defined by this

<sup>35</sup>Of course any life grows and changes over time, with new interests and occupations taking the place of old ones, and in response to changing circumstances: part of the stability of life envisioned in my idealization here of the Epicurean life is the ready evolution from the stable basis at any one point in time, to a future transformation that is in close accord, and continuity, with it. The main point is that the psychological strengths of the Epicurean wise person are all that is needed to make such transformation possible, no matter what befalls.

pact, is that sustaining the practice of justice, established in one's community through the existence of this pact, when it is agreed to by all, is the only stable means—that is, the only means acceptable to all—by which to secure the stable life one already leads, and to which one is deeply and permanently attached. They feel no temptation at all to act otherwise, under any circumstances.<sup>36</sup> They do not, in fact, as one might suppose given what Epicurus says in *Principal Doctrines* 35, quoted above, refrain out of fear of getting caught.<sup>37</sup>

We can conclude, then, that not only temperance (temperate behavior) among the standard Greek moral virtues, but courage and justice also, have an arguably firm basis in the happy life of Epicureanism. In the latter two cases, as we have seen, the high premium Epicurus places on stability, not only on security of access to the means of life, in any katastematically pleasant life plays the crucial role in the argument, given the prominence in any pleasant life of the variations on pleasure needed in order to sustain it over time, lest it fall victim to boredom or emptiness. I will return to this theme at the end of this section, when I turn to the importance in the Epicurean life of friends, with whom to share one's pleasantly varied activities. But first we need to address three features of the Epicurean life, beyond its virtuousness, that are especially emphasized by Epicurus himself and reported in all our later sources. Epicurus highlights the first two features—its irreligion and its freedom from fear of death—by mentioning and elaborating on them as the first things he advises Menoeceus (and other readers of his letter to him) to put into practice in their lives. His readers are to hold onto them, and memorize them, as “elements” or basic building blocks of living well. These also have pride of place as the substance of the first two of the forty *Principal Doctrines*. Ancient Epicureans appealed to these two doctrines as the principal benefits for humankind deriving from the Epicurean philosophical system. Taken together, they free us once and for all from the su-

<sup>36</sup>Thus one could say that the Epicurean will always act justly and never unjustly on principle. The principle is that the stability of one's present and future katastematically pleasant life demands this commitment, since that stability itself is of premium value.

<sup>37</sup>In the preceding discussion I have spoken of the Epicurean just person's behavior under “ideal” conditions for justice, where the pact is openly acknowledged as generally binding on everyone and is seen to be adhered to by most people most of the time. Under less ideal ones, where injustice is widespread, I take it that the Epicurean reasoning I have reconstructed and outlined will lead such a person to do what they can to help both to spread understanding of justice as a pact for mutual self-protection, and, by their own just behavior, and avoidance of unjust, to encourage others to follow suit in theirs. If things got bad enough, perhaps even the Epicurean wise persons might not feel bound by the pact, but the tendency of their thinking would be to vastly prefer life under the pact; and they would still see little good reason to violate its terms.

perstitutions of religion and from fear concerning our own deaths. Thus the Epicurean life involves rejecting the traditional Greek gods (and, by extension, the Jewish, the Christian, and the Muslim ones too) and all the religious practices that go along with belief in those religions; it is a life of irreligion. And, as a result, Epicureans live cheerfully, right up to the end of their lives, completely free from any and all concern regarding any afterlife.

First, Epicurus's epistemological and physical theories show that human beings have nothing at all to fear, or to be in any way concerned over, so far as concerns the gods and their possible interventions in our lives—whether favorable, in return for our devotions, or vengeful or otherwise adverse action in our regard. Gods there may be, but there is only one concept of gods that we have a right to trust, because this is the only one that human beings everywhere seem to come to by mere natural, unprejudiced openness to the world as we experience it. All other concepts of gods, or additions to this one, derive simply through socially induced, erroneous passing on of traditionally established cultural falsehoods. The true concept presents gods simply as sublimely happy and deathless beings, rather like ourselves in all other respects. Accordingly, since, as Epicurus argues, happiness means continuous *katastematic* pleasure, the gods, being blessedly happy, cannot have concerns for the whole world and its workings—as if they were creators, and/or enablers of its operations. Nor can they concern themselves with wickednesses or virtuous actions of humans, or wish for devotions from them, and then take the trouble to punish people in case they don't do their part. Such concerns would inevitably be burdensome impositions and would distract the gods from their own preferred pleasurable activities, whatever those might be. All such concerns are incompatible with the gods' essential happiness. And in any event, we know that the world and its contents are the product of nothing but random bumpings together of atoms moving in the void, and that the world and its contents behave according to purely natural principles deriving from the natures of those atoms and from their atomic movements. No gods could have any involvement in the world's formation or its laws of operation. Nor can the gods ever get upset at anything that we might do (supposing, which there is no reason to do, that they could even be aware of it), and cause hidden retributions to befall us. It is totally beneath them to take any interest whatsoever in any of our human malfeasances, or our moral accomplishments, either. Thus, popular religion, with its claims for divine control over the world of nature, and divine moral oversight, and punishment for wrongdoers, in this

world or an afterlife, is pure superstition. Its claims (frightening, and therefore disruptive to any decently pleasant human life) cannot possibly be true.

It may surprise us to find Epicurus and Epicureans giving such prominence to the damage that religious superstition can do to people's lives, and claiming Epicurus's own philosophy as a great benefactor because it immunizes us against it. It is impossible to imagine that Socrates or Plato or Aristotle or Chrysippus were subject to superstitious, or any, terror at the prospect of what the gods might do; they, and their followers, did not need the Epicurean doctrine of divinity as happy and immortal, and unconcerned with us, or with the world of which we and it are part, to ward off such debilitating afflictions. So Epicurus could not claim any advantage for his own theory over those of these other philosophers in this regard. That Epicurus lays such emphasis on these benefits of his doctrine does, however, strongly suggest that, at his time, and perhaps increasingly as time went on, many uneducated people, whom his philosophy was also aimed at benefiting, were in fact afflicted by superstitious fear concerning the gods. It is worth noting that the other ancient philosophies did not put themselves forward at all, as Epicureanism did, as having this benefit. Their authors may not have concerned themselves as much as Epicurus apparently did to engage with ordinary, unsophisticated, and uneducated people and their concerns.

Second, Epicurus emphasizes that, on his theories, there are no grounds for being terrified, or even more mildly disturbed simply by fear, in realizing that we are going to die some day. Hence there are no grounds for allowing the fact of our mortality to deprive us, or interfere with the fullest enjoyment, of the pleasures that life provides us.<sup>38</sup> His atomic theory of material stuffs and material objects as all that exists applies just as much to our souls as it does to our bodies. He argues that there cannot exist any noncorporeal spirits of the sort Platonists believe in; such an idea is the merest chimera. Accordingly, our deaths are the permanent end of our natural existences. The atoms making up our souls and keeping us alive are necessarily disarranged and dispersed when we do cease to live. We possess consciousness entirely in virtue of our souls' presence in our bodies, and the functioning arrangements of its atoms, in relation to our bodily or-

<sup>38</sup>Thoughts about possibly painful processes of dying are another matter. The remedy against anticipatory distress on such a basis has already been explained (see the last two paragraphs of the previous section); you have no good reason to think that such pains will deprive you of your happiness (if you can attain it), if they do arise. If we do experience such distress, it is our own fault. It is self-caused, not necessary, and not rational, just as much so as fear of death because of what we might suffer after dying.

gans; so our deaths, and the dispersal of our souls' atoms, are the permanent end of our consciousness.<sup>39</sup> Once dispersed, they can never come back together in just the way required so as to sustain life in a human body, and even if they did, they would no longer cause the same consciousness as before to exist. There would be no same self-awareness preserved across this span of time. Epicurus may be going too far when he puts his point by saying that our deaths (in prospect) are *nothing* to us,<sup>40</sup> since his own theory certainly does hold that we have reason to want to keep on living and enjoying the pleasures that only life can bring us. When we die, we do lose something that we want, namely, to be alive, and, like any other fact relevant to our lives, we have reason not to forget this, or act in prospect as if it is not a fact. But Epicurus's theory does show clearly how foolish it would be to become actually upset with fear or sadness when recalling, or bearing in mind, that one is going to die—and thus that one is going to cease to have the pleasures of living. As he says, “[W]henever we exist death is not present, but when death is present we do not exist.” We ought not in any way to allow that prospect to undermine our fullest commitment to, and maintenance of, an untroubled consciousness, suffused with katastematic pleasure and varied with our favorite ways of interestingly spending our time. Of course you are going to die sometime and cease totally to exist! All the more reason to live the life you have with full devotion to its pleasures, without distraction through dwelling on that knowledge.

Here, too, it may seem curious that Epicurus should place such emphasis on this benefit of his theories. It does not seem that Aristotle's or the Stoics' theories leave room (though they do not go on about the matter, as Epicurus does) for any actual fear of death, or for any disturbance of our consciousness at all, as a result of recognizing that we are going to die some day. And Socrates in Plato's *Apology* gives his own philosophical reasons for not being concerned over his own death, reasons that apply equally to everyone else too.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps, just as with religious fear of the gods, the debilitating effects of supposing we might somehow live past death and into an afterlife were widespread among unsophisticated people of Epicurus's time and later in antiquity, under the influence of religious myths of punishment in the afterlife. Such myths were spread even by well-enough-meaning philosophers like Plato, as a means of scaring people into be-

<sup>39</sup>This consequence of Epicurus's theory of nature is beautifully (even, perhaps paradoxically, rather pathetically) presented in book III 83off., of Lucretius's poem *On the Nature of Things*.

<sup>40</sup>*Letter to Menoecus* 125, and (more pithily) *Principal Doctrines* 2.

<sup>41</sup>*Apol.* 40c–41b.

having better than they otherwise might. If so, Epicurus is, here again, wishing to address, not the followers of other philosophies, claiming an advantage for his own system over theirs, but, rather, uneducated people frightened by myths that no philosopher could take seriously anyhow.

The third feature of the Epicurean life I mentioned above is not one that we find expressed clearly in any of Epicurus's *Principal Doctrines* or in his *Letters*. We learn about it from Plutarch, who tells us that Epicurus was famous for the maxim "live unnoticed" (λάθε βιώσας). This striking expression, a second-person singular imperative, addressed presumably to some individual person, perhaps in a letter also meant for circulation, is a splendid addition to the other maxims found in the *Principal Doctrines* and *Vatican Sayings*.<sup>42</sup> To "live unnoticed" means to live a completely private life, with no involvement, beyond what might be obligatory for all citizens, in the public life of one's community or country,<sup>43</sup> and also with no ambitions for making a mark in any other public realm—in any of the arts or professions, for example.<sup>44</sup> One easily sees how Epicurus might have thought his own theory of the human good leads to this advice. For Epicurus, the only criterion for deciding on one's way of life is what will work out best from the point of view of one's own pursuit of a continuous experience of katas-tematic pleasure, varied suitably so as to conform to one's own, perhaps somewhat idiosyncratic, preferences among sources of kinetic pleasure. It seems obvious that the more exposed one's life is to the attentions of the public, and, in general, to those of any wide circle of nonintimates, the more risks one runs of potential harmful interference from them. The general run of people are more inclined to envy and ingratitude than to honoring honest good services, or sim-

<sup>42</sup>Plutarch wrote a short essay arguing against this Epicurean advice, *Is "Live Unknown" a Wise Precept?*.

<sup>43</sup>Diog. Laert. (X 119) says flatly that the true Epicurean will not engage in politics. But Seneca's fragmentary essay *De otio* (*On Leisure* or, better, *On the Private Life*) gives a more nuanced view: under some conditions, an Epicurean would become politically involved. Like Diog. Laert. (VII 121), he tells us that Chrysippus said (not all that differently) that virtuous people would take a leading role in politics, unless some obstacle to this arose (e.g., if political life were too irreversibly corrupted for them to do any good).

<sup>44</sup>As ancient critics were quick to point out, this aspect of the Epicurean philosophy marked it off, much to its detriment, as they thought, from both Aristotelianism and Stoicism. This Epicurean advice is manifestly inconsistent with both of Aristotle's two ideal lives. The second happiest Aristotelian life is devoted to the public affairs and the government of a city constituted so as to advance the virtuous lives of all one's fellow citizens. The absolutely best, contemplative life is equally clearly one of active involvement in cutting-edge philosophical writing and discussion with other like-minded philosophical experts, which would quite naturally lead to recognition as a cultural leader (in the way, in fact, that Epicurus himself became recognized, already in his own lifetime). The Stoics, too, with their emphasis on the importance of the public good as an object of each human being's legitimate concern, promote and specially recommend a life of public service in a political position.

ply reciprocating favors, and, besides, people who set out to distinguish themselves in public life are sure to acquire plenty of enemies. And, in any case, as Epicurus says in another context, “There is no need for things that involve struggle and conflict (ἀγῶνας).”<sup>45</sup> Moreover, any human life is more vulnerable to the harms of interference than it is open to helpful advancement through strangers’ good will. On the positive side, life is truly one’s own to make something of (and, as we have seen, it does not require more than ordinary external resources); on the negative side, intrusions can pose serious obstacles that one has to work hard to overcome. The pact of justice is one source of self-protection; living unnoticed is a second step in the same direction.

Still, in *Principal Doctrines* 7 Epicurus seems to recognize (quite appropriately) that one ought not to generalize too readily on such a matter: there might be, for some people, in some communities and in some personal circumstances, acceptable Epicurean reasons to opt to live a political life. He says,

Some people have wanted to become highly reputed and acclaimed, thinking that this is the way to obtain security from others. If such persons’ life was secure, they attained the natural good. But if it was not secure, they do not have that for the sake of which they strove from the beginning, in accordance with what naturally suits [a human being].<sup>46</sup>

Thus for Epicurus the default position is to live a life of devotion to one’s private affairs, letting public and political interests take care of themselves, or rather letting them get taken care of by those foolish enough to go in for such things. The hope is that by keeping out of the limelight one can live happily, in peace and quiet, surrounded, and both protected and advanced in one’s pursuit of pleasure, by one’s family, and by a circle of intimate, like-minded friends.

Epicureans were in fact famous in antiquity for forming little societies, perhaps on the model of life during Epicurus’s time in the Epicurean community of his school at Athens, with its famous garden. There seem to have been many common meals (including annual celebrations of Epicurus’s birthday), and shared pastimes (intellectual and other), as well as philosophical study and discussion. These were communities of friends, who lived and ate together, and

<sup>45</sup> *Principal Doctrines* 21.

<sup>46</sup> Seneca cites as Epicurus’s principle, not the unqualified advice (reported in Diog. Laert. X 119) not to live a life of public service, but rather to do so (only) when something comes up that would make it acceptable or desirable (*On the Private Life* 3.2). We have no other source to such an effect, but it does perhaps support a noncommittal reading of this *Doctrine*. See also *Principal Doctrines* 14, which seems to go in the same direction.

shared their life in all its main aspects. In fact, whether in connection with such a fully merged life together or not, Epicurus placed a heavy emphasis on the presence and value of friendship in making possible the life of katastematic pleasure. The remarkable number of *Principal Doctrines* and *Vatican Sayings* that relate to the topic of friendship testifies to its importance for the Epicurean life.<sup>47</sup> Epicurus valued friendship so highly that he declared that, among all the things that wisdom, that is, philosophical knowledge, provides to make one's whole life blessed, the having of friends is by far the greatest.<sup>48</sup> That marks it as the greatest resource one can have for obtaining and preserving continuous katastematic pleasure in one's life.

Of course, that friendship is the greatest resource does not make it a greater good than practical wisdom itself or the other virtues,<sup>49</sup> since these are causally more fundamental to our ability to live a happy life at all, with or without friends. But in assigning it that high status Epicurus does emphasize how crucially important friendship is for achieving a stable and mutually secure form of pleasurable existence, one that is full of richly interesting activities with which to vary, and thereby most easily to sustain, that pleasurable consciousness. Diogenes Laertius reports that for Epicurus, friendship "is constituted by a partnership of those who are fulfilled in their pleasures."<sup>50</sup> Our nature is such that we all need like-minded friends to share our interests, and to engage with us in mutually favored joint activities, as well as for the open and free conversation that we all need but that are possible only with people we like and trust. Friends are also needed, of course, for mutual assistance in illness or in disappointments, or in other circumstances that, if we had to deal with them all on our own, might lead to disturbed states of mind incompatible with katastematic pleasure. It is in these ways that, for Epicurus, friendship is the greatest resource for living a blessed life.

Cicero, and apparently others in antiquity, doubted or disputed Epicurean theory's ability to support, or even to permit, the assignment of this high value to friendship. For them, Epicurus's theory could not justify the role of friendship in the lives Epicureans seem actually to have lived, allegedly under its banner.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> See *Principal Doctrines* 27, 28, and 40, and *Vatican Sayings* 23, 28, 34, 39, 52, 56–57, 66, and 78: this is more than a tenth of the total preserved "maxims" of Epicurus.

<sup>48</sup> *Principal Doctrines* 27.

<sup>49</sup> Epicurus declares practical wisdom, as root and origin of the other virtues, to be the greatest good (i.e., the greatest good that is not the feeling of katastematic pleasure); see *Letter to Menoeceus* 132.

<sup>50</sup> Diogenes Laertius X 120.

<sup>51</sup> Cicero's exposition of Epicurean theory on friendship is found in *On Ends* I 67–70, at the very end of his account of Epicurean ethics. His criticisms are lodged in II 78–85.

Cicero does not dispute that Epicurus and Epicureans lived lives of devotion to their friends, but, in this as in other respects, he thinks that they were, and lived, both inconsistently with their philosophy, and better than it told them to live. Cicero insists that friendship (true friendship, not some perversion or fraud) requires loving another person for that person's own sake (*ipsum propter ipsum*). And he claims that if one establishes and maintains a relationship of mutual attention, shared activities, and mutual assistance, "for one's own advantage" or because of its usefulness or expediency (*utilitas*), that cannot be a friendship at all.<sup>52</sup> In linking friendship to each partner's pursuit of their own pleasures, in the way that we have seen Epicurus does, Cicero thinks he is grounding friendship (self-contradictorily) in just that self-advantage or expediency, rather than in care for the other person for that person's own sake. Hence, for Cicero, if, as Epicurus does seem to hold, true friendship makes the greatest, and a virtually essential, contribution to the life of pleasure, he is simply admitting (with Plutarch in the essay I mentioned above) that it is impossible to live pleasantly according to his own theory. To live pleasantly one needs friendship, Epicurus says; but friendship is impossible unless one has other values than pleasure (the friends' good for their own sake), and assigns that value weight independent of any relation to one's pleasure. The good of some other persons (the ones one makes friends with) must be of value to oneself, independently from its effects on one's own pleasure.

But it seems likely that Cicero, and perhaps other ancient critics, Plutarch among them, did not appreciate the subtlety of Epicurus's analysis. Epicurus is not saying that true friendships should or could be initiated, and maintained, by people looking solely to their profit or advantage, measured in material terms, or their self-advancement in society—or with a view solely to such things as one's sexual pleasure or even mere entertainment or amusement. Those may be the sorts of things one would first think of when told that Epicurus recommended friendship as being to one's advantage, or for its "utility."<sup>53</sup> But those are cases of using other people (whether acceptably or not) for one's personal (perceived) benefit. Certainly, if this benefit was all you cared about in a relationship, it would not be a friendship, at least not on your side. But there is no good reason to think Epicurus would have wanted to deny this. If we are to understand and

<sup>52</sup> *On Ends* II 78.

<sup>53</sup> See *Vatican Sayings* 23, 34.

appreciate Epicurus's theory properly, we must keep in mind that the good that a person derives from an Epicurean friendship lies in their achievement and maintenance of their *katastematic* pleasure, suitably varied. It is not profit or advantage conceived in the crude material ways I mentioned above, as Cicero seems to misunderstand it, that an Epicurean aims at through friendship. Continued *katastematic* pleasure, suitably varied, is what each friend is seeking, and this fact is of course well and mutually understood among any group of Epicurean friends. It forms the basis of Epicurean friendship on both sides of the friendship.

Moreover, the activities belonging to the friendship that are of such great value to the friends, as providing variations of pleasure, require mutual intimacy and the interest in and concern on the part of each for the well-being and pleasure of the other. (I do not say it requires interest and concern for the other "for the other's own sake," in the way Cicero demands. I have more to say about that just below.) What Epicurus envisages are two or more people who have come to be capable of, and to enjoy, sharing with one another activities of mutual interest on a common basis of mutual trust, exchange of intimacy, concern for the equal enjoyment of the other person, and mutual support for the things that one finds interesting and worthwhile, in part by finding them endorsed and shared by another. Among these activities might be some that one could also engage in and enjoy with strangers or other nonintimates (e.g., certain games or other leisure activities). But, Epicurus is suggesting, even these activities have an enhanced interest, and so give a distinctively interesting variation on one's pleasure, if they are engaged in with intimate friends on a basis of shared mutual concern. It is, one might suggest on Epicurus's behalf, the added complexity of the activities, when they are engaged in as part of such a relationship, that lies at the core of their special appeal when so engaged in, as variations on one's *katastematic* pleasure. One has more to think about, more to pay attention to, more to integrate into the overall experience, in engaging one's self-conscious experience of one's natural constitution and its capabilities, and therein varying one's *katastematic* pleasure, as one participates in such shared activities with friends, with a mutual concern for one another's pleasure in the activity, than when one engages in them with relative strangers where that concern is absent.

It is, I suggest, this added complexity that makes the activities of friendship so engaging and interesting—in fact, so enjoyable. If one has no friends, and is left wrapped up in the privacy of one's self, the pursuit of pleasure, when that is understood Epicurus's way, can become cloying and may lose its appeal. One will be

stuck in a round of solipsistic pursuits of not very wide scope, that carry the risk of becoming boring, or coming to seem empty and pointless. If one opens oneself up to other people, and makes possible the more complex engagement with one's life that having friends makes possible in part through their interest in oneself and one's life, one's activities in varying the *katastematic* pleasure (assuming one achieves it) are greatly expanded in interest and indeed in variety. One comes to take pleasure in tending to the needs of one's friends, when they are in need, and to take a special, and added, pleasure even in receiving their attentions, when one is in need oneself. And in being engaged in conversation or other activities of social life with them, one has the added pleasure of anticipating their thoughts, bringing to bear memories of previous conversations and of other accumulated and pleasant knowledge of them. One can relate what one is doing oneself to what they are doing, in a common activity that is aimed equally, by all participants, at the pleasure of all parties. And so on. The central and crucial point, on Epicurus's theory of friendship and its value, is that friends mutually enjoy, in a direct and immediate way, their friends themselves, their friendships, and all the shared and mutual pleasure-seeking activities that make their friendships up. And they do so in a specially strong way: friendship provides the context for many or most of the activities of life that they find most appealing and challenging, and that they place in the first rank among their favorite ways of varying their *katastematic* pleasure.

It is certainly true, then, that when Epicureans engage with a friend in some common activity, or offer the friend assistance in some situation of legitimate need, they act for the sake of their own pleasure. But the pleasure is an immediate one, the pleasure of the particular thing one is doing—the pleasure of the shared activity, the pleasure of helping the friend when the friend is in need, the pleasure of seeing and hearing and interacting with the friend as they reciprocally do their part in the friendship. It is not only, and cannot be primarily, a pleasure to be obtained in the future (say, the pleasure got from the friend's later helping you out in some way); that would be an abuse, or would at the least tend to compromise the friendship. They are not using the friend for their benefit, when they engage with the friend in the common activities of friendship. They are seeking the friend's pleasure, as part of the objective of the activity itself that they are engaged in. They are seeking that pleasure for the sake of their own pleasure in seeking it, and in achieving it, insofar as they make friendship and its activities among their own favored variations on their *katastematic* pleasure. They

enjoy doing all the things that friendship demands, and consists of. That is, they enjoy seeing to their friend's pleasure, and they see to the friend's pleasure because they do enjoy doing so.

Is Cicero right, even on this better understanding of Epicurus's theories of pleasure and of friendship, that a relationship of Epicurean friendship is a perversion of true friendship, or a fraud, just because it and its constituent activities are entered into always for the sake of the agent's own pleasure as their ultimate end? I think this is very doubtful. The immediacy of the pleasures that are taken, in an Epicurean friendship, in the shared activities of the friends, including the concern of each for the pleasure of the other in their shared participation in them, makes a huge difference. Cicero thinks it is essential to true friendship to care for the other person for that other person's sake (and independently from any relationship to your own pleasure—out of “duty,” he says).<sup>54</sup> By that he understands that friends value their friend's good as an end in itself for them, a direct contribution to their own good, capable of motivating actions of friendship even in the absence of any relation to one's own pleasure. This understanding of friendship derives from, or, anyhow, is part of the Stoic and the Aristotelian conceptions, as developed on the basis of their own ethical theories. Plainly, Epicurus's ethical theory cannot support any such relationship.<sup>55</sup> But are we entitled to take it as a pretheoretical datum, a requirement that any acceptable theory of friendship must preserve, that friends love one another in that dutiful, “for their own sake” way? What if, with Epicurus, we do not love them and act on their behalf in that way, but only because we find it immediately pleasant to love them and act for their pleasure? On a different understanding from Cicero's of what could be meant by “for their own sake,” could it not be said that one does then love them and act on their behalf for their own sake, just because of this immediate pleasure taken in their pleasure? That is, one acts not, or not only, because of any longer term or future benefits in one's own later pleasures, but for the direct

<sup>54</sup>“Officium” is Cicero's word here for duty: see, e.g., *On Ends* II 81.

<sup>55</sup>In *Vatican Sayings* 23, in what seems certainly the correct Greek text, Epicurus does say that “[e]very friendship is worth choosing for its own sake (δι' ἑαυτῆν), though friendship has its origins in its benefits.” I take this to mean that true friends value both their friend and the activities constituting the friendship, each for its own sake. Understood Cicero's way, this manifestly contradicts Epicurus's fundamental theory of pleasure as the whole of the human good (everything else having only productive value in relation to that experience). This could be simply an intentionally provocative overstatement of Epicurus's actual view. But in what follows in my main text I suggest another way of understanding Epicurus's claim in *Vatican Sayings* 23 that friendships are worth choosing “for their own sake.”

and immediate pleasure one takes in loving them and in so acting. Perhaps that is, after all, enough to preserve whatever truth about friendship one may legitimately have had in mind, in laying down as a pretheoretical datum to govern all acceptable theories of friendship, that friends love and care for one another “for their friend’s own sake.” To seek a friend’s pleasure for the pleasure of doing so certainly does not seem damagingly self-seeking.

Epicurus emphasizes that for Epicureans friendship is a source of each person’s security. Indeed, as he puts it in *Principal Doctrines* 28, it is the easiest such source, living as we do among the bad things that can afflict any human life, and the danger of suffering them that arises from the malevolence of many other people. In this security he certainly includes protections of an ordinary sort: friends rely on one another to ward off physical dangers or threats and they help each other in need. But as we have seen, the mutual security of friendship consists more fundamentally in the assurance that living in close union with people who are one’s friends provides for the constant maintenance of one’s own kataschematic pleasure, suitably and interestingly varied day by day. Living among friends, one can be securely confident that one will be able readily to fill up one’s days with activities and pursuits of the very special degree of complex interest that friendship makes possible.

In addition, Epicurus strikingly declares friendship “an immortal good,” in comparison with wisdom (*σοφία*), the knowledge and understanding of human nature and the human good that is the goal of philosophy. Wisdom, he says, is only a mortal good.<sup>56</sup> That friendship is an immortal good must mean, for Epicurus, that it is through our friends’ fond memories of us and of our good times together, and their continuing love for us after our deaths, that we obtain immortality (insofar as human beings can be immortal at all). To the extent that people like to think they are immortal, then, it is friendship, and only friendship, that can give us what we want, in an Epicurean world. It is in this way, as a reference to friendship and its benefits, that we should presumably understand the closing words of Epicurus’s *Letter to Menoeceus*:

Practice these precepts, and ones related to them, day and night, by yourself and with a like-minded friend, and you will never feel troubled either when awake or when asleep. You will live among human beings as a god: a human being living surrounded by immortal goods is in no way like a mortal animal.

<sup>56</sup>*Vatican Sayings* 78.

#### 5.4. The Epicurean Life: Concluding Summary

Let us, then, draw together the threads of the Epicurean way of life that we have been sorting through in the previous two sections. Epicureans live convinced of the truth of Epicurus's theory of nature, which makes physical reality all the reality there is. All that is real is ultimately made up exclusively of material atoms moving in an infinite void, by chance at some places and times forming worlds, such as our own. Epicurus made major points in this theory available for memorization in his published *Letter to Herodotus*, a pupil. Having memorized these major points, one could readily call them to mind, thereby renewing one's convinced belief in their truth, in case something might happen to make one waver, and thus threaten one's steady and pleasure-filled state of mind by some foreboding or worry about nature's operations. In particular, this theory makes it completely clear that, though gods do exist, they do not and cannot affect human life, or the world and its operations, in any way, through any actions of their own. Their own long-lasting lives of supreme katastematic bliss, effortlessly and beautifully varied in their communal activities, make them paragons and paradigms of that immortal blessedness that we ourselves attain through the immortal good of friendship. Except in that way, that is, as models of long-lasting and continuous happiness for us to aspire to, the gods play, and can play, no role in our lives—unless, that is, we are foolish or deluded enough to imagine one for them to play, as many people, including philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics do. Likewise, Epicurus's theory of nature shows that our physical deaths are the permanent end to our consciousness, and so to our very existence, as agents and seekers of happiness.

Holding firmly to a convinced belief in these truths, Epicureans concentrate the whole of their attention on the here and now, seeking to live their lives by following Epicurus's ethical precepts as outlined in the *Letter to Menoeceus*, and in the *Principal Doctrines* and other collections of maxims. These collections too are ready for memorization, and for subsequent use in the same way as the *Letters*. They are a handy resource for renewing or strengthening one's ethical beliefs in case something arises that might threaten one's equanimity. Epicureans know that pleasure is the sole thing good in itself, or think they do, because this is something, as Epicurus has taught, that they can directly feel, and therefore know, every time they experience pleasure, if only they will strip away, and keep at bay, contrary beliefs belonging to the surrounding culture. They also accept, as an item of firm belief, that their greatest pleasure is a feeling given by

the steady experience of a healthy and normal state of self-consciousness, to the achievement and maintenance of which they bend their efforts. They experience this as living, waking, agents in touch with the world around them, with which they interact, as it presents itself to them through the use of their senses. They make it their highest and constant objective in life to attain and then sustain in existence that state of pleasurable self-consciousness. They know that all this knowledge, just summarized, is the result of philosophical investigations conducted by Epicurus, handed on to them for their benefit, and they honor him for it in special memorial observances. Leaving aside for the moment (I return to it below) the question whether they have engaged to any significant extent in philosophical study themselves in order to acquire it for themselves, they possess this knowledge in such a way as to have transformed their own motivations and desires so that those are in full conformance with it. It is held in their minds as practical knowledge, knowledge of value, embedded in their desires and directed at the management of their lives. It is not theoretical knowledge about value.

This practical wisdom, governing their lives, leads them to keep away from the competitive life of politics or indeed any life of competition with others, in which, whether by winning or losing, they will become so distressed that katas-tematic pleasure will either never be attained or will be lost. They retreat from the big world, if possible into a small one of their own construction as a bulwark for their pursuit of pleasure, accompanied by like-minded friends and family. There they exercise a virtuous concern for the well-being of others, and exercise (an Epicurean version of) the virtues of temperance and courage and justice (and honesty and due compassion, and sociability, and all the rest of the virtues philosophers such as Aristotle or the Stoics recognize). These virtues, especially justice, control also their interactions with people outside their own circle. They firmly believe that nothing good for themselves can be gained by contravening the rules of justice, or the principles of any other of the standard virtues. In fact, they think, their own good (the final good consisting in their continued katas-tematic pleasure) is, and can only be, served by observing them.

Thus the virtues are for Epicureans, among other things, a form of self-protection from outside interference. In fact, however, though we have no evidence that Epicurus or other Epicureans after him developed this as an articulated doctrine, it seems quite clear that the virtues, and their exercise in individual actions, should be regarded by those leading the Epicurean life as among their favorite

ways of varying their katastematic pleasure—just as we saw that the activities constituting their friendships become for them, as well.<sup>57</sup> This applies most notably within their inner circle, but also outside it, in their interactions with people in the big world. They come to enjoy acts of justice, or acts of temperate management of their diets, or honest speaking, or courageous defense of their property and of their own practical principles, or other actions of Epicurean virtue. These they regard as interesting activities involving their own special complexities, and involving intricacies of thought and feeling (i.e., certain special intricate movements of the mind or soul). In this way Epicureans can rebuff critics like Cicero, who say that Epicurus makes virtues handmaidens of pleasure, and that, as a result, on Epicurus's views the virtues become things of no intrinsic value, mere neutral tools for self-aggrandizement.<sup>58</sup> Instead, handmaidens though they are, the virtues and their practical expression in action are valued, as the Epicurean can say, as I suggested above, in themselves, or for their own sake—that is, insofar as they are immediately pleasant. It remains true, of course, that an Epicurean cannot value just action, say, as a good in itself in some other way, without reference to pleasure, as the Stoics and Aristotle can and do. But, as I said above concerning friendship, it is not so clear that pretheoretical experience or opinion validly requires acceptable ethical theories to make room for that way of valuing virtuous action.<sup>59</sup> This Epicurean way of valuing it may make their theory a distinct and legitimate contender among theories of virtue, and of its proper role in our lives. It may be that Cicero and others would refuse to be mollified in their insistence that no theory of virtue can begin to be acceptable that did not value virtuous action for its own sake in the stronger interpretation of what that requires. But it is not clear that they would be on strong ground in doing so.

It is very clear that the life I have described was, and was conceived by Epicureans as they led it as, a philosophical way of life. It was grounded in a distinctive

<sup>57</sup> Cicero unwittingly leaves us a hint in this direction. In *On Ends* I 25 he reports that what most has turned large numbers of uneducated, ordinary people into Epicureans is their belief that Epicurus “said that . . . pleasure consists in performing right and moral actions for their own sake.” Cicero is contemptuous of the idea that Epicurus did say such a thing: but if one understands “acting virtuously for its own sake” as acting that way for the immediate pleasure of doing so, then the ordinary people Cicero looks down on were not off base at all in finding Epicureanism attractive in the way Cicero says they did.

<sup>58</sup> See *On Ends* II 69.

<sup>59</sup> Epicurus is quoted by Athenaeus (end of the second century CE) in his *Learned Banquet* (*Δειπνοσοφισταί*) XII 547a, as saying, “I spit upon the fine and those who emptily admire it, whenever it brings no pleasure.” Thus he spits on Stoics and Aristotle, as well as on their puffed-up conception of the value of virtuous action, and on actions done on the basis of that conception.

set of tenets of philosophical theory. Its ultimate psychological motivation was provided through the knowledge of (i.e., the firm belief its adherents gave to) Epicurus's theory of the human good that constituted their practical wisdom, lodged firmly in their philosophically informed minds. Epicureanism's radical departures from typical ancient attitudes and ways of conducting oneself in life (and from our contemporary ones perhaps even more) are a clear mark—perhaps the clearest we have—of how philosophy in antiquity could transform people's lives. But was there a place in the Epicurean way of life, as there was in the Socratic, Aristotelian, and Stoic lives (and, as we will see in the next chapter, the Platonist one), for philosophical argument and theorizing, of one's own, as a necessary part of it? Two questions here must be recognized and distinguished. First, do those who successfully lead the Epicurean life have to have studied, at some point, presumably in early maturity, Epicurus's philosophy so thoroughly that they understand for themselves, in terms of Epicurus's own or other similarly fundamental arguments that allegedly establish them as true, the major tenets of the Epicurean worldview and Epicurean ethical doctrines? Must one leading this life successfully do so on the basis of a personal conviction, based in deeply grounded philosophical reasons grasped fully by oneself, both that and why the Epicurean life is the best way of life? Second, does this way of life require as a necessary component philosophical discussion or other regular activity as a practicing philosopher?

We do not find clear statements addressing either of these questions in any of our sources for Epicureanism. However, as to the first question, Epicurus's naturalized conception of reason and knowledge makes it doubtful that for him the best way of life requires having studied philosophy to the point of learning thoroughly, not only the central practical tenets of the school, but also, and in real critical depth, the reasons on which their (alleged) truth rests. For Epicurus, as I have said, all knowledge, including philosophical, is arrived at through a very conservative extension beyond sensory experience, with the results retained in memory; and, of course, for Epicurus, there is no value in any exercise of reason except for the pleasure that one attains in or by it. A deeper understanding is no better than a weaker or less extensive one, provided both support a pleasant life. To know the truths of Epicurean theory requires (on Epicurus's own theory of knowledge) that one believes them, and does so with a psychological firmness that allows one regularly and reliably to retain them in mind, as needed, so as to apply them in action, in accordance with the circumstances of action on particu-

lar occasions. But this, in turn, requires only a felt commitment, a feeling of conviction sufficient to fend off doubts or other disturbances to one's katastematic pleasure. This might, but need not, depend upon, and derive from, an exploration and acceptance of the reasons that Epicurus advances for their truth. Psychologically, such conviction could rest on no more than a habituated feeling of their truth. That is why Epicurus, as I mentioned, provides his summaries of the doctrines, and emphasizes so much the importance of memorizing them. He does not believe human reason is a faculty of divine provenance, providing insight into the structure of the world or into human nature and the human good. In order to function adequately in directing a human being's life, there is no requirement that it do so on the basis of knowledge of the reasons why the truths about pleasure and virtue and the other matters that are crucial, according to his analysis, for a well-lived human life, are *truths*. Memory of them, and a solid feeling of conviction of their truth, is enough. That is all, as it turns out, that Epicurean practical wisdom, as "that from which all the other virtues grow," need amount to.<sup>60</sup>

Accordingly, the emphasis placed in Stoic theory on achieving and retaining a grasp on the chains of reasoning, and a fully critical grasp of alternative lines of thought, backing one's philosophical conclusions in ethics, seems not to be part of the Epicurean conception. There is no special value in reason or reasoning in itself, as for the Stoics, to be realized in this way. So long as one knows, that is, firmly believes the bottom-line Epicurean tenets about the human good and how to achieve it—a psychological state of mental commitment to using the information contained, where relevant—and so long as one has a strong grasp in memory on them, one is as equipped to live the Epicurean life to perfection as anyone needs to be. This is why the Epicurean movement was so open to people of little or no education. It did not require a lot of study or learning to be a good Epicurean.

Hence, a fortiori, there is no room in the Epicurean life for that constant ethical inquiry that for Socrates placed philosophical discussion and argument and analysis at the very center of the best life. Obviously also, there is no special place provided in the Epicurean life for Aristotelian theoretical investigations for their own sake: people who have a special liking for that sort of thing are invited to make it prominent among the ways they vary their katastematic pleasure, but

<sup>60</sup>For the quote see *Letter to Menoeceus* 132.

that is entirely an optional matter.<sup>61</sup> The Epicurean life can be led perfectly well and happily without it. Nor is there room for philosophizing in the manner of Aristotle's second-best life, in which, as we saw, the exercise of the practical virtues is in itself a kind of philosophical thinking. Moreover, the Epicurean life does not require constant or regular activities of philosophical argument and discussion even in the way we saw in the Stoic life, where the knowledge needed to live the Stoics' way needs constantly to be renewed through exercise in philosophical discussion.

If this analysis is correct, it seems that the Epicurean life, however much grounded in the results of philosophical analysis and argument, and however much the psychological motivation provided by firm belief in these results steers Epicureans in living their life, that life cannot be said to involve, in any essential way, the practice of philosophy, that is, of philosophical reflection, analysis, discussion, and argument. When Epicurus says in an often-quoted *Vatican Saying* that "[o]ne must philosophize and at the same time laugh and take care of one's household and engage in the rest of one's personal functions, and never stop proclaiming the utterances of correct philosophy,"<sup>62</sup> the philosophizing he has in mind consists simply in making evident in one's own happy life the truth of the tenets of Epicurean philosophy, on the basis of which one is living it—whether with a philosophically reasoned understanding, or merely a convinced and ready memory, of these tenets.

### 5.5. Ancient Skepticism: Living without Believing Anything

Nowadays, philosophical skepticism functions primarily, or even solely, as a force in epistemology—as indeed it has done ever since the Renaissance. The central question for skeptics today is, what are the legitimate requirements one must satisfy in order actually to know something? Skeptics doubt that any human being ever does satisfy these requirements, whatever exactly they are. They doubt, on principle, whether we actually do know anything. They may even hold the philosophical position that, because of certain specifiable features of our situation in confronting the presumed external world, knowledge is actually unattainable—that is, unattainable by human beings. (God's knowledge is another

<sup>61</sup> See *Vatican Sayings* 27.

<sup>62</sup> *Vatican Sayings* 41. Translation adapted from Inwood and Gerson.

matter.) That is how Descartes, at the beginning of the modern tradition in philosophy, conceived the skeptic. He used skepticism, so conceived, as a foil for use in his own ambition to establish philosophy on a new, post-Aristotelian and post-medieval—and unassailably sound—foundation of basic knowledge. This was knowledge of our own individual existences as inquiring minds. Descartes thought that, with this foundation in place, we could establish on its basis much wider claims to knowledge, as well, through modern, mathematical-scientific investigations, when rigorously carried out. Specialists in early modern philosophy are well aware that Descartes, and other early modern philosophers who discussed skepticism, did so primarily on the basis of two ancient skeptics' writings, Cicero's and Sextus Empiricus's. These specialists also read other ancient writers, besides these two, who were familiar with skepticism in antiquity. It must nonetheless come as a shock to most contemporary philosophers when they first realize that our richest source for ancient skepticism, Sextus Empiricus, presents it as primarily a set of ideas about how to live one's life, not about epistemological theory.<sup>63</sup> This is not something one would be likely to know simply from early modern and later presentations of skepticism. Yet it is a fundamental fact about ancient skepticism as a philosophy that it presented itself in the guise of a way of life. Much of its philosophical interest and value are lost if it is too readily assimilated to its early modern and later descendants.

The skeptical philosophy, for Sextus, like all the other main schools of philosophy at his time (last half of the second century CE), aims at helping people to achieve the ethical "end" for human beings. This, he thinks (in a special, skeptical way about which I will say more below), is a life completely free from any but naturally arising and inevitable disturbances—a life of serene acceptance and tranquility (*ἀταραξία*), as one makes one's way through one's daily rounds, as well as through any crises that might arise.<sup>64</sup> In taking the "end" that makes possible a good and happy human life to be tranquility—total absence of (avoidable) disturbance—Sextus allies his skepticism most closely to Epicureanism, among the

<sup>63</sup> See *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (also sometimes called *Pyrrhonian Sketches*) I 25–30 (with 21–24); the best translation is that of Annas and Barnes, using the title *Outlines of Scepticism*. The *Outlines* (in three books) provides a comprehensive and detailed account of ancient skepticism. In quoting it I follow Annas and Barnes's translation, but with alterations (not always explicitly noted). On Cicero's *Academica*, his account of skepticism, see below, note 72. I focus my discussion of ancient skepticism and skepticism as a way of life, in this and the next two sections, on Sextus's presentation. For reasons explained below, I leave aside the other principal ancient representatives of skepticism, the Academics of the third to first centuries BCE.

<sup>64</sup> For discussion of the "end" skeptics set themselves and for textual references, see endnote 31.

nonskeptical, “dogmatic” philosophies of antiquity. Epicureans, too, place a lot of emphasis, as we have seen, on keeping away so far as possible from disturbances of one’s equanimity. But for the Epicureans that tranquility is merely the fundamental means for attaining happiness: happiness is the pleasure that results. For Sextus, tranquility itself is the end. As we will see, for Sextus the means to that end include adopting a special understanding of philosophy itself, and special techniques of philosophical argument. This understanding and these techniques assure the skeptics who possess them, Sextus claims, of achieving, and securely retaining their grip on, this ethical end. He also thinks application of these skeptical techniques of argumentation can raise very serious doubts about the correctness of the ends proposed by all the other ancient schools of philosophy, doubts that the members of those schools must, by their own standards for what legitimately casts doubt, take very seriously—with disturbing effect. By contrast, the skeptics’ way of accepting tranquility as their end leaves immune to doubt both it, as the correct end, and one’s own achievement of it through the skeptical philosophy.

Thus the epistemological issue of the possibility of knowledge, and the skeptic stance in relation to this issue, are, for Sextus, a secondary matter: doubts about knowledge (or even, more radically, about the mere truth of any assertion) are only a means to achieving the ethical end. The good and happy life that skepticism makes possible is indeed one led without claims to know anything—in particular, to know what is good and bad, in general, or to know that the way one is living really is the best one, the most suitable or proper one for a human being to aim at living. In Sextus’s philosophy, the skeptics do have doubts about knowledge (of a certain rather delicate kind, as we shall see), and, in fact, they doubt the propriety of claiming even that any of anyone’s beliefs are true. They live their lives, or so they say, without so much as believing anything at all, however mundane and apparently obvious.<sup>65</sup> But they live contentedly with their doubts

<sup>65</sup>Below, in section 5.7, I explain why it would be entirely appropriate, despite this denial, to say that the skeptic has (and lives according to) beliefs—in one way that ordinary language in both English and Greek makes available to us of using the terms “belief” and “opinion.” As I will explain more fully below, what the skeptic eschews is holding any view about anything whatsoever, however recondite, scientific, or philosophical, or straightforward and apparently obvious, in such a way as to rest your view on, or in any way open yourself to giving, *reasons* why your view is correct, or why others should accept it too. You don’t even think, when you can see with your very eyes that it is now nighttime, that your seeing what you see is any reason for holding that that is so; nonetheless, when you do see what you see, if you are a skeptic, you not only can but you do hold the view that it is nighttime: that shows in how you then behave. You believe (in this distinctive, nonreasoning way) that it is nighttime, and act accordingly.

about whether anything is true, and with their total lack of beliefs (at any rate, on standard philosophical accounts of what a belief is, as I will explain below); indeed, they say, they live on the very basis of that lack. Our next task, then, in this and the next two sections, is to examine the skeptics' version of living one's philosophy and of philosophy as a way of life.

Before we begin, we need to place Sextus's skepticism and his skeptic way of life briefly in the larger context of skeptical thinking in Greece, which had roots going back as far as Socrates, and, in some ways, further back even than that. Sextus speaks of his own philosophy simply as that of skepticism, without a qualifier.<sup>66</sup> But he is classed nowadays, as indeed he was already in later antiquity, as a "Pyrrhonian" skeptic.<sup>67</sup> This classification is intended to distinguish him from the earlier movement of "Academic" skepticism, so called because it developed in Plato's Academy, beginning with Arcesilaus in the third century BCE. Arcesilaus was an older contemporary of Chrysippus who engaged extensively in critical, and negative, examination of the Stoics' doctrines in all parts of philosophy.<sup>68</sup> Pyrrho, for whom Pyrrhonian skepticism is named, is a shadowy figure, active in mainland Greece (at Elis, near Corinth) during the forty years or so following Aristotle's death. This was the period when Zeno the Stoic and Epicurus founded their schools in Athens. Pyrrho left no writings of his own, but his legend was promoted in the extensive writings of a follower called Timon. It was through the work of an Academic philosopher named Aenesidemus, active at Athens and later at Alexandria in the mid-first century BCE, that Pyrrho's name became associated with skepticism as a philosophy.<sup>69</sup> Aenesidemus appears to have ap-

<sup>66</sup>For some details about Sextus's life and work, see endnote 32.

<sup>67</sup>Sextus himself accepts the propriety of the name "Pyrrhonian" for his type of philosophy (see *Outlines* I 11, and his occasional use thereafter of "the Pyrrhonian philosopher" in reference to the skeptic). But that is only because, as he says, Pyrrho (on whom see further below in my main text) "appears to us to have attached himself to Scepticism more substantially and conspicuously than anyone before him" (I 7, trans. Annas and Barnes, with one change). Thus, Sextus does not link his own philosophical views or practices to any "doctrinal" inheritance from Pyrrho; Pyrrho is a retrospective, honorary figurehead for the "school," quite different from Plato in relation to later Platonists, or Aristotle to the Peripatetics, or Zeno and Chrysippus to the Stoics.

<sup>68</sup>Sextus rejects the claim of Academic "skeptics" to be true skeptics. See endnote 33.

<sup>69</sup>My authority here is Aristocles of Messene, the first or second century CE Peripatetic author of a large work, *On Philosophy*, which seems to have been a comprehensive, critical history. Aristocles is reported to have said that it was Aenesidemus who "revived" Pyrrhonian skepticism, after it lapsed upon Timon's death. His authority is more highly regarded by scholars than whatever authority Diog. Laert. may have had for his contradictory claim (IX 115) that Ptolemy of Cyrene had already revived it half a century earlier.

pealed to Pyrrho, through his legend, as a suitably “ancient” sponsor—a contemporary of Zeno and Epicurus, founders of rival Hellenistic schools—for Aenesidemus’s own philosophical views and practices.<sup>70</sup>

As this historical sketch indicates, it was, in fact, to Aenesidemus that the skepticism of Sextus and his contemporaries looked back for their most fundamental ideas and, in particular, for their technique of using philosophical argument in supporting a skeptical way of life. Aenesidemus started, as I just said, as an Academic philosopher, but he became disillusioned with both of the opposed ways that his elders in the Academy had come to interpret their Academic heritage. These elders were his principal teacher, Philo of Larissa, but also a well-known rival of Philo’s named Antiochus, of Ascalon.<sup>71</sup> Everyone in authority in and around the Academy, Aenesidemus thought, had lost the philosophical insights, and abandoned the skeptical philosophical practices of their predecessors of the previous two centuries, the “Academic skeptics.” Philo had even begun to deny that any of his Academic predecessors ever had these insights and practices in the first place! Philo argued (to us, somewhat obscurely) for acceptance of the possibility, and even the actuality, of human knowledge, as something essential to the whole prior Academic tradition, stretching back to Plato. Antiochus, while accepting the skeptical character of the Academy after Arcesilaus, repudiated it, in favor of returning to the positive doctrinal stance that he attributed (as we usually do too) to Plato (in his works other than the Socratic dialogues), to Aristotle, and to their immediate successors down to Arcesilaus. Under these circumstances, committed skeptic that he was, Aenesidemus understandably came to feel no longer at home in the Academy.

The earlier Academic skeptics, beginning with Arcesilaus, and including most notably Carneades in the second century BCE, had insisted on a philosophically reserved, always questioning, way of doing philosophy: they never asserted, much less pontificatingly set forward, philosophical doctrines of their own. They limited themselves to critically examining the views of their contemporary Stoic

<sup>70</sup>It is a typical feature of ancient thought, especially prominent in later ancient times, to look back, for authorization of one’s own views, to some famous ancient thinker: the more ancient the better, since then the closer one could claim to come to acquaintance with the original and divine truth of things, known by some or other wise persons of old and passed on somehow to these famous “ancient” intermediaries (on this original truth see below, section 6.1). Diogenes Laertius’s *Lives* is organized on a system of pedigrees starting in as ancient times as can be decently managed, given various bits of sometimes hearsay evidence, for each of several general “schools” of philosophical thought—pre-Socratic, post-Socratic, and Hellenistic.

<sup>71</sup>Cicero heard Philo’s lectures on Academic skepticism as a young man, in Rome in 88/87 BCE. He later also heard lectures of Antiochus, at Athens (79–77).

and Epicurean rivals (and, of course, to finding them unsatisfactory, in terms of the standards and principles for satisfactoriness prevailing among these other philosophers)—very much as Socrates had done with the fifth century Sophists and other claimants to wisdom of his own time.<sup>72</sup> It seemed to Aenesidemus that, under Philo and Antiochus, Academic philosophers were, as he put it, in their different ways, just “Stoics fighting with Stoics.”<sup>73</sup> He wished to return to the reserved, skeptical way of doing philosophy that he thought Arcesilaus and Carneades had practiced (though now Philo was denying that they had). So he decamped and established his own school, no longer under the banner of these famous Academics, or of Socrates or Plato, but of Pyrrho. Nevertheless, it seems, in fact he embarked simply upon a continuation of Academic skepticism, but now under this different name. There is, however, one important difference between Academic skepticism as it had existed in the third and second centuries BCE, and the Pyrrhonian skepticism introduced by Aenesidemus. We have no evidence linking the skepticism of Academics such as Arcesilaus, Carneades, and Philo with the promotion of any particular total way of life. We do not hear of any of these philosophers proposing the idea of living one’s philosophy, in the way we have seen Socrates did, or that Aristotle and the third and second century Stoics did—not even in some less assertive and more circumspect way.<sup>74</sup> When, by contrast, Sextus not only presents as an essential component of the skeptical tradition that he codifies, but sets at its center, this “ethical” concern, we are entitled to regard this feature of his skepticism as an innovation of Aenesidemus’s.<sup>75</sup> The skeptical philosophy as a way of life was Aenesidemus’s invention.

<sup>72</sup>The most accessible, and the best, source for the Academic skepticism of Arcesilaus and Carneades, down to the time of Aenesidemus’s teacher Philo, including Antiochus’ revolt, is found in Cicero’s *Academica* of 45 BCE. The best translation is by Brittain, *Cicero on Academic Scepticism*. For more on Antiochus, see also Cicero, *On Ends* V.

<sup>73</sup>Aenesidemus’s principal work, in eight books, titled *Pyrrhonian Discourses*, is lost, but there is a very interesting summary of it by Photius, a ninth century Byzantine Patriarch of Constantinople, from which this quote is taken. See Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 71C, 72L.

<sup>74</sup>Of course, the Academics were serious about their philosophical work, and were not just playing argumentative games. They certainly expected anyone who listened similarly seriously to them, not to accept the prescriptions for life of any of what they called the “dogmatic” philosophers. This was the skeptics’ label for philosophers who thought they could establish, however open-mindedly and even tentatively, solidly grounded knowledge of their own specific philosophical first principles, and of the deductive consequences of these as to how to live. But we have no evidence that the Academics formulated an alternative skeptic way of life, or tried self-consciously to lead one themselves.

<sup>75</sup>Or perhaps it is due already to Pyrrho? We cannot rule that out; and indeed reports reaching us of Pyrrho’s life do emphasize his living his “philosophy” (such as it may have been). But see Diog. Laert. IX 62, where Aenesidemus is cited as denying that Pyrrho lived in the way his philosophy implied he should.

## 5.6. The Pyrrhonian Skepticism of Sextus Empiricus

Let us set aside these questions of historical context, and turn now to discuss Sextus's philosophy, as he presents it in his *Outlines*. Sextus tells us that the "causal origin" of skepticism as a philosophy, and as an intellectual skill, lay in the anxiety caused in certain smart and energetic people's minds by what he calls "the anomaly in things."<sup>76</sup> (Dumb or lazy people do not bother about such things, apparently.) All kinds of things that we have to deal with in life have conflicting aspects (hence the anomaly Sextus refers to). Under some circumstances, one would ordinarily think of these things in one way, but in others in another. A tower viewed from a distance, to take one of Sextus's favorite examples, may look round, but look flat-sided from close at hand.<sup>77</sup> Well, which is it? Round or flat-sided? In ordinary life (and so, for dumb or lazy people) it might not seem to matter: mostly, at any rate, when we deal with towers it is from up close, and then we can treat them (successfully enough) as flat-sided, if that is how they look then. Generally speaking, we need not worry about their different look from afar, because mostly we do not do anything with towers from that distance. Or, if ever we do interact with a tower from a distance, we can learn pragmatically (or be told by others) how things will go when we do—so far as our interests, then and later, are concerned. We can take it to be flat-sided, even when viewed from a distance, or just not care about how it actually is, so long as, when we follow our pragmatic expectations, things go well. All we need to know is how to deal with it, whether at a distance or up close, so that our interests are satisfied. Anyhow, if, as a result of inexperience with distant towers, we mess things up, how important is that likely to be? That is no doubt how dumb or lazy

<sup>76</sup>Or rather, he places the origin in the desire or hope of getting rid of the anxiety. From this hope the practices and principles of skepticism arose. They are means of achieving that goal of ridding oneself of this anxiety; see *Outlines* I 12. It is in this way that the "end" or "goal" for a skeptic, in living a skeptic life, comes to be tranquility—freedom from this disturbance (and, in fact, from other disturbances too, since once this one goes away, others can be avoided). My description of these predecessors as "smart and energetic" glosses Sextus's own description of them as *μεγαλοφύεις* (lit. "great-natured"), rendered by Annas and Barnes rather blandly by "men of talent." I should add that when Sextus refers to the origins of skepticism, he probably intends to speak also of how others than the original skeptics, in fact skeptics in general, come to be skeptics. They too began with worries about anomalies, undertook to investigate in a positive philosophical spirit how things actually stand, one way or the other, and then found the sought-for tranquility through the unexpected means of suspension. But in my main text I follow Sextus's lead in speaking about how the skeptic system got established in the first place, as something then for later worriers to avail themselves of.

<sup>77</sup>See *Outlines* I 32, 118; II 55.

people might react to such anomalies. They would, in effect, just shrug if someone pointed these anomalies out.

But Sextus's original skeptic predecessors, being smart and energetic, did not just shrug and try to do their best to muddle through somehow. They felt it to be important which way the tower is in its own self, in its nature: it must be because of how it is, they thought, that it is experienced in those anomalous ways. What reasons do we have, or could we develop, if we thought about our experiences (which are initially all we have to go on), for holding it to be in itself the one way or the other? What is *it*, that it has these two appearances? And how, on the basis of how it actually is, can one then understand that, and why—for what reasons—it does have both? Only by knowing those things, they felt, could one proceed with confidence to deal with the tower, whether from afar or up close. If one is smart and energetic, one sees (or, not to prejudge, thinks) that it is important what the tower is in itself, in its nature, since (it must surely seem, they thought) it is that nature that grounds its behavior in relation to our own apprehension of it through the use of our senses.

Of more fundamental importance, of course, than these anomalies in the physical properties of objects, are questions about what is of value in and for human life. What is good for us, and what is bad? What really matters if it happens to us, or if it does not? Here too there are anomalies: things have conflicting aspects, being or seeming good in one way, but bad in some other. Sextus's smart and energetic people were made even more anxious by these anomalies concerning whether something is good or bad, or in general of positive or negative value, for human life, than they were by those presented by towers, and other similarly "factual" anomalies, as one could classify them—the famous straight stick under water, where it appears bent, to mention another well-worn ancient skeptics' example. When something has conflicting value aspects, or "appearances," which is the more important or authoritative under the given circumstances? What, overall, is the correct thing to say—what is there the best reason to say—about whether it (the thing) is good or bad (then or ever)? If something is quite pleasant, but harms our health, what is one to say about it? How is it right to treat it? Why is that the right way? People may say, well, unless it's very pleasant, leave it alone—or if your health won't suffer greatly, then go ahead. But how does one decide what's pleasant enough, or what's a small enough bad effect on the health? Only, it can seem, if we know the answers to these questions can we proceed with confidence to make our decisions, and conduct our lives. At any rate, that is how

it seemed to Sextus's smart and energetic persons. They wanted to lead their lives in what they thought a responsible way, with due application and individual attention to all the practical problems that face us, and they wanted to be able, so far as that might be possible, to understand the *reasons* why what was right or best was indeed right or best. A self-respecting person, it seemed to them, could do no less. So they suffered anxiety. Until they could resolve the anomalies about values, by figuring out what the truth is in each case (Is it really good? Is that its nature? How good is it?), by working out a satisfactory account of the relevant reasons that support the claim to truth, they could not live responsibly and securely.

Now, it is philosophers who take it upon themselves to investigate and develop answers to such questions as these. They are the ones who profess to know how to investigate the natures of things and how to resolve these questions in terms of reasoned-out theories of how things are. Indeed, it is presumably they who introduced into human life for the first time the very idea of there being a nature of things underlying how things appear to us in practical life, or at any rate to have developed the idea of a disciplined use of reasoning to figure out what does belong to things by their natures. This means that, in beginning by experiencing anxiety at the anomalies in things, an anxiety caused by worrying over why (for what reasons) things appeared so anomalously, Sextus's proto-skeptics were already bitten by, or had bitten themselves with, the philosophy bug. They were not willing to deal merely pragmatically with these anomalies, as of course dumb or ordinary people somehow manage to do. They were not willing just to muddle through however, in ordinary life, people manage to do that. They accepted the distinction—we will see later that Sextus thinks this was the highly questionable root of all their troubles—between appearance and reality, that is, reality in the nature of things, that philosophers had articulated, and insisted upon. They wanted to know the answer, in each case, as to which of the conflicting sides of any such anomaly (if either) is the *true* one, and which the only apparent—whether this was a question of pressing practical concern, or only something quite remote from daily life, but nonetheless beset by anomalous appearances. How does sweat get onto the skin when it is hot? Does it come through the skin? How? Or does it precipitate from the surrounding wet air? Here too appearances seem to point in different directions. But it has to be some one way or another! About all such questions, of course, dumb or lazy people simply shrug: since the possible answers do not matter to our lives, or seem, at least, not to matter, such people simply pay them no attention; no pragmatic

response is called for. Not so for our proto-skeptics! They wanted to know how the truth gave rise to, and otherwise related to, the appearances: what are the reasons, in the natures of things, for these anomalies? They felt the need to know the answers, because otherwise they felt they could not proceed with adequate confidence in the conduct of their daily lives, or rid themselves of worries concerning such matters as how sweat gets onto skin. So they sought, from philosophy, a means of ridding themselves of their anxiety, and so of making possible an anxiety-free, unperturbed life, in which, by knowing the answers, they could rely on themselves to deal correctly in making their decisions and choices, and leading their lives, and could feel satisfied about the other, more remote, matters of fact and theory that attracted their notice.

Thus the goal for Sextus's proto-skeptics became to obtain tranquility through philosophy—that is, through positive philosophy, as one could put it. Positive philosophy provides definite answers, one way or the other, through a devoted and critically self-conscious use of our native rational powers, to all the questions that arise when one begins to worry about anomalies, whether ones with practical effects on life or ones bearing solely on more purely theoretical questions, and when one seeks to understand how appearance and reality work together to constitute our world. Once, through such a critically self-conscious—philosophical—use of reason, they had achieved the answers they were seeking, they could then proceed with their lives with confidence, or could live them so for the first time, and without these perturbing worries over what the natures of things they have to deal with in daily life actually are, or those other perturbing worries concerning matters of theory. So, these proto-skeptics undertook philosophical studies, by engaging with the arguments and theories given in the various schools of positive philosophy: Platonic, Aristotelian, Epicurean, Stoic, and any others they might find. These schools' views, or some revision of one or more of them produced by their own positive philosophical reasoning, they hoped, would lead them to their goal of tranquility. They embraced critical, philosophical reason, and accepted its authority, as a means to their own salvation.

Philosophers, of course, notoriously disagree with one another about just about everything, and that was true in antiquity too, as these original Pyrrhonian skeptics soon discovered. One group said pleasure was our highest good, others that it was virtue; one said reality was atoms and void and nothing else, others that nothing is real but intelligible and bodiless Forms, others that reality is the creation of god's mind, which is itself a body acting on preexisting matter. Starting from their different sets of ethical or metaphysical starting points, they

also gave divergent answers to virtually every question about which our proto-skeptics were worried. Moreover, by the principles and standards these philosophers had worked up for deciding the correct answer when we attempt to use our minds to discover the truth about how the world itself, and human values are, in the nature of things, it seemed that all these theories had good arguments for them—but also good ones against them, too. (After all, different philosophical schools, using their common tool of disciplined reasoning, reached incompatible conclusions.) And where the ancient schools of positive philosophy might agree, still, it seemed to these proto-skeptics, philosophical reason, better prepared in accordance with the self-developed standards of positive philosophizing, might well show that one could not say with the full support of critical reason that things are, in their natures, as these positive philosophers might wish to say, on their own positive theories, as they had so far worked them out. There always remains, it seemed to them, something countervailing on the other side of any and every question investigated by philosophers, if you are as inventive as possible in your philosophically disciplined inquiries.

Thus these proto-skeptics developed what Sextus describes as the specific skill of the full-blown skeptic. This the Pyrrhonian skeptics conceived as the highest development, indeed the perfection, of the power of self-consciously critical, philosophical, reasoning. It is skill in being able always to find an opposition, of appearance to appearance, or philosophical thought to appearance, or one philosophical thought to another philosophical thought, of such a sort as to cause any rationally well-prepared mind, committed to following reason wherever it leads, to withhold a final judgment (to “suspend,” as they said) on any question of philosophical theory.<sup>78</sup> Hence, having discovered this skill, the proto-skeptics themselves neither affirmed nor denied anything, on whatever the matter under investigation and inquiry might be. They recommended this “suspension” also to any positive philosophers they may have been conducting their inquiry with and questioning them about their school’s views. That is what, as it seemed to them, philosophical, critically self-conscious reason itself, the pride of all positive philosophers, demands.<sup>79</sup> Thus, having begun their study of philosophy in order to

<sup>78</sup>For more on this special skill and the “modes” of skepticism, see endnote 34.

<sup>79</sup>Since the skeptic’s method is intended for use on all and sundry who are given to holding opinions and making definite assertions about how things actually are, holding them for reasons that they think support the claim that their opinions are true, whether they are philosophers or not (see below), Sextus explains (see *Outlines* III 280–81) that it includes the flexibility needed to lead someone to suspend even by presenting weak, or indeed fallacious, arguments on one or the other side. Whatever might work with

relieve their anxiety, by arriving at definite answers to their questions about reality and appearances, they found themselves frustrated at every turn. Time after time, and without exception, they kept finding that, on any issue that they investigated in their search, reason itself, employed in accordance with the principles and standards for reasoning that the positive philosophers themselves promoted, led them to suspend judgment. This applied both to matters of more or less pure theory, and to ones of practical interest in leading one's daily life.

Hence, as time went on, these proto-skeptics began, and continued, to expect, even before beginning a new inquiry, that they would be rationally driven to suspension: it would seem to them very likely that the rationally demanded result would be a stalemated lack of success in arriving at any definite conclusion of the question at issue, one way or the other. Reason, when used according to the standards of philosophy for its proper use, would dictate suspension—as it seemed to them. They reached a point of near despair. Sextus continues his narrative by telling how then, on some occasion of failure, all of a sudden, each proto-skeptic got possessed by a feeling of tranquility, instead of a repeat of their prior near despair. This tranquility seemed to them to just follow suspension “as a shadow follows a body.”<sup>80</sup> All of a sudden, one would seem to see (one would now feel) that one does not need the assurance of positive philosophy about the natures of things, and about how and why they have any of the anomalies that they do, in order to proceed with one's life in an unperturbed state of mind, as well as to just stop worrying about what the truth might be among the conflicting possible theories that could explain the more theoretical anomalies they had been worrying over. The simple condition of sustained suspension turns out (as it seems to oneself) to provide one with what one was seeking to achieve only through getting final, definitive answers from positive philosophy about how the things one has to deal with in life are, in themselves and in their natures, or about those other more theoretical matters. One loses the anxiety, but not by learning the truth, and the critically developed reasons that show it to be the truth, as one initially thought one would have to, if one was ever going to rid oneself of it. One loses one's anxiety by renouncing the ambition to live positively on the basis of

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a particular interlocutor is good enough, and acceptable to the committed skeptic, since the controlling ethical objective is to bring them to suspend. It does not really matter how. The account in my main text is an idealization, representing the special case of suspension in discussions with expert positive philosophers.

<sup>80</sup>The quotation is from *Outlines* I 29. For the continuation of the narrative from I 12, see I 26ff.

critical reason at all (though, as I will explain, without renouncing the commitment to keep on engaging in critical rational inquiry about these matters). Thus one achieves the initial goal of one's philosophizing, not by getting answers, but by always refusing prematurely (which means, in actual effect, ever) to accept any answer (or, of course, by the same token, to deny any). One becomes a full-blown skeptic. Their experience with critical reason itself, when using it on the assumption that it is our authoritative guide to the truth, has led the skeptics to suspension, and through suspension, as a body is followed by its shadow,<sup>81</sup> to the goal of unperturbedness that they were all along seeking.

Having achieved their goal of unperturbedness via suspension, skeptics quite naturally want to keep on suspending—if possible: that is, so long as reason doesn't tell them to accept some argument and some conclusion, whether factual or to do with questions of value, and whether it concerns some purely theoretical issue or something with evident practical bearings. They remain open to the possibility that new considerations might be brought to their attention, or reconsideration of old ones might lead them to think some matter actually settled: perhaps a really convincing final argument might be invented by an Epicurean to show that reality really is just atoms and void, and thus provide a good basis for settling our questions about what is real and what is only appearance, and how the one accounts for the other. But, for the interim, they suspend, and they expect to keep on suspending, so that they can keep themselves free from perturbation by that means. They are now ready to live in a fully satisfied way, since to live without perturbation, as we have seen, is what seemed to the proto-skeptics, as they evolved into skeptics, to be all they required in order to find satisfaction with their lives.

So far I have been summarizing and commenting upon Sextus's account in the early chapters of his *Outlines* of the intellectual origins of Pyrrhonian skepticism, the train of thought that leads to skepticism. Sextus offers this in the guise of a narrative history of the experiences of those who became the first to practice the skeptic philosophy. Here we should recall that Sextus's proto-skeptics took themselves to positive philosophy because they were anxious about anomalies that were evident already to them in their daily, ordinary lives. They wanted those to be resolved. They wanted to decide which appearance of the tower

<sup>81</sup> Or, in Sextus's famous image, in the way that the painter Apelles "painted" the foam on a racehorse's mouth by throwing his sponge at the painting, in desperation and annoyance, after being unable to produce the foam by normal painterly means. *Outlines* I 28.

showed how it is (flat-faced), and which (round) was only an appearance: flat-faced things normally do look round from such distances. But philosophy introduced them to many other worrying anomalies, too, ones, as I have said of a purely theoretical sort, remote from any issue of daily practical concern. It also introduced them to philosophical theories attempting to dissipate these worries, but which were in conflict with one another, and very hard to choose between on an adequate basis of reason. These too they wanted to resolve.

Hence their suspension over all and every philosophical theory about appearance and reality, and how the one causes or otherwise relates to the other, is linked with suspension from taking a position on the anomalies arising in ordinary life that initially set the proto-skeptics off in their quest. They suspend from saying that the tower is flat-faced, but only appears round from a distance, or that pleasure is good, or not good, or that health is better, or to be preferred over pleasure, in case some pleasure will harm your health. But hanging out with philosophers, as we have seen, alerts you to new and previously unnoticed or unsuspected anomalies even where everyday matters are concerned—indeed, they seem to be everywhere you look. Is the door to your room actually, in fact, open, when it seems perfectly obvious that it is, and you can see that it is? Well, it might just *look* that way: if you are a philosopher, it is not hard to think up some consideration that could suggest that, really, it's closed (but because, say, of some so far unnoticed temporary derangement in your vision, or some unusual reflection of the light through your window, it looks open while in fact being shut). When (or if) you say, in response to these anomalies, that the door really *is* open (you've checked, and your eyes are fine; there are no unusual reflections; you really can see that it is open), you are claiming to have adequate reasons for saying that. Thus in becoming skeptics the proto-skeptics come to suspend on all matters, whether of philosophical theory, or the simplest and most straightforward points of everyday life, agreed to by everybody. They suspend, that is to say, on all claims or assertions that, like all assertions of philosophical theory, and the ones I've just illustrated from ordinary life, are asserted for *reasons* that, you think, show what you say to be true—or, in being made, are intended to be understood as open to critical scrutiny as to the reasons why they should be believed.

But on what basis, then, positively speaking, do skeptics live, once they suspend over all matters? If they have no opinions or beliefs, and never have any reasons for anything that they think, what determines their decisions, choices, preferences, and actions? Life requires discriminations, options, holding back

sometimes and going forward at others, doing this now, instead of that. I mentioned above that skeptics do not renounce their commitment to the regular practice of philosophical inquiry and to critical reasoning concerning both the questions of philosophy and those concerning everyday anomalies (I will say more about that in the next section); so, much of their daily life is devoted to this philosophical avocation (Sextus expounded in writing and maybe taught the skeptical philosophy to students). But like everyone else skeptics spend much of their time in eating and drinking and sleeping, they have some profession or work (Sextus was a doctor), they have families, including perhaps spouses and children, and engage in all the obligations and practices of life in a civilized community. How do skeptics manage all that? That requires at every turn making discriminations, taking options, doing one thing rather than another, moment by moment. Without any beliefs as to how things truly are, and eschewing doing anything ever for any reason, what can lead them to act at all? Sextus's answer, though this raises a lot of questions we will have to go into, is that skeptics live on the basis of "appearances" (*φαινόμενα*), instead of "opinions" or "beliefs." The skeptic's basis for acting, Sextus says, is not beliefs as to how things are, resting on reasons that show them true (the tower being actually round or flat-faced), but only how things appear at a given moment to the one who has to act. Sextus formulates the skeptic life like this: to live following (i.e., "adhering" or "attending" to)<sup>82</sup> the "appearances," without holding any opinions. But what should we take that to mean? We must turn to this in the next section.

One thing is already clear. What Sextus is suggesting is that we should simply not fall victim to the naturally understandable human tendency to react to the anomalies among the appearances of things, both factual and normative, by supposing that there must be some way the tower is in itself, for example, and that the other, different, ways it appears are appearances only, to be explained, one hopes, on the basis of the way it really is (and its connections to the way other things that surround it really are). Living by following the appearances is living without falling victim, to any degree, to that natural temptation (the temptation the proto-skeptics fell victim to in going to philosophy to resolve their worries about anomalies). It is, somehow, leaving the appearances, all of them, *alone*, just taking them as they come—without subjecting any of them to rational criticism. This may not be easy, but that, it seems, is what Sextus tells us skeptics manage to do. It is what the skeptic philosophy requires.

<sup>82</sup>The Greek is *προσέχοντες*. See *Outlines* I 23.

### 5.7. The Skeptic Way of Life

But what does Sextus's formula of living according to appearances (alone) entail?<sup>83</sup> Surely, when skeptics view the tower from a distance, and it looks round to them, they do not "follow" that appearance, and make plans to approach it on the basis that it is round and will be correctly treated as round upon approach. If they did, they would clearly make a mess of things (bringing curved ladders with them, say, that would not fit, as they attempted to climb up). And, at least next time, if they were not totally stupid, they would not act in that same way, even though it surely would still have that same appearance for them. This shows, or suggests, that even skeptics can learn from experience. When the tower looks round to them from a distance, once they have learned by experience about towers, they will also have a further appearance about it, that it is flat-sided, or may very well be. (It is perhaps too far away still to tell—that it is too far away to tell is something else that will appear to them, after experience.) And it will appear to them that it is *this* appearance—that it is flat-sided—that is to be followed, not the first one. Hence, it seems clear that a skeptic will not follow every appearance (indeed that would be impossible, since one can, as just mentioned, have conflicting appearances at the same time about the same thing). The ones they do follow will be the ones that it appears to them are the ones *to* follow, on that occasion and under those (apparent) circumstances.

The crucial point is that, in this whole account, it is always and only appearances, of this or of that, that skeptics consider and then act on. They do not act on assertions as to how things actually are, in truth or in the nature of things, where those assertions are based on reasons why (as they think) the one appearance is to be followed and the others not, whether this "truth" and "nature" is understood in a philosophically laden way or not. They do not have, or think they have, reasons of a critically reflective kind for what they do, or for which appearance they follow; it only appears to them that following *this* one or *that* one is the thing to do, and they follow it in that spirit. It is, for them, appearances all the way down, so to speak. They never have any reasons for what they do, at

<sup>83</sup> There has been much dispute by scholars over the answer to this question. Some argue that living by appearances means making no assertions at all, beyond acknowledging one's private sensations and other impressions (appearances) about things; others hold that the easygoing following of one's impressions that Sextus is describing includes making assertions as to how things are, given, and on the basis of, one's impressions. See the articles collected in Burnyeat and Frede, *The Original Sceptics*, and the bibliography there. The interpretation I present below is closer to the Frede side of the controversy than the Burnyeat and Barnes one.

all: it was by accepting that one ought to have reasons that the proto-skeptics bit themselves with the full-blown skeptics' now-renounced philosophy bug—the bug that led them naively (as Sextus thinks) to think that philosophy contained the answers to their dilemmas. That eschewal is part, indeed the essential core, of the skeptics' practice of suspension of judgment. Their practices of behavior, in accepting some appearances but not others, have just grown up with them, individually, in whatever way they have, as they have experienced whatever they have experienced in their lives. All skeptics adhere to their own practices of following these but not those of their appearances, just because they are their own practices, *their* ways of responding to appearances (unless, of course, they change their practices in some way, on the basis of additional, new appearances that they begin to have and to accept, after further experience).

One should notice here that, when skeptics do act on some appearance (say the appearance of the tower as flat and square, despite looking round from where they are standing), they act on the appearance that something is so and so—that the tower is flat and square. An appearance of the tower merely as looking or seeming square—where that is to be interpreted as looking to them the way that square towers usually look (from up close)—would not yet, of itself, lead to any action at all, if “accepted.” To accept (or report) that that is how it looks or seems just invites the question, “So what?” It is perhaps an interesting report on your state of consciousness that you accept that that is how it looks or seems to you, but it goes no further than that. It has no definite implications for action. Instead, the appearance that skeptics accept, and incorporate into their “action plan,” is of the tower *as* square.<sup>84</sup> It is on that appearance, if on any, that they act, when they proceed to approach the tower and deal with it in the square-tower ways that they then do. Thus when skeptics get an appearance from afar of a tower that looks round from there but that also appears to them, given their prior experience, as flat-sided and square, and when they proceed to obtain an ordinary ladder (not a rounded one) and approach the tower with the intention of climbing it, they act taking it that a ladder is to be found where they go to look for one (they have a memory appearance to go on here that leads them to take it that that is where to look for one), taking it that this is a square tower before them as they approach it, and similarly taking things to be some given way all through the series of ensuing actions. However, unlike other people at least some

<sup>84</sup>See endnote 35 for the philosophical distinction between “epistemic” and “nonepistemic” appearances.

of the time, they do all these things without thinking at all that they have any *reason* for so taking any of the things in question. If challenged (“Maybe there is no ladder there, maybe you’re deceived?”), they may very well just wave it off (or if they pause to think again and check their memory, they only do that, again, because it appears to them that, under these circumstances of challenge, that is the thing to do, and they accept and follow that appearance). They never offer (or in their thoughts hold) *anything* as a reason for taking *anything* to be the way they do take it to be, and for treating it that way.

Given all this, in fact, I see no obstacle to using the ordinary-language word “belief” here to describe what skeptics have in accepting and following appearances. It is true that in philosophical analyses of belief, and in many applications in ordinary life of the term “belief” (or “opinion”), a belief is understood to be a claim that something is true in fact, where that claim is put forward as based on and supported by reasons of some appropriate sort. But if skeptics act on ways they take things to be, without holding that they have any justification at all for taking things so, ordinary usage surely authorizes describing those acts of taking things to be so as beliefs. That is how they *think* things are; if you asked them what they were up to, they would perfectly naturally say either that they thought, or that they believed, or that it was their opinion, that things are so and so: that they ought to take a rounded ladder, because the tower is round, that there is a rounded ladder in a certain place, and so on. They do believe all these things, although, perhaps unusually for people in their societies, they are clear and explicit to themselves (and to others, if questioned) that they do not have, and are by no means claiming, any reasons whatsoever for believing what they do. They just *do* believe them.<sup>85</sup>

The appearances that skeptics live by, on Sextus’s account, then, all have an individual, conceptually articulated content—each one is an appearance of something as being a certain way: a tower appears to be flat and square, a pleasure seems good to have, health seems threatened, and, accordingly, some possible action seems a bad one, or a good one. Skeptics do not live by *all* the appearances they receive, either in the use of their senses, or in recalling things they earlier got such perceptual appearances of, or in their thoughts as they reflect upon things, but only by the ones they accept, in the way I have described. Those are the ones that may lead to action, or may help to shape actions that they then undertake.

<sup>85</sup>For comment on these Pyrrhonian “beliefs” and on the differences between them and Socrates’s ideas about what a “belief” commits one to, see endnote 36.

In the acceptances themselves, the skeptics are active, and not passive, as they are simply in receiving perceptions or when memories come to mind. Nonetheless, whenever they do accept an appearance, they never do so because they think they have any reason to do so. They just find that, for given ones, they do feel driven to accept them (what else is one to do, when things appear to you like that, they think—the way they now do?), and, in fact, they just *do* accept them—for no *reason* at all.<sup>86</sup> They may review and reflect upon an appearance that is a candidate for acceptance (the human mind evidently has that capacity),<sup>87</sup> before accepting it (or rejecting it). But in this as in all other respects, their behavior is driven simply by habits of response that have been built up over time, and in consequence of earlier experiences, going back all the way to early childhood. In that sense, acceptances too are, and feel, passive, as well; they are, as one could say, from the agent's perspective, quite automatic occurrences. They do them, but while being swept along in ways they habitually do get swept along.

Given the enormously varied history of childhood and later experiences that different individuals undergo, one might think that the actual patterns of life among a group of skeptics would vary enormously, to the point of not really constituting any skeptic “way of life,” beyond the simple, but enormously variable, common feature of acting always only on appearances and never on reason-based beliefs, as I have explained. One might expect that the differing sets of early and later experiences of sensory perception, bodily feelings, memory, and thought, occasioned by these individuals' varying exposures to environing conditions, would produce habits of response, via automatic and non-reason-based acceptances, to the array of appearances that any adult would be subject to, so individually tied to their own past that no single pattern would be discernible among the whole class of skeptic philosophers. But, in fact, Sextus makes quite strong claims about universally applicable constraints of action, in any and every skeptic life, which would establish a markedly distinct way of life for skeptics. He lists fourfold “everyday observances” that skeptics, following appearances, use to give structure to their life:

Thus, attending to that which appears, we live in accordance with everyday observances, withholding opinions—for we are not able to be utterly inactive. These everyday observances seem to be fourfold, and to consist in

<sup>86</sup> See *Outlines* I 19 and I 193, where Sextus emphasizes the sense of necessitation with which skeptics accept and follow the appearances that they do accept.

<sup>87</sup> I take Sextus to be taking notice of this fact when he lists in *Outlines* I 23–24 (quoted just below) as part of “direction by nature” in a skeptic life our engaging in thought.

(1) direction by nature, (2) necessitation by passive affection, (3) handing down of laws and customs, and (4) teaching of professional occupations: (1) by nature's direction, insofar as we are naturally such as to engage in perceiving and thinking; (2) by the necessitation of passive affection, insofar as hunger conducts us to food and thirst to drink; (3) by the handing down of customs and laws, insofar as we accept, in an everyday way, that acting piously is good and acting impiously bad; (4) by teaching of professional occupations, insofar as we are not inactive in those which we accept. And we say all this not as expressing our opinions.<sup>88</sup>

The first two of these "observances" are fairly straightforward. First, in reverse order, as for the necessitation of passive affection, everyone from time to time gets hungry and thirsty, and gets turned on for sex, and when they do they receive appearances of various objects, and things to do in relation to them, as appropriate to those feelings. Then those things and actions appear to them as attractive. Likewise, given their particular bodily constitutions, they have passive affections that generate other appearances presenting other objects and actions in an attractive light. Moreover, they find themselves inclined (indeed, in the way we have seen, actually driven) to accept, and they do accept, many of these appearances (but not others): the ones they accept are the ones they have, through experience, become habituated to accept. Second, so far as direction by nature goes, they constantly interact with their environments in the various modes of perception natural to human beings, and they do so (as I mentioned above) by gradually acquiring concepts and then applying them to what they perceive; they also think conceptually in other ways, in response to their current surroundings as they perceive them. They receive conceptually structured appearances in perception and thought, as a matter of how human nature operates;<sup>89</sup> and, again, they find themselves inclined to accept, and they do accept, many (but not all) of these. Sextus implies, quite reasonably, that, despite the huge variations between individual

<sup>88</sup> *Outlines* I 23–24, translation based on Annas and Barnes, but with many changes. The numbering of the separate points is my addition.

<sup>89</sup> The appearances of thought referred to here will include many activities of reasoning, such as when, having the question before one's mind, how much is 30 divided by 6? one then experiences the appearance that 30 divided by 6 is 5. One will have learned about these matters as one grows up, and that will give one tendencies to receive such appearances, and to accept them, under such circumstances. Such "ordinary" uses of reasoning are by no means excluded for skeptics when they eschew the critical use of reason, in evaluating appearances and deciding, on bases provided by standards of such reasoning, what the truth is. That is why in the preceding I have often added the qualifier "critical" to reason when speaking of it as rejected by skeptics.

human beings, given their differing environments and particular natural endowments, and the resulting history of their experiences, there will be a very significant commonality, in these respects, among all skeptics, as they come to maturity and continue their lives thereafter. They do not question their appearances, or try to find reasons why one should act on them (or should not), or which ones to act upon; they just follow the appearances, and the tendencies for acceptance of appearances, which they find themselves with.

The third and fourth observances are more interesting, and much more far-reaching. Here Sextus seems to assume that among the other effects of being raised in any human community are appearances that everyone receives, as they grow to maturity, that relate to cultural norms of behavior, first in what we can think of, broadly, as the moral realm, and secondly in relation to particular occupations and work that individually people find themselves attracted, or otherwise directed, to. Here again, his claim is (and reasonably so) that whatever the community may be in which one is brought up, one comes to receive appearances indicating that some behaviors are OK and others not, as one learns to live in the community. And, as one finds one's way into some field of work or occupation (among those on offer in the community), one also comes to receive appearances, provided through one's interaction with the established practitioners with whom one comes into contact, indicating that some behaviors are OK or required, others not OK or forbidden. Many of these appearances, these cultural neophytes find themselves inclined (in a way, even driven) to accept; and they find that they do accept them. Here again, we find a very significant commonality in skeptics' appearances, acceptances, and behaviors, despite the huge individual differences in localities and in details of people's experiences in growing up. Other people being raised in their communities may come to question the appearances they receive, and may look for reasons for or against conforming, but skeptics (once grown up and committed as skeptics) resolutely do not do that. They just follow these appearances that their upbringing has left them with, by sticking to the habits of acceptance that grew up in their minds as they matured.

On Sextus's representation, then (rather surprisingly, if one considers the usual conception of a skeptic as an inveterate doubter), skeptics question nothing that is authoritatively accepted in their community: they come, through their own upbringing and the appearances and acceptances that that engenders in them, to blend in seamlessly with whatever is authoritative where they live, both in morals and religion and in every other aspect of life. Skeptics accept instruction in their profession, and then act unquestioningly in accordance with its

standards. They accept whatever the prevailing ethical and moral standards are in the traditions of their community.<sup>90</sup> They otherwise live quiet and compliant lives. They are compliant and conformist in all these ways because in each case they get and accept the appearance that that is how to behave: they act on appearances to them to behave in those ways, appearances that seem to them forced upon them in the way I have indicated. It is not ruled out, I take it, that individual skeptics might begin to get appearances about things that would depart from existing standards in one area or another, even perhaps in ethics or morals, or religion. These could lead to innovations in their behavior (in relation to what is standard or customary in their communities or profession), and perhaps also in the behavior of those around them, due to their influence; and they could even help to change community life to what eventually becomes a new traditional standard of behavior, by aligning their own behavior, and explanations of it, with some new moral or social movement. They are, of course, members of their communities and participate in the human perspective on the world and on human life that their community's practices define. Hence their fundamental conformity. But by the same token, their own innovative appearances and consequent behaviors will participate in the constant reshaping that any such socially determined perspective must undergo. Moral or other revolutionaries, however, they decidedly are not. They never claim that there is any reason to make a change in religion or morals or in the conduct of their profession, for example because something is false or wrong in current practices. It just strikes them that something else than the heretofore usual thing might go better, that is, might go in such a way that one would, if one adopted it, then be struck with the impression that this was better, or more equitable, or whatever. And, obviously, they do not bring to the moral life, or to the satisfying life as proposed by themselves, any innovations involving some special spirit in which to act, or some special conception of oneself and others, deriving, as with Aristotle, the Stoics, Epicurus, and

<sup>90</sup>Under the heading of "laws and customs" Sextus mentions only pious and impious behavior—respectfully performing or attending civic temple rites and the like. But included are, presumably, behavior in accord with all the moral norms of one's society (the ones brought together by philosophers under headings drawn from the names of the traditional virtues and vices of justice, temperance, courage, etc.)—as well, of course, as all the more important, and more or less universally respected, customs, traditions, and laws of one's society. It is noteworthy that Sextus has nothing to say here, in sketching the skeptic guides for living, about the virtues themselves, which figure so grandly in all the ethical theories of the "positive" philosophies we have been examining in this book. As we have seen, especially in discussing the ethical theories of Aristotle and the Stoics, the aspiration to virtue is a mark of an elitism (a moral elitism, to be sure, not a matter of social or class distinction) to which skeptics, with their wish not to distinguish themselves from the run of life around them, must renounce.

Plotinian Platonists, from positive philosophical theory. They have learned to avoid any and all theses of positive philosophy, because those are presented as based on reasons. For the most part, they do not stand out from the rest of society in any way (except, perhaps, for their constant practice of philosophical investigation, as an avocation alongside whatever their professional work may be: more on that below). They are quite content to blend in, unquestioningly, with whatever is normal where they live. They are satisfied, even happy, to do so.

I have just reminded the reader that the skeptic life, beyond its conformism so far as issues of daily life, morality, religion, politics, and so on, may go, also includes a devotion to philosophical discussion and investigation. I will say more about that shortly, in concluding this chapter. As to the rest of their life (the conformist part), it might seem that Sextus's skepticism returns its adherents to the paradisiacally innocent position they would have been in, if, like the dumb and lazy people Sextus contrasts his proto-skeptics with in his narrative, they had never begun to entertain worries about those anomalies from which his narrative took its start. Those people just go with the flow, never questioning anything to find out reasons why things are, and need to be, the way they are, they just deal pragmatically with any conflicts or anomalies they might face in their experience of things. Aren't Sextus's skeptics supposed to live, to a significant extent, just as those dumb and lazy people? No. In fact, there is quite a large difference between the two ways of life, despite the similar outward appearances of the behaviors that might be found in each. Skeptics may follow the same traditional standards in morals, professions, and in all other respects, as these others, and, like them, they will do so docilely and without question. But they remain smart and energetic, and the others are still dumb and lazy. This means several things.

To begin with, skeptics carry within themselves a strongly self-conscious understanding of how they are living, in living this way. They are living according to what they themselves conceive to be appearances (not that they have or live with any theory as to what these appearances are, as such). They live while constantly eschewing any opinions or beliefs that go beyond an easy acceptance of those appearances. They do not think they have a grounding for human life in reasons why their life and their actions are right and best—as the Stoics and Aristotle, with their theory of a god-given and god-supervised reality, do, in their different ways, for the Stoic and Aristotelian lives, or as Epicurus does for his life of pleasure. But they have an intimate familiarity with the theories of those who do regard human life in this way, and they are also acutely conscious of the failings of these theories, as it appears to them, in regard to the very standards for theory

construction that are appealed to by these philosophers in setting them out. None of this is true of the dumb and lazy people. The skeptics' philosophical suspension of belief in all these theories, and in all those ways of life, is active in the way they do live, and that produces a large difference for them from the way the dumb and lazy live. Most decisively for the way they lead their skeptic lives, having started out as full believers in the power and authority of reason in shaping our lives, they know from their personal experience (and bear constantly in their minds as they live their lives) the full allure of that idea. That is to say, it appears strongly and forcibly to them that they used to be such believers, and the idea of this authority was and remains alluring, just as it appears forcibly to them that all the theories of life proposed by the other schools of philosophy have failed in the way I have indicated.

All this must affect their daily actions in many ways, as they self-consciously bear it all in mind in doing them. Their lives are much the richer for their disappointed love affair with philosophy than any ordinary person's who lives, to an external view, according to many of the same patterns. They, no less than the Aristotelian or Stoic or Epicurean or Platonist, live their philosophy—their skeptical life of suspension of reason-based belief and conformity to the traditions that are authoritative in their society. Their philosophical views are the source of their life; those views are their life's ultimate steersman—even if, for the most part, in a negative and warning way, rather than, as with the other ancient philosophies, a positively prescriptive one. And, of course, with the skeptics, unlike with the other philosophies, all their philosophical views are held only as accepted appearances that have arisen in their minds through their experience, both in investigating philosophical arguments and in their experience of daily life. They do not hold any philosophical views for any reason, including those they live by adhering to.<sup>91</sup>

This allure, for Sextan skeptics, of the idea of critical reason as authoritative for human life deserves more extended attention in this connection. It is not merely that skeptics (as it appears to them) used to fall to that allure and used to spend lots of time looking for the truth through positive philosophical efforts to discover it, firmly believing in the authority of reason (and of its handmaiden, philosophy) to tell us what we ought to believe, what we ought to do, how we

<sup>91</sup>That is the force of Sextus's remark, in the passage from *Outlines* I 23–24 quoted above in which he sets out the "fourfold" direction of a skeptic's life, that he states there no opinions, i.e., nothing for which he can be expected to give any reasons. He reports only appearances that he accepts in so describing their life.

ought to live. Even after they have settled into skeptical living according to appearances (alone), they retain a certain allegiance to the authority of reason and philosophy. It's just that what started out being a fully committed acceptance of that authority now becomes a conditional one. Their experience in philosophy has left them with the strong impression, which they cannot but accept, so strong is it, that critical reason does not lead to any decisive result, and, to all appearances, never will succeed in doing so. So we could put their current attitude like this: if there is any authority for how to live, reason and philosophy are certainly it—nothing else could possibly be (as it seems to them) an authority for living. But, it appears, even reason and philosophy, if pursued with the greatest rigor and vigor, as they themselves pursue it, fail to deliver any authoritative instructions for how we should live (or, more generally, what we should believe or disbelieve, in the sense of accepting and acting on it). Hence, we have to live what, from the point of view of that conditional attitude, is a second-best way of life—one that, nonetheless, in its own terms is perfectly satisfying: a life spent suspending belief and reason, led according to appearances alone, instead. This is a life not with a different authority (e.g., tradition), it is a life altogether without *any* authority for it. It's just a life that one leads.

Still, the skeptic does not at all give up on reason—on looking for an authoritative set of instructions for life, with the intention of living according to them (if found). That is why it is a crucial part of skeptics' lives to spend lots of time in their avocation of investigating philosophical questions, examining them anew, looking for previously unexplored possible ways through and away from the anomalies in human experience—while, as has happened at least so far, reaching no acceptable conclusion, one way or the other, on the questions investigated, but suspending. They keep this up because of their continued (skeptical) hope of success. If reason should after all, eventually, produce reason-certified instructions about how to live, or, in general, what to believe, one would certainly be foolish (as it seems to them) not to follow those instructions. So, as Sextus says at the beginning of the *Outlines*,

When people are investigating any subject, the likely result is either a discovery, or a denial of discovery and a confession of inapprehensibility,<sup>92</sup> or else a continuation of the investigation. This, no doubt, is why in the case

<sup>92</sup>The Greek word here is *ἀκαταληψία*, an especially Stoic term. To confess inapprehensibility is to conclude, on the basis of one's failure in inquiry, that the matter is not capable of being settled (by us); it is permanently beyond our grasp.

of philosophical investigations, too, some have said that they have discovered the truth, some have asserted that it cannot be apprehended, and others are still investigating. Those who are called Dogmatists in a specialized sense of the word think that they have established the truth—for example, the schools of Aristotle and Epicurus and the Stoics, and some others. The schools of Clitomachus and Carneades, and other Academics, have asserted that things cannot be apprehended. And the Skeptics are still investigating.<sup>93</sup>

The skeptic keeps on investigating, however, as I have said, not merely for the formalistic reason, perhaps suggested here, that a “committed” skeptic must take great care to remain a skeptic, on pain of falling into the second of Sextus’s classifications, that of a special kind of skeptically “dogmatic” philosophers—“negative” dogmatists, who assert that the truth is beyond our powers to discover (on the ground that repeated failure has shown this to be so). They must take care not to fall victim to the (to them) all too tempting thought that, because they have examined millions of philosophical arguments, their failure to find even one completely sound one (of other than trivial consequence) is some ground (even a probabilistic one) for thinking that philosophical arguments are always flawed. It is true that they must do this in order to remain skeptics (something that seems to them essential for the tranquility they now enjoy). But they must not keep on investigating just as a charade engaged in so as to keep, or pretend to keep, an open mind, while secretly being pretty well convinced that critical reason and philosophy really are frauds—simply so as not to fall into negative dogmatism, instead of remaining tranquil skeptics. No, the reason they keep investigating is a quite positive one. It is because they remain positively committed to follow reason as the true authority (that seems to them the thing to do), if only it can (seem to) prove itself to be capable of giving authoritative instructions for what to believe and how to live. Having that commitment, they cannot (as it seems to them) fail to keep giving it a try.

This implies that, even after having achieved the tranquility that comes from universal suspension of judgment, skeptics will, as a regular part of their life, continue to investigate questions of philosophy, with interest and an open mind. They have the special skill I referred to, of being able always to counterpose to any (reason-based) claim as to the truth, an equi-balanced counterclaim. So they will continue to use that skill even after they have examined enough positive

<sup>93</sup> *Outlines* I 1–3, trans. Annas and Barnes, with three changes.

philosophy, its claims and arguments, to suspect that it is all a will-o'-the-wisp, and that even about ordinary matters of daily fact one is never going to establish any truth or falsehood, according to philosophical standards of truth and falsehood, based on valid reasons for holding them true or false. Skeptics may and presumably will take great pleasure in their philosophical work of argument, analysis, and discussion, about human nature and human values, among other questions. They will, of course, sustain their own tranquility in their life of suspension so long as they do keep on failing to be satisfied with their results. And the loss of tranquility looms, as it seems to them, if they ever cease to suspend on any question: then they would revive their old worries. But the hope of sustaining their tranquility, which rests on not asserting that positive philosophy is hopeless (the reasons for saying that are all too inadequate), is not a motive, for them, in trying to make every investigation turn out fruitless. The greater motive is the hope that philosophy will succeed, not that it will fail. Of course, if it ever does, and skeptics learn about and can certify that fact, they will forthwith cease to be skeptics—whether they have to shoulder ensuing worries or not.

The fact remains, however, that it must seem to skeptics that their tranquility and happiness in life do depend on continually finding fault with any and every philosophical argument and thesis. It must seem to them that if ever they do find philosophy succeeding in establishing even one claim, they will then have to recognize that critical reason and philosophy have been vindicated; and even if that recognition is only the acceptance of the appearance, to them, that critical reason has been vindicated, once they have reached it, surely they will then become worried about all the other anomalies (the ones not settled in whatever argument they now find acceptable): what prevented worry was the unexpected effect of *universal* suspension. Having recognized that critical reason *can* establish truths that one ought to believe (witness the given case), for the reasons it proposes, wouldn't it now seem to them that philosophy isn't a will-o'-the-wisp, after all, and that it might, despite earlier apparent failures, succeed in other areas where anomalies arise? And that would now take away their tranquility: they would feel the need to try to extend philosophy's success into the area of questions, beset by anomalies, concerning how one ought to live one's life. In short, they would cease to be skeptics, and become returned to the anxious state they were in when they were proto-skeptics—until, they might hope, they could settle those anomalies, and so achieve tranquility by this alternative route of positive, committed philosophical theory. Thus, as it seems, skeptics will live their lives in a very delicate balance between living as Sextus describes, following his

fourfold direction (and also devoting lots of attention to philosophy), and worrying about what would happen to their lives if ever their skill of counterbalancing arguments should fail to undermine an argument of philosophy. Could they really maintain the perfect tranquility that Sextus claims for them by living according to appearances only? Wouldn't living that way actually lead them to start worrying, precisely because of what would seem to them the need to make their method succeed every time they applied it? If so, then it would seem doubtful, to us neutral observers, that the skeptic philosophy does, after all, enable us to achieve the skeptic's stated goal of tranquility.

Two further questions might occur to one in assessing the viability of the skeptic way of life. Consider the skeptic demand that we live our lives with no reliance on critical reason at any point or circumstance, and while holding no reason-based beliefs about anything. Here two sets of questions arise. First, how realistic is the skeptic's impression that, if one did sometimes or often rely on reason in figuring out how things are and how it makes best sense to behave in relation to them, one would suffer from anything like the seriously disturbing anxiety that his proto-skeptics began from? How much, in fact, does it matter, if we did rely on reason, that we could never be certain we were right about anything? Sextus's smart and energetic proto-skeptics were racked with anxiety caused by the anomalies, he says. But is it reasonable to think that, if we—the ones he wants to persuade to become skeptics too—did permanently bear the burden of uncertainty that caused them this anxiety, we would suffer at all greatly in our life? Couldn't we still live at least decently happily, even by the skeptic lights that make happiness consist of unperturbedness? How perturbed would one have to be, just because one did seek reasoned beliefs with which to decide on, explain, and defend one's choices (or, at any rate, some of them—the more important ones), without being able decisively and for sure to assert that one's way of life was the right one? Maybe one could be satisfied, well enough, with having some good reasons for being a Stoic, say, even if one might dither between that and Aristotelianism? Isn't Sextus's going on so about the seriousness of the anxiety in people's lives who do accept critical reason, and reason-based belief, more than a bit exaggerated?<sup>94</sup>

<sup>94</sup>See *Outlines* I 27 (trans. Annas and Barnes): “[T]hose who hold the opinion that things are good or bad by nature are perpetually troubled. When they lack what they believe to be good, they take themselves to be persecuted by natural evils, and they pursue what (so they think) is good. And when they have acquired these things, they experience more troubles; for they are elated beyond reason and measure, and in fear of change they do anything so as not to lose what they believe to be good.” Really? He adds (I 30) that when they are afflicted with some ordinary and inevitable bodily distress (e.g., shivering in the cold) such

Second, how possible is it, really, to give up our human practice of using our powers of reason to subject ourselves and others to criticism, and to judge, on the basis of reason, what to think about the facts and also about norms for decision? Even if it is possible, as Sextus insists, to live following the appearances, instead, and only thereby to achieve tranquility, should one really want to? Maybe such perturbation as this practice really may entail (setting aside Sextus's exaggerations) is worth it, for other reasons; one might think it important to have such vindication as one could find for one's beliefs and actions. Maybe that is worth the less than fully tranquil but still *relatively* tranquil life one might then lead. In fact, when Sextus includes among his "fourfold observances" that guide skeptic lives the "direction by nature," many readers might expect that this direction would include results of the fact, as it does seem to many people, even if Sextus denies it, that it belongs to our nature as rational beings to seek for our own reasons for believing things, and to attempt to satisfy ourselves as to which is the right thing to believe, given what appears to be the case. If so, we can't give this up, once we mature to the point where this part of our nature is present, and "revert" to living on appearances, and on habits of acceptance, alone. Also, even if we waive that objection, it might seem that, under his third "observance," the handing down of customs and laws, the skeptic's banned practices of critical reasoning would find a way back in. It does seem that we are customarily brought up to think of ourselves as rational beings of just that critical, and self-critical, sort.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, it may seem to many that there is an honor and dignity involved for us in having such a nature (if it is our nature), or at least in our having, as a species, developed our cultures to the point where we inculcate into the young this self-conception as part of what they acquire as they grow into maturity. If so, it might very well seem that, even if some perturbation, or some degree of anxiety, unavoidably does go along with preserving, and living with, this self-conception, and acting upon it quite often, it is not for that reason to be renounced.

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"ordinary people are afflicted by two sets of circumstances: by the feelings themselves, and no less by believing that these circumstances are bad by nature." *Afflicted* by thinking that? Really?

<sup>95</sup>This must have been so in ancient Greece, too, long before Sextus's time, and perhaps even before philosophy came on the cultural scene. Sextus's apparent idea of a paradisiacal time when ordinary people (his dumb and lazy folk) were not affected with worries about anomalies seems a motivated projection from his own skeptical philosophical position. In any event, as I argued above, Sextus's skeptics do not "return" to the life that any such dumb and lazy persons would have led.