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### **Epicurus: Freedom, Death, and Hedonism**

Phillip Mitsis

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### **Abstract and Keywords**

This chapter begins with an Epicurean account of freedom of choice, which illustrates some of the larger contours of Plato's ethical aims in the context of his materialism. It also serves as a salient point of departure for gauging the overall plausibility of his general project of 'naturalizing reason', to use a contemporary slogan Epicurus might well have endorsed. The discussions then turn to Epicurus's claims about death and pleasure.

Keywords: Epicurus, freedom of choice, ethics, materialism, death, pleasure

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Epicurus (341–270 bce) first gave shape to three powerful and interconnected strains of argument that, at different periods in the subsequent history of ethical thought, have remained at the heart of productive philosophical controversy. So, for instance, his views about the nature of pleasure and its role in ethics, first fully recovered by Gassendi, and then taken over at least in part by a long tradition of thinkers from Locke to Mill, have featured prominently in debates between hedonists and their critics over the past several centuries. By the same token, the Epicureans were arguably the first to formulate an incompatibilist defence of the freedom of choice. This defence was grounded, moreover, in a particular view of rational human agency that has been subsequently adopted not just by incompatibilists, but perhaps more surprisingly (again through the influence of Gassendi and then Locke) by a long tradition of compatibilists as well. Moreover, what Epicurus thought to be his most important ethical discovery—that death is not to be feared because it is merely our annihilation and as such in no way harms us—although being mostly derided or ignored by countless generations of philosophers convinced of their own immortality, has become the one ancient philosophical argument still most capable of capturing the attention of some of our most technically skilled contemporary

philosophers, at least if one is to judge by the ever increasing and increasingly sophisticated literature devoted to addressing it.

The Epicureans, like their ancient Stoic counterparts, believed that philosophy needs to be rigorously systematic and that their ethical claims not only depend on the truth of their epistemological, physical, and metaphysical doctrines, but that these, in turn, depend on the truth of their ethical arguments. Unlike the Stoics, however, they do not seem to have been especially committed to a particular order in the exposition of topics, either for reasons of pedagogy or for justification. It will therefore perhaps be helpful to begin with the Epicurean account of freedom of choice, not only because it proved to be enduringly philosophically influential, but also because it allows us to see some of the larger contours of Epicurus' (p. 74) ethical aims in the context of his materialism. It also can serve as a salient point of departure for gauging the overall plausibility of his general project of 'naturalizing reason', to use a contemporary slogan Epicurus might well have endorsed.

### 4.1 Freedom, Rationality, and the Voluntary

In 1967 Pamela Huby published an article entitled 'The First Discovery of the Freewill Problem' in which she argued that the ancient Epicureans should be credited for discovering the 'modern' conception of free will and along with it, the resultant problem of defending it in the face of determinism. By 'modern', she meant the view that we are free just in so far as that, at the moment of choice, we are sufficiently unencumbered by prior determining factors to be able to choose freely between the alternatives of doing x or not x. As we shall see, it is by no means clear how coherently the Epicureans themselves could hope to defend such an account of freedom in the context of their own materialism. But if they could not be credited with offering a completely compelling defence of such a conception of freedom, they at least could be credited with discovering it and making an initial attempt to preserve it against the perceived threat of determinism. Huby was no doubt correct in claiming that earlier Greek philosophers had not felt the problems raised by determinism in quite the same way, in part because most had not been forced by their physical theories to account for human freedom in a world of blind material motions. True, there had been earlier Greek materialists, such as Democritus, but he seemed merely to deny the possibility of free choice and was sceptical in general, moreover, about any evidence derived from the world of phenomenal experience. It was because of Epicurus' twin commitments to atomism and to the phenomenology of human free choice, Huby argued, that he was induced to first formulate the problem of free will in a form readily recognizable to modern philosophers. Such had not been the case with Plato and Aristotle, for instance, whose accounts of human agency were grounded in teleological categories that tend to bypass the kinds of tensions that Epicurus had discovered looming between our free voluntary movements and the causally determined movements of matter stretching back eternally. In a sense, in

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arguing that the Epicureans discovered the free will problem, Huby was giving voice to a tradition stemming back to early modern discussions. At the very beginnings of Epicurean scholarship in the seventeenth century, Gassendi had argued that Epicurus' introduction of indeterminacies or random swerves in the movements of atoms in order to deflect the threats of determinism and fatalism was ill-conceived and that it conflicted with the manifest non-arbitrariness of God's providence. But even though rejecting this feature of the Epicurean account, he nevertheless took the Epicureans to be early proponents of what eventually came to be called an incompatibilist defence of our freedom of choice.

(p. 75) One strong tradition of interpreting Epicurus' account had long affirmed Huby's claim that Epicureans hold a contra-causal account of free will and its supporting scholarship, for the most part, has tried to understand how to construe the relations between our phenomenal experiences of free will and the indeterminacies Epicureans postulated at the atomic level in order to preserve them (Sedley 1983; Englert 1987; Asmis 1990; Fowler 2002). If atomic indeterminacies are completely random, how, for example, are we to understand their effects on human action in a way that does not make our choices themselves appear correspondingly arbitrary and random? Or how can randomness at the atomic level itself be smoothly correlated with deliberate human choices at the phenomenal level in a way that is not merely question begging? In the same year that Huby's article appeared, however, David Furley, in part worried by what he saw as the implausibility of such a project, attempted to close the gap between Epicurus' understanding of freedom of choice and those of his predecessors, especially Aristotle (Furley 1967). He argued that Epicurus' account of voluntary action is better understood in the light of Aristotle's theory of the voluntary and the causal dependence of voluntary actions upon character. He concluded that Epicurus, like Aristotle, was neither interested nor aware of any conception of contra-causal freedom guaranteeing individual instances of free choice. Rather, for the Epicureans, our actions can be sufficiently described as voluntary if they flow causally from our characters. To the extent that Epicureans were worried about the problems of determinism, such worries could be displaced from the mechanisms involved in our individual ongoing choices between alternatives to those that form our characters more generally. As a result, Epicurus, he argued, must have postulated randomness at the atomic level because of a worry that our characters themselves might be determined by prior causal conditions stretching back far beyond our control. While not attributing to the Epicureans an entirely coherent theory—why, for instance, should I be held any more responsible for my character if it has been altered previously by atomic interventions that are themselves purely random?—it at least freed them from the implausibility of trying to correlate each and every instance of deliberate human choice with a corresponding indeterminate atomic event. Moreover, Furley's account lent some indirect luster to Epicureanism as a whole, since by focusing on the mechanisms of character formation Epicureans could now be admitted, albeit somewhat awkwardly because of their hedonism, into the exciting new conversations surrounding virtue ethics at the time. It also seemed to allow scholars to re-embed Epicurus into his putative intellectual milieu more generally, something that recently has been of particular concern to Suzanne Bobzien, who has argued that no ancient Greek

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philosopher, at least through the period that included the Hellenistic Stoa and Garden, ever conceived of human freedom in terms of choosing between alternatives (Bobzien 1998; 2000). Like Alasdair MacIntyre and others who have seen a deep divide between ancient and modern conceptions of both the will and the self, Bobzien has been keen to show that in fact there was no discovery of the free will problem in this period of antiquity since none of its philosophers, including the Epicureans, held a conception of free will in the required contra-causal sense.

(p. 76) In order to get our initial bearings on this dispute, it might be helpful to turn to a passage from the fourth book of *De rerum natura* (*DRN*) by the Roman Epicurean poet, Lucretius (c.99–55 bce). Given the lamentable paucity of evidence in the remains of Epicurus' own writings, questions of its interpretation have featured centrally in these two dominant approaches to his theory. Caution is in order, however, since key features of Lucretius' Latin, such as the critically important notion of '*voluntas*' ('will' or 'volition') described here, have no straightforward equivalent in Epicurus' Greek, and in fact may be Lucretius' own philosophical coinage. Nor do the exigencies of his poetic metre and expression always allow us to sort out the exact relation that is supposed to hold between various items in the causal mechanisms he describes. These problems have perhaps exercised proponents of these two interpretations less than they should, but to set the argumentative context, in the midst of giving material explanations of a series of human functions such as thirst, perspiration, sex, etc., Lucretius turns his attention to the material mechanisms of voluntary movements, in this case, walking:

Now I shall tell you—and mark what I say—how it comes about that we can take steps forward when we want to, by what means it is given to us to move our limbs, and what it is that regularly pushes forward this great bulk of our body. First let me say that the images of walking impinge on our mind and strike it, as I explained earlier. After this, volition (*voluntas*) occurs. For no one embarks on any course of action before the mind first has previewed what it wants to do. And an image exists of whatever it previews. So when the mind stirs itself to want to go forwards, it immediately strikes all the force of the spirit distributed all over the body throughout the limbs and frame: it is easily done, because the spirit is conjoined with it. Then the spirit in turn strikes the body, and thus gradually the whole bulk is pushed on and moves forward. (*DRN* 877–891. Trans. Long and Sedley, 14E; modified)

At first glance, this passage seems to describe a fairly straightforward stimulus/response model of voluntary motion that makes no particular room for choices between alternatives. The mind previews what it wants to do, is struck by the appropriate image, stirs itself to want something, then spurs into movement the spirit or vital force (*vis*) which is understood as being materially dispersed throughout the body. If Lucretius believes that every instance of individual volition is accompanied by a corresponding random atomic swerve, he certainly omits mention of it. Of course, proponents of contra-causal freedom might argue that Lucretius, in keeping with his overall intent in this section of the poem, is merely trying to give a material description of the actual

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mechanics of volition and is therefore not obliged to give a full account. However, David Furley, followed more recently by Bobzien and O'Keefe 2005, seems to be on somewhat firmer textual grounds in claiming that Lucretius is here presenting an account of voluntary movements whose mechanisms themselves remain fully causal. Images, in this case, of walking, have struck the mind and appear to it as pleasant. The mind sets itself in motion voluntarily in accordance with the image, or perhaps, the mind as it decides to move forward sets in motion *voluntas*. There seems to be nothing in this passage in its own right that is obviously incompatible with the view that such volitions themselves are causally determined by the mind. At the same time, until we know what Epicureans think about the status of the mind itself and its (p. 77) relations both to its prior causal conditions and to the images striking it, it is hardly clear where Epicureans ultimately stand on questions about the nature and locus of human freedom.

Part of the problem is the looseness of Lucretius' expression '(a)fter this, volition occurs'. It is not exactly clear whether volitions are being construed as motions of the mind itself or as a separate class of movement that arises from movements of the mind—or indeed as both, since Lucretius says that the mind stirs itself to want to go forward and it is this that sets the mechanisms of volition in motion. But note that all that is being claimed in this passage is that voluntary motions flow causally from the mind after the mind stirs itself to want to do something by means of previewing images. It would be premature at best, I think, to conclude from this passage that we have anything like a full account of the mind's capacities or of its role in initiating action. Moreover, there seems to be no evidence in this passage, *pace* both Furley and Bobzien, that Epicureans believe our actions can be characterized as free only in so far as they voluntarily flow from our characters or are the outcome of the causal mechanisms that have fixed our characters. Such a conclusion can be arrived at only by shoehorning Lucretius' account of volition into an Aristotelian account of the voluntary, or at least, into one standard interpretation of Aristotle in which an agent's action is held to be voluntary just so long as it is determined by his character. The passage itself, however, makes no mention whatsoever of dispositions, fixed characters, prior causal history, etc., or any of these Aristotelian concerns. It only describes motions originating in the mind. Indeed, it strikes me that this particular feature of the tradition of interpretation inaugurated by Furley and continued by Bobzien is, in many ways, little more than an unsubstantiated Aristotelian fantasy with no real basis in Lucretius' text. Moreover, there are ample reasons external to this passage for thinking that Epicureans do not hold any of these particular Aristotelian tenets. For instance, at *DRN* 3.314 ff, Lucretius argues that no matter the nature of one's inherited make-up, one can still come to live a life worthy of the gods by means of *ratio* or reason alone. This is strictly in keeping with Epicurus' optimistic rationalism about our capacity to respond to reason and rational argument and to transform our lives at any time, no matter our past history or present condition. Our choices and actions are not determined by aspects of our prior character, no matter how deeply ingrained. Be that as it may, what this passage overtly is concerned to describe is a material process through which the body is set in motion by means of *voluntas*, once the mind receives an external image. Such a general picture is surely compatible with any number of views about the

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relation of the voluntary and our freedom, especially since the Epicureans offer an account of how the mind itself is freely able to select from a welter of images those which move it to action. When we turn to a much disputed passage on the swerve in book two of *De Rerum Natura*, we find much the same account of the relation of mind and *voluntas* (2.251–93), but with some further important clarifications:

Moreover, if all motion is always linked, and new motion arises out of old in fixed order, and atoms do not by swerving make some beginning of motion to break the decrees of fate, that cause should not follow cause from infinity, from where does this free volition (*libera voluntas*) exist for animals throughout the world? From (p. 78) where comes this volition wrested away from the fates, through which we proceed wherever each of us is led by his pleasure, and likewise swerve off our motions at no fixed time or fixed region of space, but wherever the mind (*mens*) itself carries us? For without doubt it is volition that gives these things their beginning for each of us, and it is from volition that motions are spread through the limbs... Thus you may see that the beginning of motion is created from the heart\* (\*where the mind is located) and proceeds initially from the mind's volition, and from there is spread further through the entire body and limbs... But that the mind should not itself possess an internal necessity in all its behaviour, and be overcome and, as it were, forced to suffer and be acted upon—that is brought about by a tiny swerve of atoms at no fixed region of space or fixed time. (Long and Sedley 20F)

Again, Lucretius here describes how the mind itself makes a beginning to motion that is then passed on through the body by *voluntas* or *voluntate animi*, the volition of the mind. Many scholars have fastened their attention on the phrase 'libera voluntas' and have translated this as 'free will', but it seems clear that in this account, volition is actually free only to the extent that the mind itself is free, since volitions are causally dependent on the movements of the mind. That is, volition is viewed as a material force that conveys the decision of the mind to the limbs materially and is strictly determined by the mind. Conversely, what guarantees the freedom of the mind is the swerve, which brings it about that 'the mind should not itself possess an internal necessity in all of its behaviour'. Exactly how atomic indeterminacies are supposed to underwrite the freedom of the mind is left unexplained, but the passage makes it clear that freedom originates in mental movements that are not wholly determined by prior causal conditions.

In this context, it might be useful to recall a distinction of Locke, who most likely was influenced by this general Epicurean picture of the relation of mind and the voluntary through Gassendi. Locke insists that describing such volitions as instances of 'free will' is actually a loose way of speaking. In a much quoted argument (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II.21.14), he remarks that 'in an inquiry about freedom, the question is not proper, whether the will be free, but whether a man be free'; and 'it is as significant to ask whether a man's will be free, as to ask whether his sleep be swift or his virtue square; liberty being as little applicable to the will as swiftness of motion to sleep or squareness to virtue'. For Locke, our liberty consists in our reason's capacity to choose

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between alternative courses of action and then to direct the will to carry out its decision. The voluntary motions of the will depend entirely on the executive function of reason, which itself is the ultimate origin of our freedom. This is why it is misleading to describe them as being free *simpliciter*. Lucretius, I suggest, offers in this passage the origins of such an account of the voluntary and its relation to the mind. Voluntary motions are initiated by the mind and then serve to materially convey its commands to the rest of the body. It is the mind itself, however, that is free in the sense of its capacity for initiating movements that are not determined by prior causal factors.

Lucretius claims, therefore, that what preserves this freedom of the mind from internal necessity are atomic indeterminacies, though he leaves unspecified how this is exactly supposed to work. However, if this overall picture is right, it allows us to draw (p. 79) two initial conclusions. First, the tradition of scholarship that has tried to link the swerve directly to *voluntas* in the sense of a capacity of 'free will' has made a kind of category mistake of the sort noticed by Locke, since as Lucretius claims in this passage, the swerve frees the mind from internal necessity, and presumably our freedom of decision ultimately lies there. Volitions themselves are strictly causally dependent on the mind. To be sure, Lucretius himself calls volitions free and treats them both as movements of the mind and as separate movements caused by the mind. This, no doubt, can lead to confusion, as Locke points out. Yet, at the same time, the Epicureans give an account of voluntary action that ultimately depends on the freedom of the mind and, as we shall see, its ability to choose between alternatives—a function of mind that they ascribe to reason. At the very least, then, Epicureans can hardly be said to inhabit, as claimed by MacIntyre and others, a conceptual space that is radically foreign to early modern philosophers such as Locke, for example, or, indeed, even to many contemporary philosophers. By the same token, Bobzien uses this passage as fodder for her general claim that no Hellenistic philosopher, indeed no one until Alexander, several centuries later, ever thought of freedom of choice as choosing between two alternatives. But, of course, her argument too is misaimed, since showing that *libera voluntas* in this passage is a strictly unidirectional causal process tells us nothing about whether Epicureans think that the freedom of the mind and of our reason are themselves characterized by an ability to choose between two alternatives. In fact, it is just this famous Lockean characteristic of rationality and liberty that is driven home again and again not only in extant Epicurean texts but also, presumably, in such lost Epicurean texts as *On Choice and Avoidance*. What characterizes the rational pursuit of pleasure and the good life for the Epicurean is our rational evaluation of every pleasure and our deciding whether to choose it or not in the light of our happiness (*Letter to Menoecus (Ad Men.)* 127.4–16).

Thus, in a sense, Huby was right to claim that Epicurus discovered the free will problem, to the extent that he thought that our freedom was incompatible with determinism. But he did not necessarily think that our will is free, since, like Locke, he took our volitions to be strictly causally dependent on our reason. By the same token, Furley was right to emphasize the causal nature of volitions for the Epicurean, although this too is only part

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of the story. To find the ultimate source of our ability to act freely, Epicureans think that we must look not to the causal dispositions of our character, but to reason's ability to rationally evaluate and deliberate between alternatives.

We have evidence that Epicurus argued that in order to give an adequate explanation of this particular feature of reason and of rational deliberation, it must be defended from a kind of mechanical determinism that would preclude the possibility of genuine reasoning and rational argument. Accordingly, he claims that the determinist's conclusions, if they are arrived at through reasoning that is causally necessitated, fail to be based on genuine reasoning. Even if the determinist bases his beliefs on evidence that is good, his assessment of the evidence will itself be causally necessitated and thus the determinist cannot adequately show the requisite sensitivity needed in assessing the merits of particular arguments. In an intriguing stretch of his badly lacunose *On Nature*, Epicurus apparently tries to show that arguments for determinism are self-refuting because of (p. 80) this kind of a failure in their sensitivity to an argument's rational merits (34.26–30 = Long and Sedley 20C). To be sure, his argument as it stands is inadequate on its own, since it addresses only one extreme form of determinism, namely fatalism. Only the fatalist is committed to claiming that we must accept the conclusion of an argument simply because we would have accepted it, no matter what. Determinists can still insist that the truth of propositions certainly influences the processes and outcomes of their reasoning as well as their assessment in appropriately rational ways. In fact, they might readily agree with Epicurus that fatalism precludes rationality, since it fails to show the requisite sensitivity to the merits or truth of particular arguments. If the causes that fix beliefs are appropriately sensitive to the relations that obtain between the processes, conclusions, and assessments of our arguments, however, they can maintain that the rationality of our beliefs is not undermined.

But why, we might ask, is Epicurus so keen to defend the possibility of rational argument and deliberation in the first place? One key reason is that he thinks that the rational evaluation of our desires is our most fundamental source of freedom and of our responsibility for our actions (Mitsis 1988: 132–52). He affirms, moreover, as opposed to Aristotle, a general optimism about the ongoing power of our reason, no matter our present state of character, to take evaluative attitudes towards our desires and 'to examine the good and evil on every occasion of every choice and avoidance' (*Principal Doctrines* (KD) 25). In a sense, Epicurus comes to treat reason as a kind of ongoing Archimedean point from which to leverage every aspect of our person and agency, no matter our present state, prior habits, or the nature of our settled beliefs about the good. This raises some difficult questions, of course, about how exactly we are to account for and explain these powers of reason in the light of nature's wider causal laws—questions that take us to the heart of Epicurus' particular form of incompatibilism.

Here, a final contrast to both Gassendi and Locke might again prove useful. Locke's thoughts about the crucial dependence of our liberty on reason were heavily dependent on Gassendi, who in turn had affirmed key features of Epicurus' account of voluntary action in opposition to the faculty psychology of both Descartes and the Scholastics. Like

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the Epicureans and Gassendi, Locke allows voluntary actions to be embedded in strictly causal sequences of stimulus and response while ascribing liberty, 'the great privilege of finite human beings', to the ability of our reason to scrutinize and examine alternative courses of action and to judge which of them better promotes our happiness. For Epicureans, the freedom of our mind's reason is connected, in ways that have yet to be satisfactorily explained, with uncaused atomic events. Gassendi, on the other hand, while subscribing generally to an Epicurean model of rational agency and freedom, roundly condemns the notion of uncaused events, since he thinks it would undermine arguments for divine providence and the rational causality of nature. That both share the same view about the powers of human reason and its relation to the voluntary, while sharply differing on the question of how reason itself is to be integrated into their wider views of natural causality, raises an intriguing question about the extent to which such shared models of voluntary and rational action are able to generate both libertarian and determinist positions. Epicurus, Gassendi, and subsequently Locke, (p. 81) who follows Gassendi, all attribute to reason the same power of deliberating between alternatives. Of course, it can be rather mysterious trying to figure out how Epicurus thinks that these powers of reason can be underwritten by indeterminacies in the universe, but it is perhaps no less mysterious how Gassendi hopes to base reason's powers of scrutiny and judgement in causal motions differing from those that characterize the movements of other natural objects, including those that are voluntary. Gassendi claims that *libentia*, voluntary movement, is a natural causal movement solely in one direction, whereas *libertas*, liberty, is able to intervene and to change its directions. We thus might well wonder if Gassendi's postulation of a different kind of causal motion grounding *libertas* is, in the end, all that different in terms of its explanatory mysteriousness from Epicurus' postulation of uncaused motions. Interestingly, all three proponents of the freedom of our rationality are reticent about attempts to thoroughly naturalize reason—if by that we mean coupling explanations of the power of reason to freely direct our desires with explanations of other natural physical motions. They are less worried on this score, however, about actions that are merely voluntary—those of animals and children, for instance—since these are more easily viewed as part of an ongoing natural causal sequence governed by mechanisms of stimulus and response. Of course, it is no great secret that the prospect of naturalizing reason has often turned out to be equally problematic for determinists and indeterminists alike, but it is perhaps worth noting that neither the problems confronted nor the solutions proffered should be taken to be radically different in the theories of the ancient Epicureans and early modern heirs such as Gassendi and Locke, who themselves stand at the head of a long modern philosophical tradition. Thus, Huby's claim that Epicureans discovered the problem of free will, even if somewhat askew, helpfully serves to illustrate how paying attention to the origins of a philosophical problem as well as to its subsequent historical outcomes can often cast light on both.

### 4.2 Death

Epicureans offered a series of arguments for the claim that we have no reason to fear death because 'it is nothing to us'. They were not alone among ancient philosophers in trying to defuse such fears, of course. In their own way, Socrates, Plato, and the Stoics all made corresponding attempts, though perhaps not in such grandiloquent and triumphant terms. But it is Epicurus' arguments in particular that have garnered by far the most contemporary attention, largely, no doubt, because of his insistence that death does us absolutely no harm, even though it means our utter extinction or annihilation. However counterintuitive, this central Epicurean claim harbours a series of difficult philosophical challenges (Rosenbaum 1986). Indeed, even though contemporary discussions of Epicurus' arguments have harnessed an increasingly impressive array of logical and metaphysical machinery in order to defend or combat what the ancient Epicureans took to be a rather commonplace set of considerations supporting their (p. 82) arguments, little agreement has emerged about the relative success of any of these efforts (see Warren 2004 for a clear, comprehensive account). At the same time, most contemporary arguments take the form of what the Epicureans themselves would have regarded as a distinctly rearguard action, in the sense that few contemporary ethical theorists have seriously considered, much less taken to heart, Epicurus' broader claim that a proper recognition of our mortality needs to be at the very heart of any systematic ethical theory. True, there may be a growing sense that when we read such fundamental works as, say, Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*, it can be slightly discomfiting to find in it barely a nod to the fact that rational moral agents must confront death and that their attitudes towards this prospect may have a significant impact on their overall prudential and moral deliberations. But it is only very recently that philosophers have started to seriously link their analyses of the metaphysical puzzles generated by Epicurus' claims about death with broader ethical concerns (Parfit 1984), for the most part still focusing on questions about individual welfare and happiness (Feldman 1992). Thus, the verdict remains out on whether this key aspect of Epicurus' ethical project will begin to gain further traction in wider arenas of contemporary ethical argument.

There is a succinct statement of Epicurus' basic claim about death in his *Letter to Menoeceus*:

Therefore that most frightful of evils, death, is nothing to us, seeing that when we exist, death is not present, and when death is present, we do not exist. Thus it is nothing either to the living or the dead, seeing that the former do not have it, and the latter no longer exist. (*Ad Men.* 125 = Long and Sedley 24 A5)

The Epicureans are materialists and they offer an impressive battery of empirical observations in defence of the view that we are strictly material entities whose matter is dispersed upon death, and along with it the relevant atomic structures upon which both our existence and identities as persons are grounded (cf. *DRN* 3, 1-857). Of course, there are other available views about our post-mortem prospects and the Epicureans cast doubt

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on many of them. But before looking at some of these responses, it might be helpful to focus, as do most contemporary critics of Epicurus, on the question of annihilation itself. In a short paper in 1970, Thomas Nagel defended the claim that even though, or perhaps just because, we are annihilated at death, we have reason to regard it as being harmful to us. Since it is probably no exaggeration to say that much of the subsequent philosophical work done on this question consists in a series of elaborations of various claims found in a compressed form in Nagel's paper, it remains the best single starting point for addressing the problems raised by Epicurus' views. At the same time, it is important to be aware of the particular ethical context and goals of Epicurus' arguments, since someone might hold, as Hobbes did, for instance, that we not only have ample reason to fear death, but also that such fear actually benefits us since it makes us both more inclined to look after our own self-interest and to be more tractable in our dealings with our neighbours. If we did not fear death, he claims, we could not properly cultivate our own best interests. The Epicureans, on the other hand, strongly disagree and the aim of their thanatology is, thus, twofold. They argue that the fear of death is based on a series (p. 83) of conceptual mistakes, hence irrational and unnecessary; but they are also keen to show how the fear of death in its own right has bad systemic effects on our lives. In fact, for Epicureans, it is the greatest obstacle we must overcome if we wish to live a happy life since it infects our lives with anxiety and leads us to engage in self-defeating and self-destructive pursuits. Fortunately for us, it is completely eliminable in their view, since further reflection shows that, strictly speaking, we can never actually experience our death; hence, we can experience nothing good or bad from it. Quite simply, it is nothing to us.

Epicurus' argument raises three important challenges for anyone who maintains that death both harms us and is to be feared (Rosenbaum 1989a). One must show *when* death harms us; *how* it does so; and that it actually harms *us*, in the sense of our being subjects whose existence is located in particular categorical spatio-temporal states. Epicureans assert that we typically make mistakes on all three of these counts because we fail to apprehend the nature of our extinction and continually project ourselves into our deaths as if we were still alive and experiencing a series of continued harms at death's hands. We often do this even while claiming to understand that we will be annihilated at death. The point is made in the following way by Lucretius:

For if there is going to be unhappiness and suffering, the person must also himself exist at that same time, for the evil to be able to befall him. Since death robs him of this, preventing the existence of the person for the evils to be heaped upon, you can tell that there is nothing for us to fear in death, that he who does not exist cannot be unhappy, and that when immortal death snatches away mortal life it is no different from never having been born. So when you see a man resent the prospect of his body being burned and rotting after death, or being destroyed by fire or by the jaws of wild beasts, you may be sure that his words do not ring true, and that there lurks in his heart some hidden sting, however much he may deny the belief that he will have any sensation in death. For he does not, I think, grant

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either the substance or ground of what he professes. Instead of completely stripping himself of life, unawares he is making some bit of himself survive. (*DRN* 3.861–78 = Long and Sedley 24 E, trans. modified).

Epicurus often moves easily between the claim that death cannot harm someone who does not exist and the claim that death cannot harm someone who does not perceive it as being painful. The latter claim derives from his hedonism: something that causes us no pain is no harm to us. Since our death is a state without any sensation, it is painless, hence harmless. Before turning to these two claims, however, it is perhaps worth pointing out one further conceptual point that Epicureans like to make. In trying to conceive of our own deaths we find it difficult—Freud would later say impossible—to extract ourselves from the imagined scene of our death. As a consequence, we continually project ourselves into our own and others' deaths in a way that makes us view death 'not as the annihilation of consciousness, but as the consciousness of annihilation'—to quote the nice Epicurean-like jingle of Silverstein 1980. Instead, we should come to understand, they argue, that there is really nothing that we can intelligibly imagine about a state of non-existence.

(p. 84) For the Epicureans, this kind of conceptual error regularly colours one of our most important worries about death, that is, that it deprives us of the *praemia vitae* or the rewards of life:

No more for you the welcome of a joyful home and a good wife. No more will your children run to snatch the first kiss... 'Unhappy man', they say, 'unhappily robbed by a single hateful day of all those rewards of life'. What they fail to add is this: 'Nor does any yearning for those things remain in you.' If they properly saw this with their mind, and followed it up in their words, they would unshackle themselves of great mental anguish and fear. (*DRN* 3.894–903 = Long and Sedley 24 E)

The notion that death robs us of the goods of life, or even just some further moments of life itself, is one of our most common intuitions, but it is one that quickly runs up against the Epicurean's demands for further clarification. For instance, exactly when does death rob us of life or life's goods? It certainly cannot rob us of anything when we are dead, the Epicurean replies, since we are not there to be robbed. By the same token, to claim that our future death is currently harming us by robbing us of something while we are now alive would seem to assume some form of backwards causation, otherwise how can a posthumous event do us any harm now? From these two considerations, the Epicureans conclude that since death can harm us neither when we are dead nor when we are alive, it never harms us. One might object, of course, that it is possible to locate the harm of death in that very moment of transition between our life and death (cf. Luper 2009). However, it is hard to see how such an objection escapes from difficulties of its own. If I am not alive at that particular moment of transition, how is it that I am being harmed? Or if I am in some sense still alive, worries again arise about backwards causation, since how is it that I am now being harmed by my future state of being dead? It seems open to the

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Epicurean, that is, to ask for clarification about the nature of the subject meant to be experiencing this transition. If there is a subject persisting through the transition, then there is not yet really a case of death—a case of dying perhaps, but not death. If there is no persisting subject, however, then it is hard to see how something that no longer exists can be said to be undergoing a transition. In Aristotelian terms, we might say that the notion of a moment of transition between life and death needs to be disambiguated between mere alteration and substantial change. Neither of these options by itself, however, conflicts with the Epicurean claim that death harms us neither when we exist nor after we have been annihilated.

In the light of such difficulties in fixing the harm of death in a temporal sequence, many have thought to cash out Nagel's suggestion that the harm of death occurs at no particular fixed time. This claim is part of his larger argument that the harm of death is 'irreducibly relational' and that 'most good and ill fortune has as its subject a person identified by his history and his possibilities, rather than by his categorical state of the moment' (1970: 77). One common way of illustrating this claim is by appealing to judgements about the relative worth of lives based on comparative counterfactual judgements. So, for example, Mozart, Bellini, and Schubert all had intensely creative, but relatively short lives. Wouldn't their lives have been better and the world of music much richer, if (p. 85) they had not been cut off by death so early? Nagel argues that our common intuitions suggest that we can recognize the harm that death caused in each of these cases, even if we cannot exactly place it temporally. It lies precisely in the enormous range of possibilities lost to these extraordinary lives because of their early deaths.

In attempting to give more precision to such intuitions, a large literature relying on possible world semantics has recently arisen (Bradley 2009). We can only speculate how Epicureans might have responded to such arguments (cf. Warren 2004: ch. 2), however, it is fairly clear that they would have been suspicious of comparisons based on modal properties of persons and so-called possible-world counterparts. Given their deeply rooted empiricism, they would insist on conclusions cashed out in categorical states of agents. There is a brief bit of evidence to this effect from Cicero (*Tusculan Disputations* (*Tusc.*) i. 9–11), where it is suggested that Epicureans think that comparisons involving the dead rest on simple mistakes of logic because one cannot coherently predicate properties such as 'happy' or 'miserable' of something that does not exist. The Epicurean holds that the benefits and harms that I experience today and will experience tomorrow can be compared coherently only if it turns out that I am there at both those times as an existing subject so that their effects on me can be gauged. Comparisons between times when I do and do not exist can appear to be of the same form, but they are crucially different and fail to go through because there is no persisting subject to ground both sides of the comparison.

Such considerations are not likely to move possible worlds theorists, of course, but they do point to some importantly different background assumptions. The Epicureans are worried about the practical effect of theories and expect that metaphysical and ethical

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beliefs will be mutually reinforcing. So, for instance, the Epicurean would register a general worry about how modal accounts of individual identity might affect our ethical beliefs because of their likely indifference to capturing any meaningful sense of our mortality. Grant, for instance, that there are possible worlds in which I may live forever. How should that affect my attitudes towards death? Nagel, for instance, concludes his paper with the claim that 'if there is no limit to the amount of life it would be good to have, it may be that a bad end is in store for us all' (Nagel 1970: 79). For the Epicurean, the idea that we should base our judgements about death in accordance with a theoretical framework that allows for the possibility of our continuing on forever makes two fundamental mistakes. First, it is likely to engender irrational and unsatisfiable yearnings for immortality that will turn out to be the source of troubling anxiety:

Hence a correct understanding that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not by adding infinite time, but by ridding us of the desire for immortality. (*Ad Men.* 124 = Long and Sedley 24 A)

Second, by failing to be bound by the actual natural limits of human desires and lives, such an account conjures up a view of immortality that is itself unnatural and undesirable. An unending life, Epicureans argue, would become unendurable because of its repetitiveness and tediousness. Most people who think they would like to live forever have given little thought to what such a life actually would entail. Engaging in the same (p. 86) tasks again and again for an eternity would, the Epicurean insists, make us like Sisyphus and it would empty our tasks of all interest and meaning. To the objection that, despite the tedium of immortality (cf. Williams 1973), at least we would not need to fear death if we were immortal, the Epicurean claims that everyone would naturally prefer a shorter happy life to one of unending tedium. More important, the notion of an unending life is nothing but an irrational fantasy in the first place. Given our nature and the fact of our annihilation at death, speculations about unending possible lives can only lead us to be fearful of death by engendering desires for something that is neither actual nor desirable. If we want to usefully think about ourselves in terms of modal properties, we might do so not, as it were, horizontally, but vertically, in the sense of realizing in the here and now our potential understanding of both the natural world and ourselves, and as a consequence, learning to lead the happy lives that are at this very instant within our grasp.

One might agree with the Epicurean that counterfactual speculations about what it would be like to live forever are of limited practical use when confronting the prospect of our actual annihilation. Yet, even if one agrees that an unending life is neither possible nor desirable, one might still want just a little extra time, say, either to give one's life the kind of overall shape one expects for it (Striker 1988) or to finish the narrative one would like to tell about oneself (Velleman 2000; Mitsis 2007). If death can interrupt these potential goals of mine, don't I have reason to fear it? Again, the Epicurean thinks that such worries are based on a series of mistaken assumptions.

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Let us take first the question of life's duration and the notion that, even if we have rid ourselves of the desire for immortality, we still might reasonably wish for some extra time and, as a consequence, have reason to fear death's arrival. Epicureans offer the following thought experiment to show that we will not harbour such wishes once we rationally comprehend the actual nature of our non-existence instead of irrationally projecting ourselves or possible future selves into our post-mortem annihilation. Their argument depends on what they take to be a commonly held, but irrational, asymmetry in our attitudes towards the two periods of non-existence that encompass our lives. Lucretius offers the following version:

Look back again to see how the unending expanse of past time, before we are born, has been nothing to us. For Nature holds this forth to us as a mirror image of the time to come after our death. Is there anything terrible there, does anything seem gloomy? Is it not more peaceful than any sleep? (*DRN* 3.972–77)

We typically live our lives without being bothered by the thought that there was a time in the past when we did not exist. Yet, we seem frightened by the thought of our future non-existence. How can we justify this asymmetry in our attitudes towards these two periods of our non-existence? The Epicurean argues that it is irrational to hold asymmetric attitudes towards two states that are the same; hence there can be no justification. Moreover, once we recognize that they are the same, we can come to revise our attitudes and regard our death with the same indifference with which we typically regard our pre-vital non-existence. Such recognition will enable us, moreover, to stop projecting ourselves into our future non-existence and to come to understand that we are not really (p. 87) worried by the duration of our lives *per se*. If we were, we might wish that we had been born earlier so that our lives would have been longer, or we might bemoan the lost possibilities of our earlier non-existence. But we do not do either; nor do we appeal to modal properties in cases when we actually understand their true purchase. Thus, if it seems merely irrational to lament the lost possibilities of the time before we were born, it is equally irrational to lament the loss of our possibilities in death, since they are both equivalent states of our non-existence.

The Epicurean argument can be attacked on many fronts since we can question whether the alleged symmetry is in fact strong enough to warrant regarding both periods of our non-existence in the exact same manner (Luper 2009). Our pre-vital non-existence is followed by life, whereas our post mortem non-existence is followed by nothing, so we might appeal to that difference to justify holding an asymmetric attitude. Moreover, it might seem that Lucretius' general strategy of getting us to revise our attitudes could backfire. An alternative way of keeping my attitudes symmetrical is to begin viewing my pre-vital non-existence with the same dread as I view my death. Of course, the Epicurean would argue that such a strategy is mistaken both because it increases anxiety and because it makes mistakes about the nature of our non-existence (Rosenbaum 1989a). But the mere demand for consistency that this argument makes may be insufficient on its own to block its strategy from backfiring.

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The Epicureans have a final argument, however, for their claim that we should have no concern for the length of our lives. Although it seems rather obscure at first blush, it relies on central features of their hedonism and attempts to show how a pleasurable life can come to be complete in such a way that its duration does not matter. If I am leading a pleasurable life in the right way, Epicurus' claims, my life cannot be made any better by living longer; thus I need have no anxiety that death might rob me of time I would need for living a completely happy life. Clearly, such a view is strikingly at odds with typical conceptions of hedonism that ascribe value to such features as the varying intensity and duration of pleasures, so it will be helpful to turn to Epicurus' arguments to see what could lead a hedonist to reject such criteria as being crucially valuable characteristics of pleasure.

### 4.3 Pleasure

At first glance, Epicurus' hedonism seems to have a familiar ring. He claims that we are all naturally disposed to pursue pleasure from birth and that it serves as the final goal of all our actions. In our most extensive and connected surviving discussion, Cicero's *De Finibus*, the Epicurean interlocutor, Torquatus, gives the following account:

as soon as every animal is born, it seeks after pleasure and rejoices in it as the greatest good, while it rejects pain as the greatest bad and, as far as possible, avoids it; and it does this while it is not yet corrupted, on the innocent and sound judgement of nature itself. Hence, he says that there is no need to prove or discuss why pleasure is (p. 88) to be pursued and pain avoided. He thinks that these matters are sensed just like the heat of fire. (*Fin.* 1.30 = Long and Sedley 21 A2)

Unlike their rivals, the Cyrenaics who argue that the true hedonist will just pursue the next pleasure that presents itself without troubling over any overall balance sheet, the Epicureans argue that we need to exercise prudence in our choices to make sure that the things we pursue actually produce pleasure in the long run:

for this reason we do not choose every pleasure either, but we sometimes pass over many pleasures in cases where their outcome for us is a greater quantity of discomfort;...Every pleasure, then because of its natural affinity, is something good, yet not every pleasure is choiceworthy. (*Ad Men.*129=Long and Sedley 21 B3)

So far, these points about the pursuit of pleasure and its justification are fairly commonplace. Complications arise, however, in Epicurus' account of pleasure itself. We might think that pleasure is to be identified with a certain positive, agreeable feeling and pain with its opposite, and that we might then treat both along a sliding scale divided in the middle by a neutral state that is neither pleasurable nor painful. Epicurus, however,

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rejects such a view and distinguishes two sorts of pleasure. He argues that there are 'kinetic' as well as 'katastematic' or 'static' pleasures. Kinetic pleasures consist in those positive sensations and feelings that are often taken to be the hallmark of pleasure, whereas katastematic ones are those that arise in an organism when bodily pain or mental distress has been removed. For Epicurus, moreover, it is this latter freedom from pain and distress that is the greatest pleasure.

The pleasure we pursue is not just that which moves our actual nature with some gratification and *percipitur* (is received, perceived, felt) by the senses in company with a certain delight; we hold that to be the greatest pleasure which *percipitur* (is received, perceived, felt) once all pain has been removed. For when we are freed from pain, we enjoy (*gaudemus*) the actual freedom and absence of all distress; therefore the complete removal of pain has rightly been called a pleasure;...Hence Epicurus did not accept the existence of anything between pleasure and pain. What some people regarded as in between—the complete absence of pain—was not only pleasure but also the greatest pleasure. For anyone who *sentit* (feels, perceives, is aware of) his own condition must either have pleasure or pain. Epicurus, moreover, supposes that complete absence of pain marks the limit of the greatest pleasure, so that thereafter pleasure can be varied and differentiated but not increased and expanded. (*Fin.* 37–8 = Long and Sedley 21 A 6–7; modified)

How Epicureans conceived of the exact relation between these two types of pleasure is much debated (see Purinton 1993; Wolfsdorf 2009), but it seems fairly clear how Epicurus' might have hoped that such a view of hedonism, among other things, could serve to anchor his thanatology. Most of Epicurus' critics both ancient and modern have thought that the project of trying to fit any sort of hedonism into his strong claims about the harmlessness of death is doomed to failure, since no plausible conception of pleasure could possibly emerge from such a project. Indeed, some critics have argued that, given his hedonism, his claims about death must be something of a bluff. This is unlikely, however, (p. 89) given the amount of effort that later Epicureans, such as Philodemus, spent in showing how his views about death and pleasure cohere (cf. *De Morte* XII.26 ff; Warren 2004: ch. 4). It is perhaps suggestive as well in this context that another group of hedonists, the Cyrenaics, also believed that their hedonism freed one from the fear of death. Thus, before dismissing such a project outright, it might be useful to contrast Epicurus' views of pleasure with those of the Cyrenaics to see what kind of case hedonists can make for eliminating our fear of death.

The Epicureans were often called upon to distinguish and defend their own more austere and sober form of hedonism from the seemingly simpler, albeit uncompromising, version of the Cyrenaics (cf. Annas 1993). If we turn to their respective opening moves, we immediately see the nature of the gulf separating them. Both offer so-called 'cradle arguments' (see Brunschwig 1986) that make inferences from the behaviour of infants and animals to our primary natural motivation. The Cyrenaics argue that infants are motivated by an appetite for sensual pleasures and delight (Diogenes Laertius (D.L.) 2.88), while the Epicureans, for their part, maintain that at the most basic level infants shun

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pain (D.L 10.137). Whether we are more convinced by the evidence of a baby squealing with delight upon seeing a toy or of one quieting down for the night after having been given a bottle, their differing assessment of our earliest state displays in capsule form the overall trajectory that their theories take. For the Cyrenaic, life consists in a continual restless movement from one lively unplanned pleasure to another, while the goal for an Epicurean is to maintain a carefully controlled life of undisturbed satisfaction and tranquillity. Thus, from the point of view of the Cyrenaic, the Epicurean pursues the pleasures of a corpse, while for the Epicurean, the Cyrenaic engages in an emotional rollercoaster ride that will leave him inevitably unsatisfied and at the mercy of fortune. Interestingly, both think that their own strategy will make them immune to the fear of death, however, since the Cyrenaic believes that if he cares only for present pleasures in the right way, he will have no concern for the future nor cause for any worry about himself in the future, since he is sceptical about any connections between his present and future selves. Indeed, since he has eliminated all concern for a future self, he need not worry that death might harm *him* or interrupt anything that he cares about in the future. The Epicurean, on the other hand, claims that once one achieves the proper state of mental tranquillity (*ataraxia*) and freedom from bodily pain (*aponia*), one no longer cares about the duration of one's life. At first glance, this may look perilously close to the Cyrenaic and what can only be described as a deeply counterintuitive and peculiar conception of personal identity, but the Epicurean tries to fashion a normative source of personal identity compatible with fearlessness towards the future. The Epicurean claims that his mental pleasures are temporally extended in the sense that at any moment he can confidently rely on future expectations and also summon up memories of past pleasures. With these techniques of mental pleasure the Epicurean can hold together an extended self without, however, fearing death.

Even though both the Epicureans and Cyrenaics couch their arguments in terms of pleasure and its characteristics, it is clear that both hope to import certain values and attitudes along an axis that starts to stretch purely hedonic criteria in competing directions. (p. 90) The Cyrenaics think that the radically subjective nature of knowledge and perception makes it the case that pleasure itself is radically subjective. Epicurus, on the other hand, values rational control and individual invulnerability in a way that leads him to demote the lively present pleasures of the Cyrenaics. He does so in ways, moreover, that place him at the head of a long tradition of hedonists who try to build in certain objective normative criteria for 'true' pleasures as opposed to 'false' or 'empty' ones. Of course, disputes typically arise between hedonists and their critics precisely about the extent to which such criteria are actually hedonic or whether they are rooted instead in non-hedonic sources of value. In Epicurus' case, the hedonic nature of these criteria may fall under some suspicion since he seems to embrace as *katastematic* pleasures states of an agent that are dependent on various favoured beliefs about the world—fearlessness towards death, an understanding of atomism, recognition of divine indifference, etc.—and it might be argued that such beliefs are prior and independent

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sources of value that an agent's particular pleasures are causally dependent on. In one of his so-called *Key Doctrines*, we find the claim that:

the limit of pleasure in the mind is produced by rationalizing those very things and their congeners which used to present the mind with its greatest fears. (*KD* 18 = Long and Sedley 21 E 1)

As Aristotle famously argued, to the extent that my pleasures are dependent upon prior beliefs about value, they cannot themselves serve as the kind of independent standard of the good that is claimed for them by the hedonist. At the same time, however, Cicero's report of the Epicurean theory (p. 88 above) suggests that if one is aware of or feels (*sentit*) one's condition—and this presumably includes such attitudinal states as fearlessness towards death—one either experiences pleasure or pain. Though admittedly speculative given our evidence and the ambiguity of Cicero's phrasing, one distinction that Epicurus' account may be pointing to is one that is often hard won for contemporary hedonists and arguably non-existent in other ancient accounts of pleasure: that there is something about the way that holding a particular belief feels. Holding the right belief feels pleasurable. It is not just that the Epicurean maintains various cognitive attitudes to the world that cause pleasure, but that such attitudes themselves are united and justified by a particular sort of pleasurable feel. Of course, the Cyrenaics would find such pleasurable attitudinal states too far removed from the 'hot' affective bodily ones that they favour. But to the extent that there are katastematic mental states that are pleasurable, one possible way of understanding them is to view them as occurrent attitudinal states that are themselves pleasurable, or as Cicero writes, that we enjoy or take pleasure in (*gaudemus*, above p. 88). That is, such states are not just purely cognitive, but have a particular feel that makes them pleasurable to hold.

Indeed, the Epicurean thinks that such katastematic states are so pleasurable that everything else that people value in life pales before them. That is why they deny that reaching particular stages in life, performing a wide range of Aristotelian-approved activities, or telling and completing an elaborate narrative about how one has lived are important for the achievement of such a state of katastematic pleasure and happiness. Moreover, (p. 91) one can reach such a condition of complete happiness and pleasure at any time. Epicurus' follower, Pythocles, apparently did so as a young man and one can do so just as well when one is old. That is why Epicurus rejects the saying of Solon that one must look to the end to judge one's life (*S.V.* 76). Solon's judgement is based on the wrong sort of criteria, since one at any time can achieve complete happiness immediately upon reaching a state of Epicurean *ataraxia*.

Epicurus' claim that achieving a particular sort of psychic and physical condition is sufficient itself for happiness clearly cuts across many common intuitions. But we might object that even so, such a condition is still not immune from being harmed by death. Why wouldn't an Epicurean want to continue in such a supremely pleasurable state and, hence, be compelled to harbour some sort of disturbing negative attitude towards a potential interruption by death? The Epicurean answer is, as we have seen (above p. 88),

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the stipulation that once one has achieved the limit of pleasure, it cannot be increased or expanded by duration. Moreover, one can only maintain such a state if one remains unperturbed by worries about its continuance. To fear its loss is already to have lost it.

The idea that one would want or be able to live such a life focused on achieving a particular state of feeling that is rooted in knowledge of a particular set of objective truths may at first glance seem to have little in common with the great majority of Epicurus' hedonist successors. That is, until one remembers, say, how Locke claims that God has made sure that we will all enjoy the eternal post-mortem pleasures awaiting us. If we weigh up properly the paltriness of present pleasures against those that await us in eternity, we can come to see their objective superiority. No mortal could rationally prefer earthly pleasures and no mortal would fail to find eternal ones pleasant in the right way, since 'could we suppose their relishes as different there as they are here, yet the manna in heaven will suit every one's palate' (*Essay* II.21.67).

If the Epicurean would find Locke's account of eternal post-mortem pleasures a bit mysterious, then it may perhaps be fitting to close this discussion of the more obscure reaches of Epicurus' secular pleasures not with more argument, but, as often happens in ancient arguments when one reaches in impasse, with an exemplum—in this case, Philodemus' description of the Epicurean wise man.

The one who understands, having grasped that he is capable of achieving everything sufficient for the good life, immediately and for the rest of his life walks about already ready for burial, and enjoys the single day as if it were eternity. (Philodemus, *De Morte* XXXVIII.14–19 Kuiper)

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### **Phillip Mitsis**

Phillip Mitsis is A. S. Onassis Professor of Hellenic Culture and Civilization at New York University and Academic Director of the American Institute of Verdi Studies. He has published papers on Greek epic and tragedy, and on the history of ancient and early modern philosophy. His writings on Epicurus include *The Pleasures of Invulnerability: Epicurus' Ethical Theory* (1988).

