

Expressing Tranquility


Worthwhile Action at the Limit of Epicurean Pleasure

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ABSTRACT The Epicureans are hedonists who believe that pleasure is the only intrinsic good. Since pleasure is the only intrinsic good, other things are only worthwhile for the sake of pleasure. Tranquility is the final Epicurean *telos*, i.e., all of our actions should aim for freedom from bodily and mental pain. According to the Epicureans, tranquility is the limit of the magnitude of pleasures so that there is no pleasure beyond tranquility. Once we free ourselves from all pain, there are no further pleasures to pursue. This poses the following problem. Since hedonism is true and something is only worthwhile for the sake of pleasure, but there are no further pleasures for those who have achieved tranquility to pursue, then it seems that nothing is worthwhile to the tranquil. This poses a problem for Epicureans because they should reject this consequence and they seem to want to do so, but they cannot without contradicting themselves about the nature and limit of pleasure. I call this the Nothing is Worthwhile to the Tranquil Problem (NWP). This paper develops a strategy that Epicureans can adopt to solve NWP. I develop this strategy in three stages. First, I explain NWP: Epicurean claims about the limit and nature of pleasure suggest that nothing can be worthwhile to the tranquil. Second, I show that this problem is analogous to the Problem of Creation (PoC), which claims that an impassible God has no reasons to create. Third, I argue that a prominent solution to PoC can also solve NWP. That solution goes as follows. Some activities are worthwhile to the tranquil because these activities express tranquility, just as creating is worthwhile to God because it expresses God's perfections. In the final section, I raise three objections to this solution. None of them is strong enough to defeat the solution for which I argue, and so I conclude that it merits consideration as a solution to NWP.

KEYWORDS creation; epicureanism; Epicurus; tranquility

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Epicureans are hedonists who believe that pleasure is the only intrinsic good. Since pleasure is the only intrinsic good, other things are only worthwhile for the sake of pleasure. Tranquility is the final Epicurean *telos*: i.e., all of our actions should aim for freedom from bodily and mental pain. According to the Epicureans, tranquility is the limit of the magnitude of pleasures, so that there is no pleasure beyond tranquility. Once we free ourselves from all pain, there are no further pleasures to pursue. This poses the following problem: since hedonism is true, and something is only worthwhile for the sake of pleasure, but there are no further pleasures for those who have achieved tranquility to pursue, then it seems that nothing is worthwhile to the tranquil. This poses a problem for Epicureans, because they should reject this consequence, and they seem to want to do so, but they cannot without contradicting themselves about the nature and limit of pleasure. I call this the Nothing is Worthwhile to the Tranquil Problem (NWP). This paper develops a strategy that Epicureans can adopt to solve NWP. I develop this strategy in three stages. First, I explain NWP: Epicurean claims about the limit and nature of pleasure suggest that nothing can be worthwhile to the tranquil. Second, I show that this problem is analogous to the Problem of Creation (PoC), which claims that an impassible God has no reasons to create. Third, I argue that a prominent solution to PoC can also solve NWP. That solution goes as follows. Some activities are worthwhile to the tranquil because these activities express tranquility, just as creating is worthwhile to God because it expresses God's perfections. In the final section, I raise three objections to this solution. None of them is strong enough to defeat the solution for which I argue, and so I conclude that it merits consideration as a solution to NWP.

2. THE NOTHING IS WORTHWHILE TO THE TRANQUIL PROBLEM (NWP)

Epicurean ethics is hedonistic. *Ep. Men.* 128-129, for example, claim that pleasure is the beginning and goal of living blessedly, the first good, the innate good, and the starting point of every choice and avoidance.¹ Epicurus

1. και διὰ τοῦτο τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος λέγομεν εἶναι τοῦ μακαριῶς ζῆν. ταύτην γὰρ ἀγαθὸν πρῶτον καὶ συγγενικὸν ἐγνωμεν, καὶ ἀπὸ ταύτης καταρχόμεθα πάσης αἰρέσεως καὶ φυγῆς, καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτην καταπῶμεν ὡς κανόνι τῷ πάθει πᾶν ἀγαθὸν κρίνοντες. Unless noted otherwise, all translations of primary sources are from *Epicurus: The Epicurus Reader*, trans. Brad Inwood and L.P. Gerson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994). References to primary texts use the following conventions: *Kuriai Doxai (Principal Doctrines)* = *KD*; *Sententiae Vaticanae (Vatican Sayings)* = *VS*; *Letter to Menoeceus* = *Ep. Men.*; *Letter to Herodotus* = *Ep. Hdt.*; *de Finibus (On Goals)* = *DF*; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* = *DL*; *Seneca's Epistles* = *Sen. Ep.*

himself posits two kinds of pleasure: the kinetic and the katastematic.² Kinetic pleasures are active; they are the good feelings one experiences while satisfying some permissible desire—e.g., the pleasure of drinking water while thirsty. Katastematic pleasures are static; they are the good feelings that result from satisfying some permissible desire—e.g., the pleasure of not being thirsty after drinking water. The final Epicurean *telos* is tranquility, which consists in the absence of bodily and mental pain. Tranquility is complete katastematic pleasure. We desire freedom from all aches and worries, and tranquility results when we satisfy these desires. This is why *Ep. Men.* 128 tells us that

the unwavering contemplation of these [desires] enables one to refer every choice and avoidance to the health of the body and the freedom of soul from disturbance, since this is the goal of a blessed life. For we do everything for the sake of being neither in pain nor in terror.³

Consequently, although pleasure is the only intrinsic good, Epicureans aim not to experience as many kinetic pleasures as possible, but for complete katastematic pleasure—i.e., tranquility. Thus, *Ep. Men.* 131 reminds its reader:

So when we say pleasure is the goal we do not mean the pleasures of the profligate or the pleasure of consumption ... but rather from lack of pain in the body and disturbance in the soul.⁴

Still, all of these passages tell us that pleasure is the goal. Since pleasure is the goal, other things are only worthwhile when they are for the sake of pleasure.

This means that if something is not for the sake of pleasure, then it is not worthwhile. However, those who have already achieved tranquility cannot do anything at all for the sake of pleasure, from which it follows

2. *DL* 10.136. ὁ δ' Ἐπίκουρος ἐν τῷ Περὶ αἰρέσεων οὕτω λέγει· “ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἀταραξία καὶ ἀπονία καταστηματικαὶ εἰσιν ἡδοναί· ἡ δὲ χαρὰ καὶ ἡ εὐφροσύνη κατὰ κίνησιν ἐνεργεῖα βλέπονται.”

3. τούτων γὰρ ἀπλανῆς θεωρία πᾶσαν αἴρεσιν καὶ φυγὴν ἐπανάγειν οἶδεν ἐπὶ τῆν τοῦ σώματος ὑγίαν καὶ τῆν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀταραξίαν, ἐπεὶ τοῦτο τοῦ μακαρίως ζῆν ἐστι τέλος. τούτου γὰρ πάντα πράττομεν, ὅπως μῆτε ἀλγῶμεν μῆτε ταρβῶμεν.

4. ὅταν οὖν λέγωμεν ἡδονὴν τέλος ὑπάρχειν, οὐ τὰς τῶν ἀσώτων ἡδονὰς καὶ τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κεμμένας λέγομεν, ὡς τινες ἀγνοοῦντες καὶ οὐχ ὁμολογοῦντες ἢ κακῶς ἐκδεχόμενοι νομίζουσιν, ἀλλὰ τὸ μῆτε ἀλγεῖν κατὰ σῶμα μῆτε ταράττεσθαι κατὰ ψυχὴν.

that nothing can be worthwhile to the tranquil. In order to see why this follows, we must first make sense of some Epicurean claims about the limit and nature of pleasure. *KD III* claims that “The removal of all feeling of pain is the limit of the magnitude of pleasures.”⁵ Since tranquility just is freedom from pain, tranquility provides the limit of the magnitude of pleasures. To make sense of what this means, we can consult *Ep. Men.* 128, which says that “As soon as we achieve this state [i.e. tranquility] every storm in the soul is dispelled, since the animal is not in a position to go after some need nor to seek something else to complete the good of the body and the soul.”⁶ According to *Ep. Men.* 128, once we achieve tranquility, we have no further needs to meet or goods to seek. This is what *KD III* means when it claims that tranquility is the limit of magnitude of pleasures. Tranquility is the greatest pleasure possible and it results from the elimination of bodily and mental pains. Once we accomplish this, there are no other pleasures to pursue. Let us recall here that the Epicureans only posit two kinds of pleasure: the kinetic and the katastematic. Neither kind of pleasure is available to those who have achieved tranquility. If the tranquil could pursue kinetic pleasures, then the removal of the feeling of pain would not provide the limit of the magnitude of pleasures, and this contradicts *KD III*. Similarly, if the tranquil could pursue kinetic pleasures, then there would be goods of the body and soul for the tranquil to pursue, and this contradicts *Ep. Men.* 128. The same reasons explain why the tranquil cannot pursue katastematic pleasures beyond tranquility, either: if this were possible for them, then tranquility would not provide the limit of the magnitude of pleasures and there would be goods of the body and soul beyond tranquility, but these entailments also contradict *KD III* and *Ep. Men.* 128. There is an additional reason that the tranquil cannot pursue katastematic pleasures: it is impossible by definition. Tranquility just is the absence of bodily and mental pain, which results from meeting all of our needs. Thus the tranquil have no unmet needs. However, katastematic pleasure is the good feeling we experience from meeting our needs, so there just are no katastematic pleasures for the tranquil to pursue.

We can now formalize the problem for Epicureans that this paper aims to solve, which I call the Nothing is Worthwhile to the Tranquil Problem (NWP). Since hedonism is true, pleasure is the only intrinsic good. Since

5. Ὁρος τοῦ μεγέθους τῶν ἡδονῶν ἢ παντὸς τοῦ ἀλγοῦντος ὑπεξαίρεσις.

6. ὅταν δὲ ἅπαξ τοῦτο περὶ ἡμᾶς γένηται, λύεται πᾶς ὁ τῆς ψυχῆς χεμίων, οὐκ ἔχοντος τοῦ ζώου βαδίζειν ὡς πρὸς ἐνδέον τι καὶ ζητεῖν ἕτερον ᾧ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ σώματος ἀγαθὸν συμπληρῶσεται.

pleasure is the only intrinsic good, things are only worthwhile for the sake of pleasure. There are only two kinds of pleasure: kinetic pleasure and katastematic pleasure. Consequently, things are only worthwhile for the sake of either kinetic pleasure or katastematic pleasure. This means that if something is not for the sake of kinetic or katastematic pleasure, then it is not worthwhile. However, because tranquility is the limit and magnitude of pleasures and there are no needs to meet or goods to seek once someone achieves tranquility, there are no kinetic or katastematic pleasures for the tranquil to pursue. Since there are no such pleasures for the tranquil to pursue, they cannot do anything for the sake of pleasure. Since the tranquil cannot do anything for the sake of pleasure, nothing can be worthwhile to the tranquil.

The aim of this paper is to generate a strategy that Epicureans can employ in order to avoid this consequence. They should develop such a strategy. Epicureans would render their ethics weaker in the face of some objections that others have raised against them than it already is if they were willing to concede that nothing can be worthwhile to the tranquil. For example, the Epicureans take friendship to be supremely important. *KD XXVII* even suggests that friendship is the greatest resource we have at our disposal for ensuring that our lives go well. “Of the things which wisdom provides for the blessedness of one’s whole life, by far the greatest is the possession of friendship.”⁷ Epicurean friends are supposed to be willing to go to great lengths for one another. *VS 56–57*, for example, claim that,

The wise man feels no more pain when he is tortured [than when his friend is tortured, and will die on his behalf; for if he betrays] his friend, his entire life will be confounded and utterly upset because of a lack of confidence.⁸

Despite the Epicurean insistence that friends should be willing to go to great lengths for one another, ancient opponents of Epicureanism still criticized the school for developing an impoverished view of friendship. After all, since the Epicureans are hedonists, if they are also egoists, as

7. Ὦν ἡ σοφία παρασκευάζεται εἰς τὴν τοῦ ὄλου βίου μακαριότητα, πολὺ μέγιστόν ἐστιν ἢ τῆς φιλίας κτήσις.

8. ἀλγεῖ μὲν ὁ σοφὸς οὐ μᾶλλον στρεβλούμενος <ἢ στρεβλουμένου τοῦ φίλου, καὶ ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ τεθνήσκειται· εἰ γὰρ προήσεται> τὸν φίλον ὁ βίος αὐτοῦ πάς δι’ ἀπιστίαν συγχυθήσεται καὶ ἀνακεχαιτισμένος ἔσται. The bracketed text contains an eleven word lacuna used to reconstruct the passage, which most scholars accept.

most scholars believe,⁹ then friendship is only worthwhile for the sake of one's own pleasure, and some opponents insist that this is incompatible with the sort of other-concern that friendship requires of us. We know that some even gave into such criticism. According to *DF* 1.69, some Epicureans

are afraid that if we believe that friendship is to be pursued for the sake of our own pleasure, all of friendship might be crippled. So they say that people first meet, pair up, and desire to form associations for the sake of pleasure, but that when increasing experience [of each other] has produced the sense of a personal bond, then love flowers to such a degree that even if there is no utility to be gained from the friendship the friends themselves are still loved for their own sake.¹⁰

Not all Epicureans responded to such criticism by allowing friends to have intrinsic value. Epicureans developed other replies to this criticism.¹¹ Still, that Epicureans are sensitive to the worry that their account of friendship is too egoistic explains why they should not concede that nothing can be worthwhile to the tranquil. If nothing can be worthwhile to the tranquil, then friends are merely instruments that we use to achieve tranquility ourselves. Once we achieve tranquility, our friends are no longer worthwhile. They would only be worthwhile if there were pleasures available to us that they could help us to pursue, but there are no such pleasures available to the tranquil, and so friends cannot be worthwhile to the tranquil. This has the surprising implication that we should abandon our friends once we achieve tranquility because they are no longer worthwhile, which seems uncharacteristic of true friends.¹² Consequently, if there is a strategy

9. Brown (2009, 189), for example, takes the conjunction of egoism and hedonism to form the fundamental dictum of Epicurean ethics, which is that "everything worth choosing is worth choosing for the sake of one's own pleasure." Arensen (2019), Rossi (2017), Dimas (2015) and O'Connor (1989) also take Epicurus to be a consistent egoist.

10. *Sunt autem quidam Epicurei timidiore paulo contra vestra convicia, sed tamen satis acuti, qui verentur ne, si amicitiam propter nostram voluptatem expetendam putemus, tota amicitia quasi claudicare videatur. itaque primos congressus copulationesque et consuetudinum instituendarum voluntates fieri propter voluptatem; cum autem usus progrediens familiaritatem effecerit, tum amorem efflorescere tantum, ut, etiamsi nulla sit utilitas ex amicitia, tamen ipsi amici propter se ipsos amentur.*

11. Some, for example, claim that our friends and pleasure are inseparable, so that to care for our pleasure is to care for our friends themselves. Others claim that our friends' pleasures are pleasures for us, so that we can care about our friends for their own sake even on egoistic grounds. See *DF* 1.66-1.69 for an outline of these strategies.

12. Evans (2004, 419) considers the possibility that the Epicurean Sage might have prudential reasons to "cut and run," because the sacrifices that friends should make far outweigh

available to the Epicureans that enables them to avoid making a concession that has the entailment that friends are not worthwhile to the tranquil, they should consider it.

Epicureans should not only consider such a strategy because without one they would develop a problematic account of friendship; they should also consider such a strategy because they would contradict themselves without one. I have argued that Epicurean claims about the nature and limit of pleasure suggest nothing can be worthwhile to the tranquil. Nonetheless, the Epicureans suggest that even those who have achieved tranquility have *pro tanto* reasons to do some things. Unless one can have *pro tanto* reasons to do something without that thing being worthwhile, this suggestion generates a contradiction for the consequence of NWP that nothing can be worthwhile to the tranquil. Epicurean claims about the conditions in which doing philosophy is worthwhile most clearly demonstrate this incompatibility. *Ep. Men.* 122 claims that “He who says either that the time for philosophy has not come or that it has passed is like someone who says that the time for *eudaimonia* has not come or that it has passed.”¹³ The time to do philosophy never passes: i.e., it is always the time to do philosophy. Since it is always the time to do philosophy, philosophy is always worthwhile. On the other hand, since nothing is worthwhile to the tranquil, then the time to do philosophy presumably passes for many Epicureans: e.g., those who achieve tranquility. To put the point more succinctly, if nothing is worthwhile to the tranquil, then philosophy cannot be worthwhile to the tranquil, but *Ep. Men.* 122 apparently rejects this consequent. Even worse, Epicurus himself would have embodied this very contradiction. Epicurus dies of dysentery in pain that he claims could not possibly be more intense. Nevertheless, he reports from his deathbed that he is having a blessedly happy day.¹⁴ My point is that Epicurus himself achieved such resolute tranquility that not even the most intense pain imaginable could

the meager hedonic benefits that the tranquil might derive from friendship. This possibility is far stronger if nothing can be worthwhile to the tranquil. If this were so, then the Sage would have very strong prudential reasons to cut and run—i.e., to abandon her friends. Per *VS* 56-67, she must be willing to suffer and die for her friends, but there is nothing that could make doing so worthwhile for her!

13. ὁ δὲ λέγων ἢ μήπω τοῦ φιλοσοφεῖν ὑπάρχειν ὥραν ἢ παρεληλυθῆναι τὴν ὥραν, ὁμοίως ἔστιν τῷ λέγοντι πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν ἢ μὴ παρῆναι τὴν ὥραν ἢ μηκέτι εἶναι.

14. *DL* 10.22. “I write this to you while experiencing a blessedly happy day, and at the same time the last day of my life. Urinary blockages and dysenteric discomforts afflict me which could not be surpassed for their intensity. But against all these things are ranged the joy in my soul produced by the recollection of the discussion we have had.” “Τὴν μακαρίαν ἄγοντες καὶ ἅμα τελευταίαν ἡμέραν τοῦ βίου ἐγράφομεν ὑμῖν ταυτί. στραγγουρία τε παρηκολουθήκει καὶ

disrupt it. Notwithstanding this, he continued to do philosophy up to his dying day. Ostensibly, this means that Epicurus himself considered philosophy worthwhile even after achieving tranquility, which is incompatible with the fact that nothing is worthwhile to the tranquil. The principle of charity exhorts us to interpret Epicurean ethics in a way that minimizes this sort of tension—something which further supports accepting the strategy I develop in Part IV.

3. THE ANALOGOUS PROBLEM FOR CREATION

In Section II, I argued that Epicureans face the following problem: their views about the nature and limit of pleasure suggest that nothing can be worthwhile to the tranquil. I named this the Nothing is Worthwhile to the Tranquil Problem (NWP). I then showed that Epicureans should, and want to, avoid NWP, but seem unable to do so without contradiction. In this section, I describe a problem analogous to NWP that proponents of Classical Theism (CT) face. Their problem is this. According to Mullins (Mullins 2020, 392), “What makes classical theism unique is its commitment to a timeless understanding of divine eternity along with immutability, impassibility, and simplicity.” Here I focus on one of these attributes: impassibility. To say God is impassible is to say God cannot suffer, be acted upon by anything external to God, or have an emotion that is incompatible with perfect rationality, moral goodness, and happiness (Helm 1990, 120–1). As Mullins (2020, 394) puts Randles’ (1900) view, “The impassible God is in a state of pure, undisturbed happiness that is entirely grounded in Himself.” Tying all of this together, if CT is true then God is impassible.¹⁵ If God is impassible, then God cannot become better or worse off. If God were able either to become better or worse off, then God would not be in a state of pure and undisturbed happiness—but this is incompatible with God’s impassibility.

Nevertheless, if God is impassible, then it is difficult to see why God creates. This is the Problem of Creation (PoC), which is as follows: God must create for a reason, otherwise God would not be perfectly rational, but this is incompatible with the model of God that many theists propose. There are only two kinds of reasons that God could have for creating:

δυσεντερικὰ πάθη ὑπερβολὴν οὐκ ἀπολείποντα τοῦ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς μεγέθους. ἀντιπαρετάττετο δὲ πᾶσι τούτοις τὸ κατὰ ψυχὴν χαῖρον ἐπὶ τῇ τῶν γεγονότων ἡμῖν διαλογισμῶν μνήμη.”

15. CT is sufficient but not necessary for God’s impassibility. One could conclude that God is impassible without endorsing CT. Some versions of Perfect Being Theism (PBT), for example, might entail that God is impassible. Indeed, if God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and perfectly good, then God might know how to be as well off as possible, would have the power to accomplish this, and would want to be this way absent overriding reasons not to.

external reasons or internal reasons. God's reasons for creating would be external if God derived them from something outside of God. God's reasons for creating would be internal if God furnished them from and to Himself. Classical theists run into deep problems, no matter whether God's reasons for creating are external or internal. CT explicitly claims that God's impassibility requires that nothing *ad extra* to divine nature can influence God's decisions (Pink 1975, 15). However, if God's reasons for creating were external, then something *ad extra* to the divine nature would influence God's decisions. Suppose, for example, that God creates in such a way that there is value in the world that there would not be without creation.¹⁶ Such a decision would be based on considerations that are *ad extra* to divine nature, which violates God's impassibility. God's impassibility also requires that God cannot become better or worse off. However, if God's reasons for creating were internal, then He could become better or worse off. Suppose, for example, that God creates because He wills His own goodness. Since God's aim in creating would be Himself, His reasons here would be purely internal. Still, if God cannot become better or worse off, then He would have been just as good had He not decided to express His own goodness in creating, and so this leaves His decision to create unexplained.¹⁷ In short, PoC claims that God must create for some reason. God could create for His own good or the good of something other than Himself. The former is unnecessary, because God is in a state of pure and undisturbed happiness no matter what. The latter is impossible because God's decisions cannot be based on anything external to divine nature, which the good of others happens to be.

PoC is therefore roughly analogous to NWP. God needs reasons to create, otherwise He would not be perfectly rational, and creation would be arbitrary, which is absurd. Similarly, the tranquil need hedonic reasons or else their actions are not worthwhile, but since there are no pleasures for the tranquil to pursue, nothing is worthwhile for them, which is absurd.¹⁸

16. Garcia (1992), Kraay (2010), and Ward (2015, 23–7; 2017, 194–5) explore a version of this response to PoC.

17. This is why Helm (2010, 176) argues that such a solution does not satisfactorily explain why God creates.

18. There are obvious distinctions. Epicurean and classically theistic metaphysics are different; the Epicureans posit only body and void, which many proponents of CT probably do not. Since the Epicureans are hedonists, the tranquil require specifically hedonic reasons for acting: i.e., they must act for the sake of pleasure for their action to be worthwhile. On the other hand, God's reasons need not be hedonic. In fact, PoC suggests that they probably could not be. If God's reasons for creating were hedonic, then God must decide to create for the sake of His own pleasure or the pleasure of creatures, since God's reasons must be internal or

Although God, in principle, could create for His own good or the good of something external to Him, both possibilities pose problems for theists who take God to be impassible. Something similar is true of Epicureans, given their views about the nature and limit of pleasure: the tranquil cannot do anything for their own good or the good of others. It is more obvious why no Epicurean, let alone the tranquil, can do anything for the good of others. Since the Epicureans are egoistic hedonists, something is only worthwhile for the sake of one's own pleasure.¹⁹ This means that if something is not for the sake of one's own pleasure, then it is not worthwhile. In turn, this means that Epicureans are forbidden from acting for the good of others—at least, unless acting for the good of others somehow contributes to their own good.²⁰ However, NWP suggests that the tranquil also cannot act for their own good. If hedonism is true, which the Epicureans believe, then the tranquil can only act for their own good if they can act for the sake of their own pleasure. There are two kinds of pleasure: the kinetic and katastematic. Consequently, the tranquil could only act for their own good if they could act for the sake of their own kinetic or katastematic pleasure, but neither kind of pleasure is available for the tranquil to pursue. If there were kinetic pleasure for them to pursue, then tranquility would not be the limit of the magnitude of pleasures, which contradicts *KD III*²¹ and *Ep. Men.* 128.²² If there were katastematic pleasure for the tranquil to pursue, then the tranquil would have further needs to meet, which is impossible, because the tranquil have no unmet needs, as they have no pains to eliminate.

4. SOLVING NWP: EXPRESSING TRANQUILITY

I argued in Section III that NWP and PoC are analogous problems. Epicurean claims about the nature and limit of pleasure suggest that nothing is worthwhile to the tranquil, i.e., the tranquil have no reason to do anything. PoC implies that God has no reason to create, since qua impassible He needs not create for His own good and cannot create for the good of others. Since NWP and PoC are analogous problems, a solution to one has the potential

external. Both options are problematic. God does not need to create for the sake of His own pleasure, since God is perfectly happy no matter what. God cannot create for the sake of the pleasure of creatures, lest God be moved by something other than His own divine nature.

19. See footnote 9.

20. See Carnes (2021), who argues that Epicurean friends can value one another for their own sake without contradicting their commitment to egoism: e.g., I could value my friend for her own sake because it is pleasant to do so.

21. See footnote 5.

22. See footnote 6.

to solve the other. In this section, I argue that an attempted solution to PoC offers a promising strategy that Epicureans can adopt to avoid NWP.²³ According to Kretzmann (1991, 208), there are two kinds of solutions to PoC: libertarian and necessitarian. The libertarian solution claims that God created because He freely chose to do so. Any libertarian solution must then explain why God chose to create. There are a few options here. God might choose to create because it brings about the best possible world.²⁴ Alternatively, God might choose to create for our benefit (Bates 1999, 185). Furthermore, God might choose to create for His own glory. Unfortunately, it is difficult to see how any of these explanations would really solve PoC. If God chooses to create because it brings about the best possible world, then He is influenced by something *ad extra* to the divine nature, which violates His impassibility.²⁵ The same consequent follows if God chooses to create for our benefit. In doing so, He would be influenced by the benefits that creatures external to Him would receive if He were to create, which cannot happen *per* His impassibility. It is also difficult to see why God would choose to create for His own glory. Pink (1975, 9–11) distinguishes between manifestative and essential glory. God’s manifestative glory consists in God’s glory being known to creatures, whereas God’s essential glory is God’s perfection. Dolezal (2019, 20) shows why God cannot create for the sake of manifestative glory: “When we glorify [God, God] does not thereby receive glory he previously lacked.” If this were so, then God would not be impassible. It is also difficult to see why God would create for the sake of essential glory. If God has glory essentially, then He would not create for the sake of it, for He has such glory no matter what. Any libertarian solution to PoC faces the challenge of explaining why a perfectly happy God who cannot be influenced by external considerations would choose to create in the first place.

The difficulty of grounding God’s choice to create in a reason consistent with His impassibility pushes us to consider the possibility that God did not choose to create after all. This is how the necessitarian solution responds to

23. I call this an “attempted solution” to PoC because I am agnostic about whether it really solves PoC. Kretzmann (1991) thinks it does, and Mullins (2020) thinks that it does not. I explain this disagreement in due course. Whether it really solves PoC is irrelevant to the thesis of this paper. I only need it to solve NWP, and I will argue that it can.

24. Mullins (2020, 399) describes the problems with different versions of this explanation for God’s choice to create.

25. This would not be true if God chose to create for His own sake rather than that of something external to Him, but that would fail to explain why God chooses to create. *Qua* impassible, God need not do anything to be perfectly happy.

PoC: by claiming that creation is a necessary consequence of God's nature. According to the necessitarian solution, God did not choose to create in the sense that implies that He could have not created. On the contrary, God is such that He must have created. In Kretzmann's words (1991, 208), "the necessitarian line entails that there cannot be a state of affairs consisting of an absolutely perfect being's existing all by itself." The defender of the necessitarian response to PoC must then explain what it is about God's nature that entails that God creates. Typically, this involves claiming that God is inherently creative. As Kretzmann puts it, "explanations lying along the necessitarian line will try to show that an absolutely perfect being is essentially productive." Aquinas and Bonaventure accomplish this with recourse to what Kretzmann (1991, 217) calls the Dionysian Principle, which claims that goodness is by its very nature diffusive. Aquinas (*Super Sent.* I, D2, Q1, A4, s.c.) employs the Dionysian Principle in this way: "the good is communicative of itself. But God is good in the highest degree: therefore, God will communicate himself in the highest degree."²⁶ Bonaventure (*In Sent.* II, D1, P1, A1, Q1) deploys it like this: "Because [God] is most perfect, he is of the highest goodness; because he is of the highest goodness, he wills to produce many things."²⁷

The necessitarian solution is problematic for several reasons. First, it will not appeal to theists who claim that God created freely, especially if acting freely requires that God (1) is the source of His own action and (2) could have done otherwise. The necessitarian solution does not violate (1). If God's nature causes creation, then God is the source of His action in creating. However, the necessitarian solution does violate (2). Pruss (2017, 213–4) calls this the No Necessary Creation Principle (NNC), which claims that it was possible for God not to actualize any contingent beings. Since God created necessarily, God could not have done otherwise. Second, but similarly, the necessitarian solution seems incompatible with the claim that God is perfectly rational. In order for God to be perfectly rational, Swinburne (1994, 128) claims that God must be "guided by rational considerations alone." However, according to the necessitarian solution, God is not guided by rational considerations alone in deciding to create. God did

26. Aquinas (*DP* III.15c) concludes that "one must hold, without any doubt, that God produced that created in existence by a free choice of his will, without any natural necessity," but Kretzmann argues that Aquinas' conceptions of God, goodness, and creation entail the opposite. I am agnostic on whether Aquinas is ultimately a libertarian or necessitarian on creation. I cite this text merely to illustrate how the necessitarian solution might go.

27. The translations of both this passage from Bonaventure and that from Aquinas in the previous sentence are those of Kretzmann.

not decide to create, so God could not have been guided by rational considerations in doing so. In turn, any version of the necessitarian solution to PoC might render the act of creation arbitrary. God creates because God is goodness itself and goodness is essentially productive. The act of creation is just a consequence of God's nature, not something that He decided to do for reasons.

Regardless of whether the necessitarian response solves PoC satisfactorily, something like it has the potential to solve NWP. Moving forward, I will focus on one specific version of the necessitarian response to PoC, which claims that creation is an expression of God's essentially productive nature. Put otherwise, God created necessarily, because the act of creation manifests God's perfect goodness, which is inherently self-diffusive *per* the Dionysian Principle.²⁸ The Epicureans can develop a similar response as a solution to NWP. They can claim that the tranquil engage in certain activities despite the fact that these activities cannot possibly make them better off, because doing so expresses the tranquility they achieved. Put otherwise, the tranquil find certain activities worthwhile not because these activities improve their lives, but because continued involvement with them expresses the tranquility they have already developed.

Let us call this the Expression Solution (ES), which says that *w* is worthwhile if it expresses actor *A*'s share of the intrinsic good. As we saw earlier, two of the activities that the tranquil continue to find worthwhile are friendship and philosophy. According to ES, the tranquil continue to find these activities worthwhile because participating in them expresses their tranquility. If adopted, ES could make sense of some otherwise puzzling Epicurean texts. *VS* 78, for example, claims that, "The noble man is most involved with wisdom and friendship, of which one is a mortal good, the other immortal."²⁹ If the noble man has achieved tranquility, NWP suggests that he has no reason to continue his involvement with any goods, but *VS* 78 suggests that he does so anyway. ES enables us to say that continued involvement with wisdom and friendship is worthwhile for the tranquil because it expresses their tranquility. The noble man is involved with wisdom and friendship despite having achieved tranquility because being wise and a friend are just things the tranquil do, in the same way

28. Almeida (Almeida 2017, 2–3) develops a version of the necessitarian solution to PoC similar to that in Kretzmann (1991).

29. ὁ γενναῖος περὶ σοφίαν καὶ φιλίαν μάλιστα γίγνεται, ὧν τὸ μὲν ἐστὶ θνητὸν ἀγαθόν, τὸ δὲ ἀθάνατον.

that creating is just what God does qua essentially productive. Similarly, VS 44 claims that

When the wise man is brought face to face with the necessities of life, he knows how to give rather than receive—such a treasury of self-sufficiency has he found.³⁰

The wise man is so self-sufficient that he can maintain his tranquility no matter the circumstances. As such, he gives rather than takes in the face of life's necessities. Contra NWP, there must be a reason that giving rather than taking is worthwhile, otherwise the wise man who has achieved tranquility would have no reasons to do it, and he does. Giving rather than taking cannot be worthwhile for the tranquil because it makes them better off. That is the point of VS 44: the wise man is perfectly well off no matter what. Giving rather than taking cannot be worthwhile for the sake of those to whom the wise man gives, lest Epicureans contradict their commitment to egoism. ES enables us to explain why the wise man gives rather than takes: giving expresses his tranquility. Giving rather than taking is just what those who achieve tranquility do, as creating just is what God does qua being essentially productive.

5. OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

In this section, I develop and respond to three objections against the argument for the thesis of this paper: namely, that ES solves NWP, in that participating in certain activities is worthwhile to the tranquil because doing so expresses their tranquility even though the tranquil cannot become better off. First, one might object that PoC and NWP are so different that a version of the solution to the former does not solve the latter. Second, one might object that ES can explain why the tranquil engage in certain activities, but not why doing so is worthwhile to them. If this is so, then ES does not really solve NWP, since NWP requires a solution that renders some activities worthwhile to the tranquil. Third, one might object that even if ES offers a solution to NWP, the solution it offers is not a very attractive one, all things considered. In response, I argue that although the third objection does more damage to my argument for the thesis of this paper, none of these three objections does enough to eliminate ES as a potential solution to NWP.

30. ὁ σοφὸς εἰς τὰ ἀναγκαῖα συγκριθεὶς μᾶλλον ἐπίσταται μεταδιδόναι ἢ μεταλαμβάνειν-τηλικούτον ἀταρκείας εὐρε θησαυρόν.

I have argued here that since PoC and NWP are analogous, a version of a solution to the former would also solve the latter. The first objection claims that this is false because PoC and NWP are too different to be analogous in this way. Since they are not, a version of a solution to one does not also solve the other. There are at least two reasons to think that PoC and NWP are too different to be analogous in the way ES proposes. First, PoC takes God to be impassible, but NWP does not take the tranquil to be impassible. In other words, PoC claims that God cannot become better or worse off, whereas NWP only claims that the tranquil cannot become better off. If God cannot become better or worse off, but the tranquil can only not become better off, what causes God to create must differ from what causes the tranquil to act. Second, the necessitarian solution to PoC claims that God necessarily creates, but ES does not and cannot, claim that the tranquil necessarily participate in certain activities. In other words, the necessitarian solution to PoC claims that God could not do otherwise, but ES allows that the tranquil certainly could do otherwise than continue to be friends and do philosophy. Since the tranquil can do otherwise, a version of the necessitarian solution to PoC will not solve NWP.

I have two responses to this objection. First, although the tranquil are certainly not impassible in the same way that God is, it does not follow that the tranquil can become worse off, whereas God cannot. Indeed, some Epicureans achieved such resilient tranquility that they could not have become worse off either. Earlier we considered *VS* 56–67, which claims that the wise man is happy even when tortured.³¹ We also saw that Epicurus claims to have maintained tranquility despite experiencing the most intense bodily pain imaginable to him.³² If tranquility is sufficient for being as well off as possible, but not even the most intense pain can detract from the tranquility that some achieve, it follows that some who achieve tranquility cannot become either better or worse off. Nevertheless, even if God and the tranquil are different in the sense that God cannot become better or worse off, while the tranquil can still become worse off, it does not follow that ES does not solve NWP. Regardless of whether PoC and NWP are different in various ways, ES succeeds so long as it can explain why the tranquil find various activities worthwhile despite not being able to become better off. ES accomplishes this. Second, the same goes for the claim that PoC and NWP are different because the necessitarian solution claims that God creates necessarily but there is no such necessity surrounding the actions

31. See footnote 8 for the text.

32. See footnote 14 for the text.

of the tranquil. This is true, but it does not mean that ES fails to solve NWP. I can concede that ES is not truly necessitarian in the sense that the necessitarian solution to PoC that I described is. Despite this, ES offers the same sort of explanation as to why the tranquil find various activities worthwhile as the necessitarian solution to PoC does: creating just is what an essentially productive God does, in the same way that being friends and doing philosophy just are what the tranquil happen to do.

The second objection claims that ES fails to explain why certain activities are worthwhile to the tranquil, which a solution to NWP must do. I have argued that although the tranquil cannot become better (or perhaps even worse) off, they can find various activities worthwhile e.g., friendship and philosophy. These activities are worthwhile because they express the tranquility of those who engage in them, just as creation is an expression of God's essentially productive nature. One might therefore worry that although ES explains why the tranquil participate in certain activities, it does not establish that doing so is worthwhile for them. In other words, ES can explain why those who have achieved tranquility happen to engage in various activities: doing so expresses their tranquility. Nevertheless, ES does not explain why those who have achieved tranquility should participate in these activities. In short, ES offers an empirical account of what motivates the tranquil despite the fact that they cannot become better (or perhaps even worse) off, not a normative account of what the tranquil ought to do after achieving tranquility. However, ES fails to solve NWP without such a normative account. A solution to NWP needs to explain why the tranquil should find certain activities worthwhile, and showing why some who have achieved tranquility might find certain activities worthwhile does not accomplish this task.

My response is that ES does explain why the tranquil should find certain activities worthwhile, so ES does not fail for the reason that the second objection posits. Indeed, ES does provide the sort of normative account that a solution to NWP requires. The Epicureans are hedonists, so pleasure is the only intrinsic good. Since pleasure is the only intrinsic good, something is only worthwhile when it is for the sake of pleasure. In other words, if it is not for the sake of pleasure, then it is not worthwhile. NWP alleges that nothing can be for the sake of pleasure to the tranquil, so that nothing can be worthwhile to the tranquil. ES claimed that it is false that nothing can be for the sake of pleasure to the tranquil, so it does not follow that nothing is worthwhile to the tranquil. Friendship and philosophy are worthwhile to the tranquil, for example, because participating in them expresses the tranquility of those who do so. Since certain activities can be worthwhile

to the tranquil, they have reasons to participate in them. Since they have reasons to participate in these activities, they should do so—unless there are overriding reasons not to. In other words, since certain activities can be for the sake of pleasure even to those who have achieved tranquility, the tranquil have *pro tanto* reasons to participate in these activities. Since the tranquil have *pro tanto* reasons to participate in these activities, they should do so unless there are overriding reasons to the contrary. Therefore, contrary to the second objection, ES does explain what makes actions worthwhile to the tranquil.

The third and final objection claims that even if ES offers a solution to NWP, the solution that it offers is not very attractive, all things considered. There are two reasons one might find ES unattractive. First, ES is somewhat unsatisfying. PoC asks why God creates, and the necessitarian solution answers that creating is what an essentially productive God does. Suppose Jill wants to know why God created. Jack explains to Jill: “God created because God is creative.” Jack’s explanation seems unlikely to satisfy Jill, but this is the same sort of explanation that ES offers for why participating in certain activities is worthwhile to the tranquil. Suppose Jill wants to know whether the tranquil find certain activities worthwhile even though they cannot become better off. Jack responds to Jill: “The tranquil find certain activities worthwhile because these activities express the tranquility of the tranquil.” There is something similarly unsatisfying about this response. Second, one might claim that there are better solutions to NWP than ES. For example, it would be better for the tranquil to find certain activities worthwhile because participating in them would prevent the tranquil from becoming worse off were they not to participate in them. After all, if your life cannot possibly become more pleasant, you might as well take measures to ensure that your life will continue to be that pleasant in the future. Alternatively, it would be better for the tranquil to find certain activities worthwhile, because participating in them makes those they care about better off. After all, if your life cannot possibly improve, you might as well turn to helping your friends and family improve their lives. Since it would be better to find various activities worthwhile for one of these reasons rather than because they express our tranquility, ES offers a less attractive solution to NWP than the alternatives.

Although ES might not be entirely satisfying, it offers a more satisfying solution to NWP than the necessitation solution does to PoC. According to the latter, God creates because God is essentially productive. This is all there is to the necessitarian solution. On the other hand, ES claims that the tranquil participate in certain activities because doing so expresses their

tranquility. In turn, this is worthwhile, because the expression of tranquility is for the sake of pleasure. Thus the explanation that ES offers to NWP goes one step further than the necessitarian solution does in response to PoC. Nevertheless, even if ES does not offer an entirely satisfying solution to NWP, this does no damage to the thesis for which I have argued. My job as a historian of philosophy who works on Epicureanism is to develop strategies that Epicureans can employ to avoid some problematic consequences of their ethical views e.g., NWP. ES offers such a strategy. There are other strategies that might fare better, and I plan to explore those in future research. This brings me to my reply to the second reason that ES is allegedly not very attractive, all things considered: it would be better to respond to NWP by claiming that various activities are worthwhile to the tranquil because these activities prevent the tranquil from becoming worse off or improve the lives of those about whom they care. Even if these are in fact better responses, they are not open to the Epicureans. Some Epicureans achieve such resilient tranquility that they cannot become worse off.³³ For these Epicureans, something cannot be worthwhile because it safeguards their tranquility; their tranquility requires no safeguarding. To be clear, this solution might solve NWP for some Epicureans who have not achieved such resilient tranquility, but my aim here is to generate a solution that could solve NWP for all tranquil Epicureans. ES does this. The same goes for the allegation that it would be better to claim that some activities are worthwhile to the tranquil because they improve the lives of others. Perhaps this a better response to NWP, but it entails that certain activities are worthwhile for the sake of the pleasure of others, and this contradicts the Epicurean commitment to egoistic hedonism. Again: the principle of charity urges us to find the solution to NWP that is most compatible with other Epicurean claims. This is one reason that I develop and defend ES: it solves NWP without generating any contradiction.

6. CONCLUSION

I have argued here that Epicurean claims about the nature and limit of pleasure suggest that nothing could be worthwhile to the tranquil. Something is only worthwhile when it is for the sake of pleasure, i.e., if something is not for the sake of pleasure, then it is not worthwhile. Since tranquility is the limit and magnitude of pleasures, it seems that nothing could be for the sake of pleasure to the tranquil. There are no pleasures for the tranquil to pursue, so there are no pleasures for the sake of which anything could

33. See footnote 14.

be worthwhile. I called this the Nothing is Worthwhile to the Tranquil Problem (NWP). I argued that this problem is analogous to one that any theist faces who takes God to be impassible: the Problem of Creation (PoC). Since the problems are analogous, a solution to one has the potential to solve the other. I argued here that this is true. Just as the necessitarian solution to PoC claims that creating is worthwhile to God because God is essentially productive, even though God cannot become better or worse off, the Expression Solution (ES) claims that some activities are worthwhile to the tranquil because these activities express tranquility, even though the tranquil cannot become better (or perhaps even worse) off. I then raised three objections against the viability of ES. I concluded that although ES is problematic and unsatisfactory for various reasons, it deserves consideration as a solution to NWP, because it explains why some activities are worthwhile to the tranquil and is compatible with Epicurean claims about egoism, the resilience of tranquility, and the nature and limit of pleasure.

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