

# Review of the "What is Epicureanism and Is It Compatible with Stoicism?" video by Vox Stoica

Post by "Cassius" of August 7, 2021 at 10:08 AM

I will come back here and organize my main comments in a list in this post, but this is a start:

1. This chart at the three minute mark is indicative of several aspects (I am ignoring the audio commentary on it for a moment). I would largely agree with the line on virtues, but I would disagree with the second line on "pleasures." The very strong thrust I believe is most fairly to be taken from Stoic writings is that pleasure is not only not necessary for the good life, but it is an obstacle and a thing to be avoided. The line on the Gods is also not accurate, as Epicurus did not say to "ignore" the gods, but to pay close attention to a true understanding of the gods due to the benefits that brings and the burdens it avoids. As to the last line, the video itself is marked that this line is incorrect as to the Stoics - the stoics did look to the gods for guidance.



	EPICUREANISM	STOICISM
VIRTUES	Useful but not 'goods'	The highest good They are their own rewards
PLEASURES	The highest good What we should seek in life	'Preferred Indifferents' Not essential for a good life
THE GODS	Don't impact our lives. Ignore them	Do impact our lives. Honour and revere them
SUPERSTITION & DIVINATION	False and to be avoided	False and to be avoided

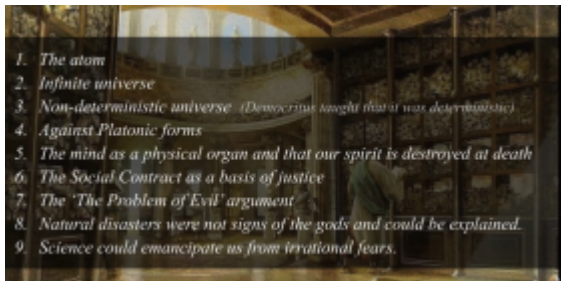
I am glad to see him include these two slides as I think it is very useful to keep in mind that there has always been violent opposition to Epicurus which does not come from differences as to the meaning of pleasure, but to the much deeper conflict with the Epicurean worldview:





THEIR CEMETERY HAVE UPON THIS SIDE  
WITH EPICURUS ALL HIS FOLLOWERS,  
WHO WITH THE BODY,  
MORTAL MAKE THE SOUL.  
- DANTE'S INFERNO, CANTO 10 (1320 AD)

A pretty decent list of important points that Epicurus wrote about (with the exception of referring to "social contract as a basis of justice" - probably "social contract is debatable term but the core concept is that agreement over harm is THE (not "a") basis of justice:



1. The atom
2. Infinite universe
3. Non-deterministic universe (Democritus taught that it was deterministic)
4. Against Platonic forms
5. The mind as a physical organ and that our spirit is destroyed at death
6. The Social Contract as a basis of justice
7. The 'The Problem of Evil' argument
8. Natural disasters were not signs of the gods and could be explained.
9. Science could emancipate us from irrational fears.

Oh NO - I strongly disagree with this next slide. If the stoics want to look for the "humanists" all they need to do is look in the mirror --



- HUMANISM**  
in a nutshell
1. Putting **human beings** and other **living things** at the centre of your moral outlook
  2. Seeing the world as a **natural place** and looking to **science** and **reason** to make sense of it
  3. Promoting and supporting human **flourishing** across all frontiers, and championing **human rights** for everyone

 And that's about it.

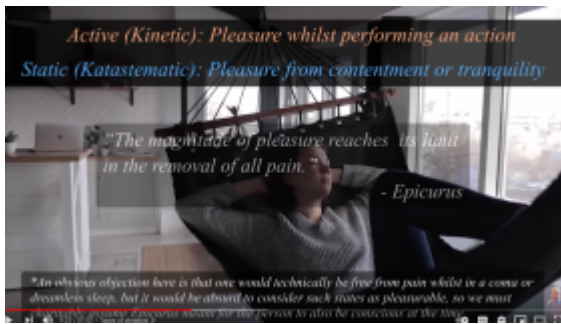
Here's the root flow in so much analysis -- as detailed most succinctly by [Nikolsky](#) and in much more detail by [Gosling & Taylor](#). This distinction is not Epicurean at all - to the extent Epicurus concerned himself with these categories, Epicurus embraced **both**, as Diogenes Laertius himself says, and he did not prioritize one over the other.



Even this next slide, when you think about it, illustrates how misleading it is to focus on these categories. So all pleasures that arise from performing an action are kinetic? Well the very act of living is "performing an action," so according to that definition **all** pleasures experienced while living are kinetic, and nothing is experienced in death, so there are no pleasures **except** kinetic pleasures. Epicurus did not get caught up in such useless word games as these, which endlessly appeal to the Stoic-minded (such word games as Seneca himself complained against).



The video "charitably" points out an obvious contradiction of this viewpoint, but Epicurus and Epicureans do not need the Stoics' charity - the people who really need charity are those who are so full of hubris that they think themselves superior in reasoning to Epicurus, and that he did not realize this "obvious objection" to his viewpoint. The answer, of course, is that what is described was not Epicurus' viewpoint at all. And yes, the key to understanding all this is to have a proper understanding of the statement in the center of the slide - PD3 - and that it does NOT mean that Epicurus held nothingness to be the highest and most pleasurable way of life.



Looks to me like he's getting totally mixed up here, as there is no reason to think that "aponia" (absence of pain) is limited to absence of **physical** pain. It appears he's just getting mixed up more and more as he chases the "kinetic/katastematic" distinction - so he can no doubt enhance is ultimate viewpoint that there are in fact deep similarities between Epicurus and the Stoics.



This is the full slide on categories of the desires. I note here that he's still chasing rabbits when he concludes that natural and unnecessary desires "offer kinetic pleasure but present a risk of katastematic pain." That arrangement is totally off course but a further illustration of the false premise and his expectation that katastematic pleasure is the highest type. The pain and pleasure calculation for this category is the same as all the rest - it is a mix of "physical pain" and "mental pain" (another difficult distinction in itself). And the red-letter "avoid entirely" in the third column is a further extension of the same error.