

Creating a "Seven Steps to the Ethics of Epicurus"

Post by "Don" of September 1, 2023 at 9:14 PM

I like the idea of "7 Steps" not for any mystical/metaphysical reason! because:

it's the number of days in a week

it's a manageable number to get one's head around

Even with the "7 days" analogy, it's like the "24 hours to..." book where "24 hours" wasn't one day, it was literally 24 hours as in 1 hour/day for 24 days and you can get through the book and its exercises.

I like the idea that this is "Seven Steps to the **Ethics** of Epicurus" because that's what lots of people are coming looking for.

Here are some specific thoughts from me from the current list.

1 is doing a LOT of heavy lifting, but I agree there has to be some Physics to serve as the Foundation (or should I say Phoundation, pun-spelling intended: Physics are the Phoundation; Physics are the Foundation of the Ethics). I wouldn't necessarily include the gods in the physics though.

I like 8 as emphasizing the need to study the natural world/science. Using Epicurus' quote of [DL 10.37] "Hence, since such a course is of service to all who take up natural science, I, who devote to the subject my continuous energy and reap the calm enjoyment of a life like this, have prepared for you just such an epitome and manual of the doctrines as a whole."

So, in your current list, I'd definitely agree with or augment/edit the following:

1 Yes! Definitely include some physics/fundamentals as the foundation for the ethics

2 Yes! Get Pleasure in there early and often

3 Yes! Choice and avoidance with the aid of practical wisdom, justice, "virtue" is the fundamental practice of an Epicurean life

4 Yes! Friendship - mutual support, etc. - are foundational

5 Not sure about this one, so I'd have to see more to know. Are 5 and 6 combinable? Are Safety and Justice two aspects of Justice writ large: The agreement neither to intentionally harm others nor to be intentionally harmed by others?

6 See 5

7 A right understanding of the gods has to be in there somewhere, same as a right understanding of death

8 see above for why I'd like to see the list kept to 7, but also why I think 8's sentiment has to be somewhere. Maybe within 1's foundation of physics. It's not enough to have that foundation but you also have to study and understand it and apply it.

Since the letter to Menoikeus is our primary summary of Epicurean ethics, it can be broken down into the following points:

1. A correct view of the gods
2. A correct view of death
3. A correct understanding of desires and the goal of a happy life: Pleasure is the foundation and culmination of well-being.
4. How to choose between pleasure and pain and how to be "self-reliant."
5. Knowing the value of practical wisdom/phronesis, justice, and excellence
6. Knowing the place of Fate and chance in one's life
7. The value of studying with "those like yourself" (ὁμοιον σεαυτῷ)

According to Epicurus in his letter, who is better than someone who:

- holds pious opinions about the gods,
- is always fearless in the face of death
- has reasoned out the natural goal of life
- has understood that the limit of good things is easy to fulfill and easy to achieve, whereas the limit of bad things is either short-lived or causes little pain
- laughs at destiny and considers it better to be rationally unfortunate than irrationally fortunate

BUT this letter leaves out some significant topics, like friendship, so where' back to looking at other lists and texts.

First thoughts from me.