

What If Anything Has Changed About Human Nature In the Last 2000 Years?

Post by "Don" of January 6, 2024 at 12:01 AM

[Quote from BrainToBeing](#)

1. Yet, we do now have science.
2. We do now believe there is some way to understand the world other than by preferred belief systems.
3. We do now recognize the relationships of the species.
4. We do now understand far more about the universe in which we live.
5. We do now know that consciousness is inside the brain rather than floating around as a mist, or a spirit outside of it.
6. We do now even know how to create intelligence.
7. So, there are reasons for optimism.

I wanted to break those out in to individual assertions to address each in turn and to try and turn this thread back into an exploration of Epicurus and his philosophy. We've gone far afield in this particular thread 😊.

1. Science is just a systematic way of investigating the world, unless you have a specific definition of science. I would argue Epicurus and the ancient Epicureans advocated a form of proto-science in their insistence of holding off on rigid opinions of the causes of phenomena until sufficient evidence was acquired. We've simply gotten better at our observations, measurements, and information gathering.
2. So did Epicurus. And I'd be curious what you mean by "preferred belief systems," because there are plenty of people who will stick with their "preferred belief system" regardless of evidence.
3. So did Lucretius! To the best of my memory, Lucretius firmly places humans with the other animals, and Epicurus looked at both animals and baby humans to arrive at the idea of pleasure being the supreme good/telos/summum bonum.
4. Again, we're just better at gathering information with more sophisticated instruments. Epicurus, with only his imagination and what could be called thought experiments, posited the existence of multiple cosmoi (i.e., more than one world-system) in an infinite universe, the infinitesimally small particles making up all of the universe's matter, and other things about the universe that wouldn't be rivaled or exceeded for centuries.
5. Epicurus certainly didn't think that the mind was 'floating around as a mist, or a spirit outside of it.' He saw the mind as inextricably linked to the physical body and composed of fine atoms. As far as we can determine, he posited that the feelings or mind or psyche was both spread across the body (think nervous system maybe?) but also centered in one

aspect in the chest or abdomen. I think this is still a defensible position for him to have held at his time because we even today use words like "heart-sick, broken-hearted" and other physical phrases to evoke emotional and psychological states. It would make sense to think the mind was centered in your abdomen if you get sick to your stomach with fear or feel your "blood rising" when you're angry.

6. LOL! That remains to be seen! I have certain issues calling cleverly-constructed algorithms "intelligence." They give the verisimilitude of "intelligence" while merely recombining vast inputs and making correlations programmed into the algorithm.
7. As far as optimism... I like to think I'm optimistic. Or at least a realistic optimist. Human beings have always and will always be capable of expressing great compassion and altruism as well as of dealing great and horrendous harm and misery. Epicurus's idea of justice as being a social contract to neither intentionally harm no be intentionally harmed isn't a bad place to start.