

The Use of Negation in Epicurean Philosophy Concepts

Post by "Cassius" of April 21, 2025 at 11:06 AM

To illustrate how this plays out, the quote below is the way the Epicureanism Wikipedia page as of today starts off.

Quote

Epicureanism is a system of [philosophy](#) founded 307 [BCE](#) based upon the teachings of [Epicurus](#), an [ancient Greek philosopher](#). Epicurus was an [atomist](#) and [materialist](#), following in the steps of [Democritus](#). His materialism led him to [religious skepticism](#) and a general attack on superstition and divine intervention. Epicureanism was originally a challenge to [Platonism](#), and its main opponent later became [Stoicism](#). It is a form of [hedonism](#) insofar as it declares pleasure to be its sole intrinsic goal. However, the concept that the absence of pain and fear constitutes the greatest pleasure, and its advocacy of a simple life, make it very different from hedonism as [colloquially](#) understood.

Following the [Cyrenaic](#) philosopher [Aristippus](#), Epicurus believed that the greatest good was to seek modest, sustainable pleasure in the form of a state of [ataraxia](#) (tranquility and freedom from fear) and [aponia](#) (the absence of bodily pain) through knowledge of the workings of the world and limiting desires. Correspondingly, Epicurus and his followers generally withdrew from politics because it could lead to frustrations and ambitions that would conflict with their pursuit of virtue and peace of mind.^[1]

I would argue that the first paragraph sets the incorrect tone (absence of pain, without more explanation, is the greatest pleasure) that leads to the false conclusions in the second paragraph (that Epicurus advocated withdrawal from engagement with the world in favor of mental contemplation).

The first paragraph fails to explain that there are only two feelings, and that if you are not feeling pain then you are feeling pleasure, and vice versa.

Omission of this premise plants the implication that "absence of pain" does not include the type of ordinary pleasures that normal people consider the term to include, and that this transcendent condition is separate from and takes the place of pleasures as ordinarily understood.

In contrast to Epicurus, who is *widening* the definition of pleasure to include not only the standard active pleasures, but also all experiences whether active or stable that are not painful,

the Wikipedia approach *narrows* the definition of pleasure.

The Wikipedia viewpoint deprecates joy and delight and standard active pleasures, and leaves behind only the implication that Epicurus was advocating the type of mental detachment that is characteristic of Stoicism, Buddhism, and otherworldly philosophies and religions.