

Why pursue unnecessary desires?

Post by “Don” of May 4, 2025 at 12:06 AM

I just noticed that [Pacatus](#) was the one who asked me "How do you think this might relate to past discussions on here about the “practical Epicurean” and the “philosophical Epicurean”?" Mea culpa. I thought that was [Cassius](#). Let me address those questions first.

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

How do you think this might relate to past discussions on here about the “practical Epicurean” and the “philosophical Epicurean”?

I wouldn't use the modifiers "practical" and "philosophical," but I don't want to disparage one group over another. That said, I'd characterize these two groups as "browsers" and "researchers." Or maybe "surface" vs "deep." Or maybe Cliffs Notes vs encyclopedic Epicureans. Or maybe horizontal Epicureans vs vertical Epicureans, those who only need/want a surface understanding as opposed to those who want to delve deeply into one philosophy. Both are (hopefully) looking for practical applications - for a way to more fully live their life; however, the horizontal ones are skimming along the surface. The others not only want the "how" but the "why." Both groups undoubtedly come to Epicurean philosophy with preconceived notions (How can they not?), but the reason the skimmers *tend* to leave this particular forum is that those expectations and preconceived notions aren't borne out by deeper study. Those who think "I like Epicureanism because it validates my minimalism" or "Epicureanism sounds like Buddhism because he wants me to limit my desires to the bare minimum" don't get reinforced by further study. They retreat to a "surface" understanding of the philosophy because it's a safe place for them and satisfies their desire and basic curiosity. If someone is incurious for deeper understanding and wants a superficial understanding of the philosophy, we can't make them curious or make them study. We are working against a strong cultural headwind. They may just be looking for something to add to their eclectic cafeteria style of personal philosophy and may incorporate some personal understanding of Epicurus and move along to their next interesting philosophical topic.

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

how to offer a helpful (“therapeutic”) Epicurean practice toward daily life to the former group without undue simplification (my emphasis)? Or is that not possible? (If not, then Epicureanism seems destined to remain an option only for a fairly narrow segment of the general populace.)

Ah! So, the "former group" (what you called the "practical" Epicureans) has likely gotten what they want and moved on. It seems to me you're asking a bigger question: "What's in it (Epicureanism) for the person 'on the street'?" How can we make Epicureanism attractive to those not necessarily interested in "*Philosophy*"? Who could benefit from living for pleasure? Epicureanism will never *appeal* to everyone or maybe not even to a plurality of people. Even in the religion surveys, many people aren't "religious" but they still believe in an afterlife, a "higher power," and other supernatural ideas. They don't want to not believe in them, and Epicureanism is adamant that you can't be a supernatural Epicurean, either horizontal or vertical. So, our potential pool is limited. Now, If someone is genuinely curious and asked us "Why are you an Epicurean?" we should have a readily understood answer, succinct, clear, easy to understand.

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

What can we offer to the factory worker who labors overtime hours, or the farmworker bending her back to harvest our fruits and vegetables, or ... ? Anything? If so ... how? (If not ... then not.)

The factory worker and the farm worker are human beings. They're not special. They just may have never considered Epicureanism as a way of looking at the world. What do we have to offer? A life free from fear of divine wrath and punishment after death, a life focused on being in touch with how they're feeling and acting on that, a life where one's perspective focuses on happiness, satisfaction, being true to one's nature as a living being.

How would you see the factory worker or the farm worker or the body shop mechanic or the waitress or the check-out clerk at the grocery store or... name anyone... living their life differently if we successfully evangelized to them? For me, they would live it like anyone else trying to put Epicurean philosophy into practice. One's occupation doesn't define them as a living breathing human being.

That said, we are not evangelizers. We are not (I hope!) going to be out on street corners with sandwich boards or yelling at people. I've regularly passed people with giant signs and using bullhorns to tell me to "turn from your wicked ways." Maybe Epicureans *would* be on the street corner handing out leaflets? But where do we point them? It's not like there's a Epicurean Garden three miles down the street. To our forum? To [AxA](#)'s meet-up in Canada? To the podcast? One big hurdle we as students of Epicurus have is there's no wider in-person support community. We don't have "places of worship." We don't have a pop culture ecosystem like the Stoics.

I agree that we DO need an "elevator pitch" for the philosophy. The Tetrapharmakos is too inside baseball. A good, solid reminder for students of the philosophy with some depth of understanding, but not an evangelizing tool. I'll try my hand from my perspective. Your mileage may vary...

Why are you an Epicurean? What does that even mean?

For me, the philosophy reinforces my conviction that we live in a material world and are not under the thumb or watchful eye of some god.

I take responsibility for my life and the choices I make. There are two choices I can make: I can choose to act in ways that are good for me in the long run, or I can act in ways that are going to be painful now or later.

From all available evidence, I believe this is the only life I'll have: from when I was born to the day I die. That's it. Any "afterlife" is only the memory of me that will live on in those that knew me.