

Epicurus vs Schopenhauer - Orientation Discussion

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Warm greetings to all epicurean friends 😊

I would like to add my own small Greek contribution to this discussion, since we are speaking about Epicurus and a philosophy that blossomed on Greek soil and continues to illuminate minds to this day. The relationship between Epicurus and Schopenhauer becomes much clearer when viewed through Nietzsche, who acts both as a bridge and as a boundary. Epicurus and Nietzsche, despite their differences, meet in a profound affirmation of life, of this world, of the body, and of the present moment. Schopenhauer, by contrast, places the center of reality in a blind, noumenal Will outside the world of experience, a move that both Epicurus and Nietzsche would see as a retreat from life rather than an embrace of it. Both agree that the world we live in is the only world we have, that meaning is not hidden behind things but found within them, that suffering is a natural part of existence rather than a metaphysical curse, and that wisdom is not an escape from life but the art of living it. Epicurus expresses this through pleasure as the natural guide and the removal of fear, while Nietzsche expresses it through amor fati that is, the love for this one and only life that has been given to us, and through the creative affirmation of existence. Different vocabulary, same orientation: life is to be affirmed, not denied.

Schopenhauer, on the other hand, sees the world as fundamentally painful, life as a disease, and morality as renunciation. This stance stands in direct opposition to Epicurean teaching, according to which pleasure is natural, pain is manageable, fear is unnecessary, and life is pleasant only when it contains prudence, beauty, and justice; if any of these is missing, life cannot be pleasant. And here lies the crucial difference: Epicurus never enters the dilemma "to live or not to live." For the wise person, life is not a burden and death is not an evil; the issue is not quantity but quality, not "more" but "more pleasant." As he writes in the Letter to Menoeceus, *the wise person neither despises life nor fears not living, for life is no burden to him and not living is no evil*. The care of living well and dying well is one and the same, and anyone who claims that "it would be better never to have been born" either does not truly believe it -- for if he did, he would already have left life -- or is joking about matters that do not admit of jokes. This clarity, this absence of tragic posturing, this simplicity of truth is what makes Epicurus so different from Schopenhauer.

Nietzsche initially admired Schopenhauer, just as he admired Wagner, but later broke away from both when he realized that each, in his own way, continued the Platonic-Socratic tradition of devaluing this world and seeking a "true" world behind appearances. Epicurus had already dismantled this Platonic illusion two millennia earlier, insisting that there is no world beyond this one and that wisdom lies in living well here and now 📌

And perhaps here lies an even deeper difference that is rarely discussed: the figure of the mother in the life of the philosopher. Epicurus is the only one of the three who left us a letter to his mother -a letter so balanced, so gentle, so beautifully composed, precisely because their relationship was like that from the beginning. There was no trauma, no conflict, no darkness that needed to be transformed into a philosophical system. Instead, there was stability, warmth, and clarity, and this is why Epicurus' philosophy is serene, grounded, and free from existential drama. Schopenhauer and Nietzsche carry within them the shadow of a difficult maternal presence; Epicurus carries the light of a mother who did not wound him. And this, simple as it may seem, changes one's entire stance toward life. 😊