

How Would You Answer Someone New Who Asked You: "What Is Epicurean Philosophy All About?"

Post by "Cassius" of September 1, 2019 at 8:28 AM

I agree with everything that Elayne wrote, and she's provided a great general answer that should be good for most anyone.

If you happen to know something about the person who is asking the question, you can attempt to be sure to cover more specific aspects of the philosophy that might interest them.

For example, if they are acutely interested in religious issues, then it is good to mention that Epicurean philosophy was one of the major viewpoints that was popular before the take-over of Judeo Christian religion. Such a person would be interested to know that Epicurus taught that there is no life, and no punishment or reward, after death, and that any "gods" that exist are not as we are taught, but did not create or control this earth and do not punish or reward humans for their actions.

If they are interested in nature or physics, it would would good to mention that Epicurus was one of the first leading teachers that the universe is made of combinations of particles that interact naturally without any supernatural forces; and that both regularity in the actions of bodies exist along with "swerving" of elemental particles as science observes today.

If they are interested in astronomy / space travel / science "fiction" they would be interested to know that Epicurus taught that life does not exist just here on earth, but throughout the universe as a whole; that the universe is boundless in size and eternal in time, and that the earth is not the center of the universe.

If they are interested in philosophy in general, or history, it would be good for them to know that Epicurus was a rebel against Plato and most prior (and following) schools of Greek philosophy. They would be interested to know that Epicurus warned against the misuse of dialectical logic, and even against the misuse of math and geometry to claim that there are mysterious forces (implicitly supernatural) "behind" the reality of the universe.

If they are interested in government and society they will be interested to know that Epicurus taught that there is no absolute justice or absolute morality, and that many important people over the centuries from Thomas Jefferson to Karl Marx to Frederik Nietzsche to the English Utilitarians studied Epicurus' views on that area.

If they are Americans and interested in American history, you can point out to them that they probably didn't know that Thomas Jefferson called himself an Epicurean, and that he was friends with a woman (Frances Wright, who visited him at Monticello) who published one of the

best summaries of major points of Epicurean philosophy in hundreds of years.

So there's a lot you can do if you know something about the person you are talking to.

And as a final comment, we do have the example of Lucretius to consult, because his poem is essentially one long presentation of the philosophy to someone who previously did not know the details.