

General / Opening - Comments on Existentialism / Nihilism

Post by "Cassius" of January 2, 2020 at 8:35 AM

[ADMIN NOTE: To open this discussion here are some comments by "M.A." at another location, which I will paste here for reference. I personally don't have time right now to pursue this topic in detail, but it is definitely of interest, especially as to the intersection with Nietzsche, so this is placeholder to one day come back to it. In his opening post MA is referring to Elayne's article on [An Approach to Reading Philosophy](#):]

M.A.: It's nice to learn you put Epicurus as the context of your deep investigation of science and philosophy. Your framework is best-suited for curious learners of Epicurianism. In my case, I've been to a very strange path. I was a radical Marxist-Leninist communist, became a Socratic skeptic, then a post-modern existentialist. It was at this point of being an anti absolutist I've come to appreciate and embraced the philosophy of Epicurus since he is also an ant-absolutist and as radical as Socrates. In fact, I personally regard Epicurus as the REAL father of existentialism and not so much of Utilitarianism as Utilitarians believe him to be.

Cassius:

I just saw M.A.'s post. I can see why Mike's comment makes sense, and I definitely agree with his last point that Epicurus was not the father of Utilitarianism. But I think Epicurus would recoil in horror, and vigorously denounce many / most of the conclusions that are associated with existentialism, such as this clip on angst. Unfortunately I doubt we can treat the subject of existentialism fairly in a subthread.

Image may contain: text
Image not found. Type: unknown

M.A. Response to Cassius:

Yes I agree with your observation. Actually, I do not see existentialism to be identical with Epicureanism as the former lacks the answer to the most of life's ultimate questions which the latter offers. But being the father of something doesn't mean they are the same thing. I just want to say that existentialists are "standing on the shoulder of a giant" who had already answered their questions even before they ever existed. Yes it is true of existentialism that life is meaningless and death is nothing. However, the point of human existence is not to ponder on the meaninglessness of life but to find the meaning through the pursuit of pleasure. Epicureanism being the father of existentialism doesn't mean the former takes care of that prodigal son. Rather, what I mean is that Epicureanism (not existentialism) was the first to have

recognized that there is nothing to fear of death since there is no absolute and eternal damnation. My point is that existentialism is not the original discoverer of existential question of freedom from absolute God by saying that "God is dead". Rather, it is Epicureanism that originally discovered it by saying that God simply doesn't care about human affairs and is already happy elsewhere so we are on our own.

...

Perhaps, I should rephrase the term "father of existentialism" into the "original author of principles which existentialists are using to justify their random thoughts." Of course Epicureanism and existentialism are two different things because I wouldn't get to Epicureanism if not. I just see the connection that connects me from existentialism to Epicureanism. However, I totally disagree about the claim of Utilitarians that they consider Epicurus as their distant ancestor. What I see is that they are more connected with Aristippus. In fact, Utilitarianism promotes meritocracy which is counter to Epicurean prudence..

Cassius:

M.A. thanks for those posts. You seem to really be into this and I think your perspective makes sense. Seeing as you do from both sides of the issue, if you have the inclination to suggest anything in more detail, please consider suggesting a standalone post here, or posting at Epicureanfriends.com. I think many of us here would be interested in your thoughts on how at least some of these (Nietzsche especially) related to Epicurus. I've read myself most of Nietzsche's references to Epicurus, but I presume these others also referenced Epicurus. If you have observations as to how some of these flirted with Epicurus but then rejected him, and why, that could be very interesting. We don't want to sidetrack too far into Existentialism / Nihilism details that aren't relevant, but given your stated views I bet you have more good summary comments like those in this thread. At least from my point of view a major part of our target audience is people who are definitely not professional philosophers, but who are probably acquainted enough with terms like existentialism and nihilism to be aware that these are directions that they don't want to go - but they might not be exactly sure why.