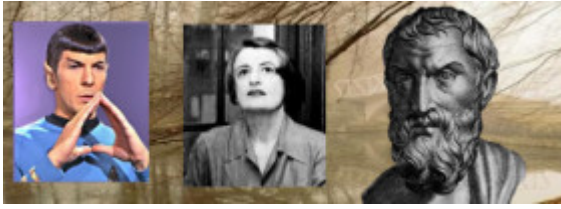


# Summarizing Epicurean Philosophy vs Objectivism

Post by "Cassius" of July 5, 2019 at 6:48 PM



Some people try to draw parallels between Epicurean philosophy and Ayn Rand's objectivism. I would argue that they are very wrong to do so, but as an exercise in discussing how, I would pose this question: Rand was recorded to have said that she could present

the essence of her philosophy while standing on one foot. Her summary was:

1. *Metaphysics: Objective Reality*
2. *Epistemology: Reason*
3. *Ethics: Self-interest*
4. *Politics: Capitalism*

Let's presume you are a stand-in for Epicurus or Metrodorus or Lucretius, and you were asked to give your statement of those four categories in one word or a **very** short phrase that conveys the essence of each.

Rand went on to elaborate slightly further at the link I am going to paste below. Her answers there might help you fine-tune your reply.

Note: I left the photo of Spock in the photo because I took it from a post that is several years old. In this instance Spock can serve as a reminder that Epicurus was not a Stoic/Vulcan, and Epicurus' answer would not be those of a Stoic or a Randian.

<http://aynrandlexicon.com/ayn-rand-ideas...bjectivism.html>

---

Post by "Martin" of July 5, 2019 at 7:38 PM

1. The differences seem too small that I could find a short statement to characterize them.
2. The Canon instead of just reason, which is "downgraded" to an essential tool for sanity checks, the hedonic calculus, work and communication

3. Long-term pleasure, which includes action upon compassion for people and animals in the inner circles with disregard for self-interest

4. Democracy with strongly regulated capitalism and influenced by regional culture (as exemplified in some European countries and Japan, whereby none of them is already close to an "ideal" state)

---

### **Post by “Joshua” of July 5, 2019 at 7:40 PM**

Those four answers show precisely what kind of muddled thinker Rand really was.

1. Identifying metaphysics as objective reality just punts the question. What "is" objective reality? What is it made of?

2. Reason can build on epistemology, but it does not stand in for it. Epistemology must answer to something more "prime"; as sensation (for an empiricist), revelation (as in theology), a priori knowledge, feelings, anticipations, etc. Reason operates on knowledge--it is not a foundation of knowledge on which to operate.

3. Self-interest is actually a valid, if often wrong-headed, ethical system.

4. Capitalism is a theory and expression of economics, not really of politics. She wants to offer it as a counterpoint to Marxism, which offers a theory of economics, a theory of history, AND a theory of government. But that was never what capitalism was; a society can have a capitalist economy, and still have all of its political decisions ahead of it.

But to answer your question;

1. Metaphysics: Atomic Materialism (one kind of philosophical naturalism)

2. Epistemology: the Canon: Sensations, Feelings, and Anticipations.

3. Ethics: Hedonism\*

4 Politics: [theory or practice?]

4a: theory of politics: Arises by human convention.

4b: practice of politics: N/A (unrelated to the questions that concern the Epicurean.)

\*of Hedonism, three kinds; egotistical, altruistic, rational. In my opinion, Epicurus advocated rational hedonism; no *need* to consider everyone else's pleasure (altruism), nor any wisdom in ignoring the same (egotism); instead, consider other's pleasure and pain rationally, as it bears

on your own hedonic calculus. That is why friendship is initially founded in utility.

---

### **Post by “Joshua” of July 5, 2019 at 7:49 PM**

Martin has posited that democracy is a political system consistent with Epicurean philosophy. I agree, and have argued here before that convention implies legitimate power ONLY over those who agree to convention. I.E. excluding slavery, totalitarianism, theocracy, etc.

The reason I don't give that answer myself for number 4 is simply because the textual tradition isn't strong enough to justify it.

For my own part, I agree with you!

---

### **Post by “Elli” of July 6, 2019 at 1:42 AM**

- Metaphysics: No metaphysics or prophysics or between physics only Physics or Physiology i.e. the scientific study of Nature with the observation and examination on the phenomena and the causes that caused them for finding the obvious and for the purpose to not be agitated that is leading to pure pleasure or eudaemonia.

- Epistemology: The methodology or gnosiology of the multivalued reasoning or manifold way that is in the Canon that is leading to pure pleasure or eudeamonia.

- Ethics: Friendship on the basis of the common benefit while all the friends are exceptional to each other having the clear sense that their common goal is pure pleasure or eudaemonia.

- Politics: As a general picture is the constitution of Democracy i.e. many groups of mental balanced persons that are always ready for making social contracts with such fair laws to not hurt each other that is also keeps the coherence of the society they live for the purpose of the pure pleasure or eudaemonia for the majority of them.

---

### **Post by “Cassius” of July 6, 2019 at 9:01 AM**

These are excellent answers and I don't see any that I significantly disagree with. Joshua's list of short summary terms would be a good direct one-on-one comparison with Rand's. Here are my comments on that list (Joshua in bold; my comments italicized):

**1. Metaphysics: Atomic Materialism (one kind of philosophical naturalism)** << *I think "atomic materialism" probably is a good summary term. "Materialism" is helpful for denying "supernaturalism" and "atomic" is helpful for stressing that reality is made up of innumerable separate components and not some kind of mystical single substance.*

**2. Epistemology: the Canon: Sensations, Feelings, and Anticipations.** << *Yes this too seems like a good summary, and indicates the proper place of reason by omission.*

**3. Ethics: Hedonism\*** << *Since Epicurus did not use this term, and since it doesn't have an agreed-upon definite meaning, and since what is agreed upon may not be Epicurean, I would probably look for another word or term. I would say that Epicurean ethics involves maximizing the pleasure and minimizing the pain of the person under consideration, rather than measured by some larger group of people. Pleasure and pain are feelings and need no further definition, while "maximization" is not a matter of time, and does not reference either the immediate moment or "over the long run" (*

*"And even as men choose of food not merely and simply the larger portion, but the more pleasant, so the wise seek to enjoy the time which is most pleasant and not merely that which is longest." - Letter to Menoecus) Presumably the "most pleasant" involves "purity" and "intensity" rather than "duration." I do not see how this can be measured outside by a third party, so presumably this is a matter for individual determination. This boils down to "maximize pleasure and minimize pain both mental and physical.*

#### **4 Politics: [theory or practice?]**

**4a: theory of politics: Arises by human convention.**

**4b: practice of politics: N/A (unrelated to the questions that concern the Epicurean.)**  
<<< *Yes I agree that the important points here have to refer to the "justice" doctrines, indicating that there is no absolute best system.. Period - full stop. These PD's indicate that convention / agreement can be involved, but NOT necessarily, as those who refuse to participate are outside of justice. Thus the bottom line is that politics is determined by the people involved whether arrived at by agreement or by force or by any other method.*

---

**Post by "Joshua" of July 6, 2019 at 9:30 AM**

## Quote

-hedonism

The pursuit of one's own pleasure as an end in itself; in ethics, the view that such a pursuit is the proper aim of all action. Since there are different conceptions of pleasure there are correspondingly different varieties of hedonism.

-Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy

I think that hedonism has a sufficiently clipped and precise definition, particularly under the heading of ethics.

However, I also understand that many are apt to confuse the word with sybaritism, and libertinism. But it will always be the case that the real confusion is over the word pleasure itself. No getting around that, I'm afraid.

---

### **Post by “Cassius” of July 6, 2019 at 9:54 AM**

I can see that exact issue being a major reason why Epicurus seems to have rejected "argument or discussion" on the nature of pleasure or its desirability. Pleasure and pain are givens of Nature and we can't adequately summarize it in words. Pleasure and pain are things that we feel, and Nature is the judge of pleasure and pain, not our logical abstractions.

Hence Epicurus refuses to admit any necessity for argument or discussion to prove that pleasure is desirable and pain to be avoided. These facts, he thinks, are perceived by the senses, as that fire is hot, snow white, honey sweet, none of which things need be proved by elaborate argument: it is enough merely to draw attention to them. (For there is a difference, he holds, between formal syllogistic proof of a thing and a mere notice or reminder: the former is the method for discovering abstruse and recondite truths, the latter for indicating facts that are obvious and evident.) Strip mankind of sensation, and nothing remains; it follows that Nature herself is the judge of that which is in accordance with or contrary to nature.

(from [On Ends](#))

---

### **Post by “Daniel” of July 7, 2019 at 12:09 PM**

1)Metaphysics: Naturalism

2)Epistemology: the Canon: Senses, Pleasure/Pain and Anticipations (Moral intuitions based on genetic predisposition)

3)Ethics: Enlightened self-interest (Hedonism, Utilitarianism)

4)Politics: Contractualism

---

### **Post by “Cassius” of July 7, 2019 at 12:12 PM**

Daniel: If someone were looking to research what you mean by "Contractualism" where would you suggest they look?

---

### **Post by “Daniel” of July 7, 2019 at 12:13 PM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Daniel: If someone were looking to research what you mean by "Contractualism" where would you suggest they look?

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contractualism>