

Epicurus vs the Cyreniacs

Post by "Cassius" of July 20, 2019 at 10:01 AM

If there is enough interest in the Cyreniacs we may open a new section of the forum devoted only to them, but for now let's talk about them under "Hedonism."

I've just read the following article by David Sedley entitled "[Diogenes of Oenoanda on Cyreniac Hedonism.](#)"

(33 III 7) [...] is able, as these people lay it down, like a bait, for all human beings, to draw them, like birds or fish, open-mouthed to the names of the virtues, and sometimes (33 IV 1) <LACUNA OF THREE LINES> [illusions (?). And are you] not ashamed, [you] wretched people, [of contradicting yourselves and] one another: [for indeed, employing puerile] wit, [you reject] pleasure, while cleverly agreeing [with us about sensation], so that you are not [prevented from] passing through [an area in safety] when you venture to climb crags.

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believes,

(33 V 2) Well now, I want to deflect also the error which, along with the feeling of self-love, has you in its grip – an error which, more than any other, further inflates your doctrine as ignorant. The error is this: [not] all causes in things precede their effects, even if the majority do, but some of them precede their effects, others [coincide with] them, and others follow them.⁴

(33 VI 4) Examples of causes that precede are cautery and surgery saving life: in these cases extreme pain must be borne, and it is after this that pleasure quickly follows.

(33 VI 11) Examples of coincident causes are [solid] and liquid nourishment and, in addition to these, [sexual acts]: we do not eat [food] and experience pleasure afterwards, nor do we drink [wine] and experience pleasure afterwards, nor do we emit semen and experience pleasure afterwards; rather the action brings about these pleasures for us immediately, [without awaiting] the future.

(33 VII 11) [As for causes that follow, an example is expecting to win] praise after death: although men experience pleasure now because there will be a favourable memory of them after they have gone, nevertheless the cause of the pleasure occurs later.

(33 VIII 7) Now you, being unable to mark off these distinctions, and being unaware that the virtues have a place among the causes that coincide with their effects (for they are borne along with [pleasure]), go completely astray].

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This is an excellent article and affirms the hazards in textual reconstruction from mutilated original texts.

Post by “Hiram” of July 20, 2019 at 11:24 AM

Here's my review of a book of the Cyrenaics

<http://societyofepicurus.com/cyrenaic-reasonings/>

Onfray also has a lot to say about them and about Aristippus

I read that essay recently. These discussions must have taken place at the onset of the Garden, because by the time Diogenes was writing I do not believe there is evidence of any Cyrenaic school, so I believe this means that Diogenes was citing or re-stating discussions from earlier, probably quoting from the founders themselves.

Post by “Cassius” of February 25, 2021 at 7:16 AM

"For our nature [wants what] is better for our soul. Moreover, the soul is manifestly more [powerful] than the body; for it [has] control of the extreme and supremacy over the other [feelings], as indeed we revealed it [above.] **[So if], through paying attention to the arguments of Aristippus, we take care of the body, [choosing] all the pleasure derived from drink, food and [sexual acts] and indeed absolutely all the things which no longer [give enjoyment after the happening], but neglect the soul, we shall deprive ourselves of the greatest pleasures.**"

Diogenes of Oinoanda Fragment 29 http://www.english.enoanda.cat/the_inscription.html

Post by “TauPhi” of February 2, 2026 at 11:17 PM

The best online resource on Cyrenaics I'm aware of:

[The Cyrenaics Resource \[The Lucian of Samosata Project\]](#)

Post by “DaveT” of February 3, 2026 at 11:43 AM

[Cassius](#) Yes, as I am not familiar with his school, and I'd be interested in determining the extent of his influence on Epicurus' school, particularly since the Cyreniac school disappeared around the time period Epicureanism was introduced and began to flourish

Post by “Eikadistes” of February 3, 2026 at 9:19 PM

[Quote from DaveT](#)

[Cassius](#) Yes, as I am not familiar with his school, and I'd be interested in determining the extent of his influence on Epicurus' school, particularly since the Cyreniac school disappeared around the time period Epicureanism was introduced and began to flourish

Here are some [similarities \(and differences\)](#) between the two:

	PHILOSOPHY EPICUREANISM	CYRENAICISM
Founder	Epicurus	Aristippus
History	<p><i>Epicurus</i> (341–270 BCE) founded this anti-Platonic ethical philosophy of non-deterministic atomism with the support of his disciples <i>Metrodorus</i>, <i>Hermarchus</i>, and <i>Polyaenus</i>. The 1st-century BCE Roman poets <i>Lucretius</i> (author of <i>De Rerum Natura</i>, "On the Nature of Things") and <i>Philodemus</i> made notable contributions to spread the philosophy. The 2nd-century CE <i>Diogenes of Oinoanda</i> is known for funding a large, Epicurean stonework project.</p>	<p><i>Aristippus</i> (c. 435-356 BCE) was born in ancient Libya and studied under Socrates in Athens until the death of his teacher in 399 BCE. Aristippus' propositions heavily deviated from his teacher. Eventually, the Cyrenaic school experienced a schism between Anniceris, Hegesias, and Theodorus. By the 3rd-century, Epicurean Philosophy had displaced Cyrenaicism as the dominant expression of hedonism.</p>

Epistemology	<p>All knowledge begins with [1] <i>sensation</i> (aisthesis) caused by the interaction of external particles with our sensory organs. We detect pleasurable or painful [2] <i>feelings</i> (pathē) associated with the various sensations. Through repeated stimulation, we form [3] <i>anticipations</i> (prolepsis) about the patterns of nature.</p>	<p>The only reliable criterion of knowledge is [1] <i>feeling</i> (pathē), which is all that is required to pursue the true goal of life (<i>active pleasure</i>). Sensations cannot provide reliable information about the objective universe because they purely subjective and we should therefore treat them with a skeptical attitude.</p>
Metaphysics	<p>Reality exists independent of the mind. The universe is made of bodies and void. Bodies are either particles that can neither be created nor destroyed, or compounds that are composed of particles. All compound objects are subject to the forces of dissolution. Both empty space and the particles that move through it are infinite in number and eternal in time. The mind is a compound structure associated with a living animal, and can be located within the body.</p>	<p>An objective reality exists, separate from our subjective experiences, <i>however</i>, that reality is ultimately unknowable because sensory data is limited and ultimately unreliable.</p>
Cosmology	<p>The Earth, Sun, Moon, planets, and other linked celestial objects comprise a <i>kosmos</i> in a spatially-infinite universe with infinite <i>kosmoi</i>. All kosmoi are made of atoms. The seeds of life are everywhere.</p>	<p>The material universe is sensible, but the contents of our perceptions do not reflect the actual nature of reality. It is best to focus on the reliable knowledge provided by our feelings.</p>
Theology	<p>The gods are perfect, material beings, unconcerned with humanity, imagined as either as [1] indestructible, extra-terrestrial animals, or [2] thought-forms we dream due to our natural preconception of "blessedness". Epicurus is romanticized as having been god-like.</p>	<p>The gods do not exist. Any discussion of theology is futile because our senses cannot be trusted to provide true knowledge about the objective universe.</p>

Ethics:	<p>Calculate the advantages of every situation based on their possibility to provide stable, long-term pleasure. Actions are judged according to their consequences. There are no eternal ethical rules. There are, however, "Masterful Opinions" attributed to Epicurus that should be studied in order to minimize pain and maximize the pleasure of the good life.</p>	<p>Maximize physical pleasure in all circumstances according to each individual's personal feelings. Prioritize changing your painful circumstances instead of changing your attitude. There is no virtue in tolerating pain. Physical pleasure is preferable to mental pleasure, and physical pain is worse than mental pain.</p>
Goal of Life:	<p>A godlike state of pure pleasure, a disposition of imperturbable joy, free from physical pain and mental anguish. The practice of prudence will lead the wise person to the good life.</p>	<p>Enjoy active, physical pleasures. Pleasure is more than the absence of pain. A life of luxury is demonstrably superior to a life of economic poverty and should be pursued.</p>