

2022 Epicurus vs Buddhism Compare and Contrast Thread

Post by “Cassius” of January 27, 2022 at 4:34 PM

We have recently had a number of good new participants in the forum who have a lot of experience in Buddhism. We have one thread on this already, but rather than restart that one I'd prefer a brand new one which will probably make it easier to get input from the new participants, which I would greatly appreciate.

As before, we don't need a Buddhism-Bashing tone here - though I myself probably have tendency to be the most guilty of that. Part of my frustration comes from finding it relatively easy to pin down core positions of Stoicism, and therefore contrasting it to Epicurean viewpoints on the same issues, but regularly being told that Buddhism is so amorphous that it's really impossible to pin it down. The discussion usually then devolves into "such and such a figure said this" and "such and such a figure said that" with the result that there are so many rabbit trails that only those who are deep into Buddhism end up really caring about the results.

So if possible I'd like us to work on a thread for "the rest of us" - Epicureans in particular, of course, who want to get an initial grasp of what is fairly referable to as generic Buddhism from a Western perspective. That way we can hopefully get a grasp on at least a couple of core concepts.

To kick this off, I will post something that documents what I myself understand to be sort of a generic Buddhist position that I think Epicurus would find most unacceptable. Since we don't have direct Epicurean commentary, my best suggestion is to cite this in the form of two clips I came across this afternoon:

 <https://www.reddit.com> > r > Nietzsche > comments > 71uwla > nietzsche_on_buddhism

[Nietzsche on Buddhism : Nietzsche](#)

A core tenet of traditional **Buddhism** is that life is essentially unsatisfactory, which is a form of suffering; therefore, the goal is to escape the cycle of rebirth, i.e, to no longer exist. A core tenet of **Nietzsche's** philosophy takes the opposite view: one should will to live over and over even if life does involve suffering.

I finally found a short quote in The Will to Power that might begin to explain things, "weary Nihilism, which no longer attacks: its most renowned form being Buddhism: as passive Nihilism, a sign of weakness". Is it really fair for Nietzsche to accuse Buddhism of being nihilistic? People disciplining their mind to attain enlightenment is nihilism? I don't get it. Maybe I'm traveling down the wrong path anyways.

[Those clips came from here.](#)

Of course I said that this shouldn't be a "Bash Buddhism" thread and then I turn around and cite someone who never read "How To Win Friends and Influence People." But I cite this as an attempt to ground the discussion in the views of someone who was a far smarter person than I, who actually had some sympathies for Buddhism, and who apparently ended up finding a strong strain of Nihilism and Passivity in Buddhism which does in fact seem to me to be the standard criticism which I see repeated often in mainstream "Western" writing that ultimately seems to derive from the Greco-Roman-Epicurean perspective.

Hopefully these cites will help us focus on the really large questions including:

"Is Buddhism essentially nihilistic?"

Is the goal of Buddhism ultimately to cease to exist?"

Does Buddhism cultivate passivity?

And of course from our Epicurean perspective, "Is it fair to say that Buddhism has very little or any concern with pleasure as the goal of life?"

This is a start and I hope this time we can construct some commentary that would be useful in the future to our many visitors who have explored Buddhism prior to coming to this forum.

Post by "Matt" of January 27, 2022 at 4:53 PM

I could never get behind Buddhism. The Dhammapada is nice, but the Buddha's insistence on there being reincarnation and actual practical examples of karma, such as a man's house burning down or collapsing because he was not a good person, pretty much invalidated the majority philosophy for me.

I also just didn't understand the concept of "anatta"...the supposed denial of the atman or soul in contrast to the atman in Hinduism and the jiva of Jainism. It seemed to me that the basis of some sort of continuity for reincarnation and karma to work, there would need to be some sort

of element that carries the karmic deeds from life to the next...yet if anatta is true it seemed unlikely...if there is no atman or soul to carry the "scent" of the karma of a previous life to a new one, then what mechanism does? This was the main metaphysical issue I had...also the ambiguity of what the "blowing out" of nirvana actually entails, without it being a very ambiguous sort of non-differentiated passionless nothing.

Post by "Matt" of January 27, 2022 at 5:03 PM

I'm also probably very biased in my view of Buddhism contrasted with my experience with Vedanta and Neoplatonism.

Plotinus for example was extremely vigorous in his exposition on metaphysical topics, that I felt the Buddha was exceedingly vague on (to sell me on the philosophy). Not to say "later" Buddhists who wrote in the various Theravada and Mahayana traditions didn't attempt to expound upon these ideas...but just going off of the "Gospel" of the Buddha, the Dhammapada, it wasn't as detailed.

Post by "Cassius" of January 27, 2022 at 5:39 PM

In reading summaries like Matt has posted, the jargon almost seems nonsensical to someone who doesn't dive in to the details. What is the world is so attractive about it that people would spend the time to dive into those details when they hardly take the time anymore to read a book or a newspaper on current events. I presume that the superficial attraction is something about the "mystical" look or the simplicity appearance of the leaders, but I am probably descending again in to Buddhism-Bashing. Don't people who are attracted to it have "some" idea of the basic teachings before they dive into the details? What are those basic attractions that get people started down that path in the first place?

(And here I am referring to Westerners who are raised largely in a "Western" tradition - I am not referring to people in Eastern cultures who are raised around it and absorb it from the majority of those around them.)

Post by "Cassius" of January 27, 2022 at 5:48 PM

Here is another clip that might advance this conversation:

Quote

Quote

Both Nietzsche's and Buddhist writings share the fact that they are a direct response to nihilism, however was he right in characterizing Buddhism as advocating a negation of the will, as a will to nothingness, or was this a misunderstanding stemming from his reading of Buddhist texts through the works of Schopenhauer?

I can speak less strongly to Nietzsche than I can to Buddhism, but let me say this: Buddhism is (and has been for than a millennium) as stricken by sectarianism as any Western religion. In the particular case of the approach to will, consider two almost orthogonal cases:

1. Theravada Buddhism. To vastly oversimplify, Theravadins practice something that approaches an ascetism. In a very real way, Theravada practice focuses on denying--and thus subduing--the will and any sense of desire. I think this most completely meshes with Nietzsche's conception of Buddhist thought as a negation of the will and a will to nothingness. This conception is very easily supported--and is supported in Theravada--through the Second and Third Noble Truths ("Desire is the root of suffering." and "There is a path to the cessation of desire.").
2. Zen Buddhism. Most notably in its theoretical form, Zen looks almost nothing like Theravada in respect to its approach to will and nothingness. Zen thinking relies heavily on the Diamond and Heart Sutras, which pretty explicitly say that the Buddhist conception of nothingness envelops even the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. As such, Zen practitioners reach for a stillness of mind that manifests as a totally natural motion of mind. This looks almost identical to Taoist Wei-Wu-Wei (action without action), which is harmonious natural activity. In Zen (as in most forms of Buddhism when practiced in their highest forms), the fullness of nothingness is recognized: it is not a negation of anything, but rather an affirmation of everything which is in the phenomenally experienced world. In Zen, it is said that "It is right to want flowers and to hate weeds." This is quite obviously NOT a negation of will, but perhaps rather an attempt to free one's will from what Zen would call the confines of ego-bound or conceptual thought.

The point is that Nietzsche's interpretation of Buddhist will and nothingness is quite defensible, and it is a very natural conclusion from certain forms of Buddhism--especially many of those that are approached in a more scholarly and academic

fashion. On the other hand, there are Buddhist schools in which there is no reasonable way to reconcile Nietzsche's conception with what the practicing Buddhists talk about.

Unfortunately, however, there is a massive caveat to this, and that is that most practicing Buddhists (even those who practice Sutra-driven forms of the religion) will tell you that Buddhism cannot be completely accurately expressed in academic words. There is a requirement for the suspension of self that requires the suspension of thought, and "nothingness" (to most Buddhists) is simply a word-symbol that points to the unencapsulable idea that is that suspension and the access it gives.

The only serious way to enquire about the philosophical validity of Western takes on Buddhism that are laden with basic philosophical conceits regarding thought, self, and truth is in terms of their psychological and cultural impact, and that's a completely different question.

That's from here: <https://philosophy.stackexchange.com/questions/3452...que-of-buddhism>

Post by "Godfrey" of January 27, 2022 at 6:40 PM

Personally I was attracted to Eastern thought because of the emptiness of the Platonic and Aristotlean traditions. I had thought that this was the basis of all Western thinking and so was looking elsewhere for a sensible philosophy. In stumbling across Epicurus I discovered that there actually *is* a sensible Western tradition and that it was no longer necessary to try to 'splain away the parts of Eastern thought that made no sense to me.

I'm mainly familiar with Zen, but I generally disagree with the characterizations of nihilistic and passive. Particularly passivity: Buddhism as I understand it is extremely socially engaged.

Some scholars have documented an historic connection between Buddhism and the Greeks but I believe that their work is not without controversy. This connection is in the person of Pyrrho, who apparently spent several years in India and absorbed many of the Buddhist teachings. Another theory is that Pyrrho and the Buddhists influenced each other.

Epicurus was reputed to admire Pyrrho, however he didn't accept his philosophy. So as I understand it currently, Buddhism and/or Pyrrhonism was just one more line of thinking that Epicurus supplanted in developing his system.

I'll leave to those more well versed than me to give a synopsis of Buddhism.

Post by “Matt” of January 27, 2022 at 7:03 PM

I had far more ease conceptualizing the ideas in the Hindu Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita...and it's Greek counterpart Neoplatonism.

The Hindu Brahman, Nirguna Brahman, Ishvara, Para-atman and the atman in contrast to the Greek emanation of “to hen” the One, the Nous and the world soul and the phenomenal world. All that mystical jargon made far more sense to me than the equally mystical Buddhist concepts.

<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/p/plotinus/enneads/cache/enneads.pdf>

Post by “Eikadistes” of January 27, 2022 at 10:02 PM

Of the ancient Indian philosophies of **Ājīvika**, **Ajñana**, **Buddhism**, **Chārvāka**, **Jainism**, **Mīmāṃsā**, **Nyāya**, **Samkhya**, **Vaisheshika**, **Vedanta**, and **Yoga**, we'll find the closest companion to Epicureanism in **Chārvāka**. Early Buddhism is most closely related to the Indian school of **Ajñana**, from which Pyrrhonism developed, so, in general, I don't think that comparisons between early Buddhism and Epicurean philosophy are helpful. They are dissimilar and historically unrelated.

In terms of physics, Epicureanism shares the atomism of **Ājīvika** and **Vaisheshika** (though, both traditions propose a deterministic physics) as well as the materialism of **Chārvāka**.

It uniquely shares the ethics of **Chārvāka**, whereas every other tradition devalues hedonism.

We find the most similarity between Epicurean epistemology and **Chārvāka**, which justifies the criterion of direct physical and mental perceptions, without inference, comparison, or speculation. It is most dissimilar from **Ajñana**, which rejects all criteria of knowledge, followed closely thereafter by early **Buddhism**, which avoids making any certain claims.

Epicurean theology is comparatively unique. Epicurus would have been opposed to the atheism of **Ājīvika**, **Chārvāka**, **Nyāya**, and **Vaisheshika**, as well as the agnosticism of **Ajñana** and Buddhism, as well as the immanent dualism and mysticism of **Samkhya** and **Yoga**, and also the divine idealism of **Mīmāṃsā** and **Vedanta**. The Jain universe of multiple, physical deities (the Tirthankaras), is the closest ancient Indian theology that in any way resembles Epicureanism. There is not, to my knowledge, any significant historical link between the two at any point in time.

As far as ancient Indian philosophies go, early Buddhism overwhelmingly contradicts Epicurean philosophy. They are at the opposite ends of the epistemological spectrum, propose completely different goals in life, and are only barely physically compatible if, for no other reason than early Buddhism's refusal to provide *any* hard answers on physics.

Whereas Epicureanism is most similar to **Chārvāka** and, to an extent **Ājīvika** and **Vaisheshika**, early Buddhism shares intellectual similarities with **Ajñana** and Prryhonian Skepticism, and the meditative practices with **Vedanta** and **Yoga**. Buddhism's propositions are much closer to Epicurus' opponents than to Epicurus in any meaningful way.

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 28, 2022 at 12:23 AM

Here is my understanding of Buddhism, based on my study and practice:

I think that for many people who go into the study and practice of Buddhism, they are unhappy and they hope to find an answer as to what to do to have a better life. So Buddhism looks at what is causing the suffering, the "dukkha", in life.

From the Pali Sutta, ancient text:

Quote

"[Birth](#) is dukkha, [aging](#) is dukkha, [death](#) is dukkha; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, & despair are dukkha; association with the unbeloved is dukkha; separation from the loved is dukkha; not getting what is wanted is dukkha. In short, the five clinging-aggregates are dukkha."

— [SN 56.11](#)

<https://www.accesstoinsight.org/ptf/dhamma/sac...ca1/dukkha.html>

And they say that the suffering is due to clinging to unrealistic expectations...and then they say why do people cling? ...because they crave, and why do they crave? ...because they have greed.

The unrealistic expectations are that they want to hold onto things, or that they wish to permanently possess the things that they want, but actually the nature of everything is impermenence, and there is nothing that can be held onto. And then when unpleasant things happen, the urge to resist them and the feeling of aversion or anger arises, but things like being subjected to unpleasant things, and old age, sickness, and death are all inevitable.

So through the disciplined practice of meditation, within Zen Buddhism, they practice "letting go"...and "choiceless awareness"... "not picking or choosing" and also come to "realize" the "true nature of everything" which is "emptiness". And they practice by simplifying one's life and cultivating and practicing Buddhist virtues...the Buddhist precepts and the paramitas (perfections)...

Zen paramitas:

Quote

The six are (1) generosity (dāna), (2) morality (śīla), (3) patience (kṣānti), (4) vigor (vīrya), (5) concentration (dhyāna), and (6) wisdom (prajñā).

Zen Buddhist Precepts:

Quote

The Three Refuges

- I take refuge in the Buddha (the source of the teaching)
- I take refuge in the Dharma (the Buddha's teaching)
- I take refuge in the Sangha (those who practise the teaching)

The Three Pure Precepts

- Cease from evil. By refraining from that which causes confusion and suffering, the truth will shine of itself
- Do only good. Doing good arises naturally when we cease from evil
- Do good for others. To train in Zen is to devote one's life to the good of all living things

The Ten Precepts

- Do not take life
- Do not steal
- Do not indulge in abusive or inappropriate sexuality
- Do not lie
- Do not abuse intoxicants
- Do not criticize others
- Do not boast of your attainments and belittle others
- Do not be mean [stingy] in giving Dharma (teaching) or wealth
- Do not harbour anger

- Do not defame the three treasures (do not deny the Buddha within yourself or in others)

<https://zenways.org/take-the-zen-precepts/>

And for Buddhist "emptiness" there are different ways of explaining this...there is no inner and no outer, there is no center and no edge. All things are empty of intrinsic existence and nature. As for nihilism...this can come from the teaching of "no self" which is the understanding that there is no fixed innate "inner self" because the self arises dependent on many causes and conditions which are in flux.

I think that this understanding of the "no self" can lead to problems. It can lead to a quiet acquiescence in which a person engages with the world in a very passive way. This may work in the communal life of a Zen monastery, but doesn't translate well for the modern Western lifestyle. And then this could lead to a sense of "giving up" on life, for people who are introverted and lack social skills and lack adequate social connections.

So to answer a question that [Cassius](#) asked in the very first post...Yes, I think Buddhism leads people to cultivate passivity.

The understanding of pleasure in Buddhism is that it should not be "relied upon", because it is impermanent and ephemeral and therefore it will always lead to more suffering, because try as you might you just can't "hold onto" pleasure.

So.....now to contrast Buddhism with Epicureanism....

The antidote to all the unhealthy passivity of Buddhism....is Epicureanism!

For me....first it is important to understand what the natural and necessary pleasures of life are...and getting clear on what those are...then diligently (and patiently) working toward getting those pleasures. This is my list:

- 1) eating healthy food
- 2) an adequate place to live
- 3) good sleep
- 4) some form of regular exercise
- 5) making and maintaining good friendships (could include a life partner)
- 6) study of Epicurean wisdom philosophy
- 7) right type of career/job/craft

And...also there is the experience of pleasureable sensations and pleasureable memories, and yet the basics of one's life is a priority and is also the place where the all the sensory enjoyments arise.

Also...there is the anticipation that the basic pleasures will always be there to enjoy. For example, there is ample food to eat and so the pleasure of eating will continually occur every day. There is no need to over-eat, because in a few hours I will be hungry again and can enjoy eating all over again...which also means that there is a way to interact with food so as to bring the most pleasure...eat in a beautiful way...slowly/enjoyably and with pleasureable respect for the food.

Post by “Godfrey” of January 28, 2022 at 12:43 AM

[Quote from Nate](#)

Buddhism's propositions are much closer to Epicurus' opponents than to Epicurus in any meaningful way.

@Nate you are much more familiar with the material than I am, but this is my take-away as well.

Post by “Cassius” of January 28, 2022 at 9:26 AM

Thank you too for the excellent post Kalosyni! There is a lot of information there, which from my perspective speaks for itself. To read about Buddhism is in my mind to recoil at its opposition to everything I see in Epicurus. When I read about Buddhism I "sense" pain itself; when I read about Epicurus' views I see a path that is the opposite of pain and to which I am naturally drawn.

Here's the one part I would comment on now:

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

The antidote to all the unhealthy passivity of Buddhism....is Epicureanism!

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Display More

Yes, I think that is all correct, especially when you say "For me..." but if someone were to tell me this I would want to ask them immediately: Yes, what you are describing is a good course toward pleasure and the Epicurean life.

But do you FIRST understand WHY this path makes sense?

Someone who skips right to the "application" without understanding may be apt to give up when the going gets tough, or when, as Lucretius says, that person is confronted by the scary or intimidating tales of the religionists or idealists, who suggest that you are following the path of evil by not heeding their definition of "the good."

In short it's important to understand why and how Epicurus embraced pleasure as the good so that you won't be shaken from the course in the inevitable storms of life.

Post by "Cassius" of January 28, 2022 at 11:29 AM

And in fact my comment as to needing to know the "why" and the "how" is pretty much exactly the point made by Torquatus which is at the top of the home page now:

Quote

Moreover, unless the constitution of the world is thoroughly understood, we shall by no means be able to justify the verdicts of our senses. Further, our mental perceptions all arise from our sensations; and if these are all to be true, as the system of Epicurus proves to us, *then only* will cognition and perception become possible. ... [W]hen cognition and knowledge have been invalidated, every principle concerning the conduct of life and the performance of its business becomes invalidated. So from natural science we borrow courage to withstand the fear of death, and firmness to face superstitious dread, and tranquillity of mind, through the removal of ignorance concerning the mysteries of the world, and self-control, arising from the elucidation of the nature of the passions and their different classes....

If we can't "justify the verdict of our senses" then we can't be sure of anything - that's the "skepticism" problem that Buddhism jumps off the deep in by accepting as having no solution.

And without confidence in the verdicts of our senses only then is "cognition and perception" about anything possible.

And without cognition and knowledge, "every principle concerning the conduct of life and the performance of its business" is invalidated.

As Diogenes of Oinoanda stated it, we accept that the flux exists, but not that it is so fast that we can't come to grips with it!

Quote

Fr. 5

[Others do not] explicitly [stigmatise] natural science as unnecessary, being ashamed to acknowledge [this], but use another means of discarding it. For, when they assert that things are inapprehensible, what else are they saying than that there is no need for us to pursue natural science? After all, who will choose to seek what he can never find?

Now Aristotle and those who hold the same Peripatetic views as Aristotle say that nothing is scientifically knowable, because things are continually in flux and, on account of the rapidity of the flux, evade our apprehension. We on the other hand acknowledge their flux, but not its being so rapid that the nature of each thing [is] at no time apprehensible by sense-perception. And indeed [in no way would the upholders of] the view under discussion have been able to say (and this is just what they do [maintain] that [at one time] this is [white] and this black, while [at another time]

neither this is [white nor] that black, [if] they had not had [previous] knowledge of the nature of both white and black.

Post by “Don” of January 28, 2022 at 12:31 PM

This is a fascinating thread. Thanks for initiating a "fresh" one, [Cassius](#) !

I'll admit I'm a little intimidated by the depth of knowledge displayed by @Nate. His grasp of early Indian philosophies is far deeper than I even realized was available! Thanks for sharing that! I find it fascinating that there was such a wide divergent spectrum of beliefs and philosophies.

I also appreciate [Kalosyni](#) 's post. One of the things that had attracted me to Buddhism in the first place was its lists and outlines and the sense that all that gave of "We have this all figured out. Here's the charts and diagrams and outlines to prove it!" Maybe that's what attracted me initially to Epicurus, too? The [Principal Doctrines](#), the Three Legs of the Canon, the 3-part Physics/Canon/Ethics have that flavor of "Here's the basics" when first encountered. Yes, I realize there's SO much more to wrap one's head around but being able to say "Here's an outline" is somehow gratifying and inviting and sparks curiosity to dig deeper.

[Kalosyni](#) gave the Four Noble Truths in her post. From another source, these are:

- (1) dukkha exists (i.e., There is dukkha)
- (2) dukkha arises from causes
- (3) we can end dukkha
- (4) by following the Buddha's path to awakening (The 8-fold Path).

(See <https://tricycle.org/magazine/dukkha-meaning/>)

My penchant for going back to the original texts was strong even back when exploring Buddhism, so I found many translations of *dukkha* somewhat misleading and pale reflections of the connotations of the original. That Tricycle article I linked to had an interesting point:

Quote

This central term [dukkha] is best understood alongside the related word sukha. The prefix su- generally means “good, easy, and conducive to well-being,” and the prefix du- correspondingly means “bad, difficult, and inclining toward illness or harm.” On the most basic level, then, sukha means pleasant while dukkha means unpleasant. The noble truth of suffering, however, does not simply refer to bodily pain; its meaning is far more subtle and rich.

One can also feel mental pleasure and pain. Here, the twin prefixes are employed again. A “good mind” (su-manas) is contrasted with a “bad mind” (du-manas) to yield the Pali words most often used to describe happiness (somanassa) and sorrow (domanassa), also known as mental pleasure and mental pain.

The traditional way of translating the First Noble Truth is: Life is suffering. But that's not exactly the meaning of that "Truth" (yes, I'm going to start putting it in quotes). [Kalosyni](#) 's link does a great job of displaying the original texts (Thanks!) and it seems to me that even Epicurus would agree that the things that Sariputta lists can be described as "terrible things" (as the 4th line of the Tetracharmakos calls "pain").

I also find it interesting in the Tricycle article's discussion of the prefixes su- "good" and du- "bad" which, it seems to me have parallels in Epicurus's focus on pleasure and pain. So, it also seems to me that, ultimately, Buddhism and Epicureanism are both concerned with "pain" and "pleasure" and maximizing "pleasure" in one's life...

*****BUT!** *** (before anyone's head explodes! 😊)

It seems to me they both started from different locations on *how* pain exists and what "pleasure/good things" means. From the start, Epicurus posited 2 feelings - pleasure and pain - which Epicureans use as the "yardstick" by which to measure which actions would be most advantageous to move us to a more pleasurable life.

Buddha, on the other hand, said that our very existence - the very components of our physical and mental makeup, "the five clinging-aggregates" - are themselves dukkha/pain/unsatisfactory. The only release from this dukkha is found in dousing the fires of our desires, our clinging, that which connects us round after round on the wheel of rebirth. I think Buddha said that nirvana/moksha could be experienced while alive (or was this expanded on in later sutras and traditions like the bodhisattva foregoing his/her own "release" until all sentient beings are freed) but the ultimate "prize" is NOT being reborn, not having to go through all the dukkha all over again and again and again.

Epicurus had something to say about that attitude:

Quote

We are born once. We cannot be born twice: for eternity we must be non-existent. But you people, who are not master of the future, put things off for "the right time". Procrastination ruins the life of all. And so, each of us is hurried and unprepared at death.

So, everything we experience, we experience in this life. There is no rebirth. There is no karma determining our future existence although understood more broadly, we DO experience the consequences of our actions and decisions - which is one understanding of "karma" - and that does determine our life in the future in this life. Which, to me, is a reason for defining terms. I could see a Buddhist saying that Buddhism is designed to allow a person to lead "the most pleasurable life" or better "the most blissful life." But right there, how do you define "pleasure" or "bliss" and even "life."

There is a modern strain of Western Buddhism - [secular Buddhism](#) (that even has [its own podcast!](#)) but to me (and one of the things that finally led me away from Buddhism as a path) that attempts - from my perspective - to do something similar to some modern Stoics and try to separate a "modern version" of the philosophy from its underpinnings and its historical context. Which is why I think [Cassius](#) 's focus, for example, on the underlying Epicurean physics on this forum is important. We have to look at the totality of the philosophy and where it grew from if we're to understand the rest of it. A cafeteria-style Buddhism or Stoicism is just a watered down version of the original. And if you want watered-down philosophy, I suppose that's one way to go.

Post by “Matt” of January 28, 2022 at 12:39 PM

The main issue I see with certain philosophies like Buddhism is that though they may trend toward being atheistic or agnostic, like Buddhism and Jainism, they are still rife with unsubstantiated metaphysical premises.

I think many western people see that the Buddha is a non-theistic path and especially if they are running from western Judeo-Christian traditions, they see the Buddha as an eastern sage offering an alternative path. But the reality is though that a monotheistic “God” is not material to Buddhism, there are plenty of unsubstantiated metaphysical premises that the philosophy is built upon...as @Nate said in his post, that Buddhism was one of many philosophical schools that all had very different ideas about life. From theistic Hindu schools like Sankhya yoga and Vedanta to the non-theistic Carvaka. But Buddhism’s middle way is still built upon the entirely unsubstantiated doctrine that karma is in fact an observable and measurable mechanism in the universe and that samsara continual reincarnation is also an observable process....again these are merely articles of faith as opposed to observable truths and frankly as articles of faith, they

are as valid as the Christian idea of the resurrection and original sin. Because if samsara and the fear of perpetual reincarnation tied to bad karma WASN'T the main focus of the faith and philosophy, then the Buddha has nothing really unique to offer as a solution to get off the wheel of suffering and reincarnation...his entire system is dependent on an unfounded premise....that because of previous actions from time immemorial, you will be reborn again and again and again...until you extinguish your karmic flame.

It's like going from one thing with metaphysical articles of faith to another one...just without God being a primary issue.

Post by “Don” of January 28, 2022 at 12:41 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

As Diogenes of Oinoanda stated it, we accept that the flux exists, but not that it is so fast that we can't come to grips with it!

I find this an interesting parallel to the concept of the [Buddhist Two Truths](#), "conventional" truth and "ultimate" truth.

The Buddhist version goes "Provisional or conventional truth describes our daily experience of a concrete world, and Ultimate truth describes the ultimate reality as *sunyata*, empty of concrete and inherent characteristics."

From my perspective, the Epicurean version goes something like "Provisional or conventional truth describes our daily experience of a concrete world, and Ultimate truth describes the ultimate reality as consisting of only atoms and void." There are only **really** atoms and void but that doesn't negate or make it any less important that we are alive, we make decisions, our decisions have consequences, and we can live a pleasurable life. But, in the **ultimate** analysis, we are simply momentary aggregates of atoms moving in the void.

Post by “Don” of January 28, 2022 at 12:50 PM

[Quote from Matt](#)

I think many western people see that the Buddha is a non-theistic path and especially if they are running from western Judeo-Christian traditions, they see the Buddha as an eastern sage offering an alternative path. But the reality is though that a monotheistic "God" is not material to Buddhism, there are plenty of unsubstantiated metaphysical premises that the philosophy is built upon

Yes! Looking back, I believe that was my mindset when I discovered Buddhism. I also found the concept of "rebirth" more palatable than the Christian "you're being tested in this life for the real prize in the afterlife." My go-to thought was "Rebirth just makes more sense" with the seasonal cycles of nature, for example. When compared to the Christian "One strike and you're out", the idea of rebirth was an intriguing alternative. But then I tried to wrap my brain around the convoluted explanations of: there is no atman/soul in Buddhism so nothing "transmigrates" from one life to the next; it's like stamping a ring in clay with the ring being one life and the clay being next and the stamp being the karmic imprints from one to the next and.... etc. Humans are clever little primates and can really come up with some wild ideas!

Post by "Matt" of January 28, 2022 at 12:52 PM

"One strike yer outta here!!!"

Post by "Matt" of January 28, 2022 at 12:56 PM

Yeah the Buddhist anatta doctrine throws me pretty hard and it makes it even less believable as purely an article of faith situation where you need to conceptualize this very unobservable principle without having "something" for continuity. No atman... there is no karmic scent to pass onto another being. If I have no memory of my past lives and will have no memory of my future lives, then how can I be worried or even be remotely sure this is correct or even remotely true? Just faith.

Karma and original or inherited sin might as well be synonymous with each other, because though previous iterations of myself may have done bad things, I may not have done them "now" in this life, therefore what would be the difference between inherited sin that I'm guilty for that would send me to hell without atonement and karmic sins of a previous life that effect my "eternal" place in the universe of suffering? Nothing, I see nothing different. Two sides of

the same coin.

And further there is no universal arbiter to make a petition to get full warranty on this...just the word of someone who says "this will happen...trust me", much like the word of a person who says the resurrection will happen.

When placed side by side with even monotheistic traditions, Buddhism is every bit as metaphysical and irrational. Even though we know many leave one tradition for the other believing it's an escape.

I can imagine the horror of a western atheist fleeing to a Tibetan monastery to learn that the Buddhist's have hells, heavens, ghosts and deities all wrapped up in a soteriological package that requires faith in the word of a man.

Post by "Kalosyni" of January 28, 2022 at 1:19 PM

It is important here, that we all see that there are various views begin presented on this thread that are coming from individual opinions, some of which are not based on the deep study of Buddhism.

When it came to my Buddhist understanding, I began to feel that either something was lost in time or lost in translation, or the Hindu religious understanding crept back into Buddhism (and which stamped out Buddhism in India after a certain number of years).

In Buddhism there is the understanding of the present moment experience...of understanding the components of present moment experience...there are objects, and there are sensory organs, and there are the sensory experiences. And consciousness arises from these sensory experiences.

Because if you follow the logic, then actually Buddha was ending the idea of endless reincarnation. In fact, his idea may have been so far out there that very few people actually got it. Basically this: that consciousness depends on the body. This is what I got from studying the Pali Suttas, and reading between the lines so to speak...but basically taking the ideas of Buddha to their logical conclusions.

As for the emphasis on suffering, maybe that too got taken out of it's original teaching. Buddha says in the Pali Suttas..."I teach dukkha (suffering) and the end of dukkkha". And so it originally was a kind of "self-help" teaching. And Buddha tells the story of the raft...you use the raft to cross the river, but once you reach the other side you don't start carrying the raft around, you leave it behind.

So as I think about it, an entire religion formed around Buddha, but evolved way beyond what Buddha intended. (hmm...that happened in Christianity also).

But the main take away here is that Buddhism has as its goal the removal of suffering.

And Epicureanism has as its goal the experience of pleasure. So it is a very different orientation. And I am still learning.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

But do you FIRST understand WHY this path makes sense?

Someone who skips right to the "application" without understanding may be apt to give up when the going gets tough, or when, as Lucretius says, that person is confronted by the scary or intimidating tales of the religionists or idealists, who suggest that you are following the path of evil by not heeding their definition of "the good."

In short it's important to understand why and how Epicurus embraced pleasure as the good so that you won't be shaken from the course in the inevitable storms of life.

Yes, thank you Cassius! I will carry on with my Epicurean studies 😊

Post by "Don" of January 28, 2022 at 1:40 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

But the main take away here is that Buddhism has as its goal the removal of suffering.

Well summarized! And, interestingly enough, there are some/many who would unfortunately describe Epicurean philosophy the same way: the removal of pain is the goal.

I think your next statement, [Kalosyni](#), is exactly on point:

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Epicureanism has as its goal the experience of pleasure

I wanted to say too that my understanding is that Buddha didn't seem to question the underlying cultural concept of rebirth. He taught that his path led to the cessation of rebirth. I suppose that could be understood as being reborn every moment. I found your saying this very interesting:

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Basically this: that consciousness depends on the body

That sounds nearly identical to what Epicurus would say in the [Principal Doctrines](#). 🤔

So it sounds like what you're saying is that Buddha used the terminology of "rebirth" but recontextualized it to mean moment by moment "rebirth" of my consciousness in this life? Color me intrigued 😊

I also found the raft reference intriguing in light of Epicurus's use of harbors and little boats as metaphors.

Excellent posts, [Kalosyni](#) . Thanks!

Post by “Scott” of January 28, 2022 at 1:48 PM

First, the disclaimer:

I have great hesitation even posting in this thread. This should probably be 12 different threads. There is so much here to take on. Let me start with - like it or not - there are **very many** understandings of Buddhism, many of which directly contradict each other, and we have NO written version of what the Buddha said. We all know how difficult it is to make sense of a philosophy that has been written down, especially over years by different authors, passing through translations by different peeps in history, through various languages old and modern - now just imagine that with no certain starting point. At all. They started writing the Buddha's words down probably around 3-400 years after the Buddha had died and one could argue they are essentially still adding to the canon - there is no "revealed" or "authentic" truth / version by a god or an Epicurus or other religious leader or philosopher (of course various sects claim various parts of the canon as authoritative).

Now I'm sure some or many concepts actually presented by the Buddha managed to be maintained with some degree of correctness, and still exist in the writings we have. But it's impossible to nail this down. Again - like it or not, this is what we got.

The Buddhist common disclaimer is "oh, people at that time had great memory capabilities and they were verbally able to pass down the teachings reliably". Really? I'm calling baloney on that. Some Buddhists will also often say that this flexibility is by design of the Buddha and this is valuable, that there is no determinate path. Each person can fashion a "raft" to get to the other side of the proverbial river, and the Buddha's teachings can help, but you have to fashion your own raft. In Zen they would say the Buddha was like pointing a finger at the moon. Don't get hung up on the finger and keep looking at it - the point is the moon (and of course what the "goal" is suggested by this moon is itself another long topic).

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Don't people who are attracted to it have "some" idea of the basic teachings before they dive into the details? What are those basic attractions that get people started down that path in the first place?

Generally, modern converts to some form of Buddhism encounter one or another flavor of Buddhism (either one of the traditional/regional versions or a more modern variant, or some combination) and they learn their "basics" there.

Often people then dabble in other versions they hear about, though some folks stick with their original.

Many peeps discover "Mindfulness", then find out it came from Buddhism and other ancient Indian traditions and they look up local Buddhist groups in their town and off they go to meditate there.

It's a smorgasbord out there, and one can pick and choose. Today of course we have broad access to all different types of Buddhism in a way that was never even possible a couple of hundred years ago. While there are many shared ideas among different versions and some that certain groups argue are "core" to all Buddhism or most, in reality the ideas criss-cross in complicated ways, and there are also basic, **fundamental, radical** differences between many of the "Buddhisms".

[Quote from Cassius](#)

So if possible I'd like us to work on a thread for "the rest of us" - Epicureans in particular, of course, who want to get an initial grasp of what is fairly referable to as generic Buddhism from a Western perspective. That way we can hopefully get a grasp on at least a couple of core concepts.

I think going after some core concepts is a good idea. My today is really busy, so I apologize I'm going to step away now, after having dumped this out here. I'll try to post some more of my thoughts soon regarding specific concepts, but I just wanted to first throw out this well worn wet blanket in an attempt to maybe cool the flames just a tidge and encourage more focus.

"Buddhism" is a bugger to pin down. It's like one of the agents in the Matrix movie. They move fast and they morph. Hard to land a bullet on them.

Post by "Cassius" of January 28, 2022 at 2:41 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

But, in the *ultimate* analysis, we are simply momentary aggregates of atoms moving in the void.

I say much the same thing pretty often, but even here I would be careful that the word "ultimate" invests that perspective with something more than it probably deserves. I guess what we're really referring to is something like either "microscopic" (figuratively) or "eternal" (more literally) perspectives. From a strong enough microscopic ("vision") perspective, all we see if we look through the instrument is something like atoms and void. From a "time" perspective, if we could stand back and look to see what it is (if anything) that exists unchanged over an eternity, all we see is matter and void.

But do the perspectives of "time" and "vision" really deserve the deference of being called "ultimate?" I think what most of us are implying when we say "ultimate" is something like "the most important perspective of importance." And if we're using that as the definition, then indeed the most important perspective of significance of importance is a matter of importance "to us" and that's a lot more complicated than matters and void. That's "our" world of qualities and events and accidents and things that rise to the "shores of light" in our level of experience.

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Yes, thank you Cassius! I will carry on with my Epicurean studies

LOL. That makes it sound like I am rapping the knuckles of a student in grammar school 😊

[Quote from Don](#)

Well summarized! And, interestingly enough, there are some/many who would unfortunately describe Epicurean philosophy the same way: the removal of pain is the goal.

And unfortunately at this point in world history that "some/many" is probably the vast majority of people who've been exposed to Epicurean through the "orthodox" academic path.

I'm of course sensitive to not wanting us to be perceived as a "cult" or to accusations that this forum is dedicated to anything less than "totally free inquiry." But I think that it's almost a principal of physics to observe that the world doesn't operate in all the ways that we might like it to. Maybe we should look for an analogy to the hooks of atoms, or something else in Epicurean physics, that explains how "bodies" come into being at all, and that the universe doesn't remain a totally formless soup.

Unless we accept that there are natural principals of attraction and repulsion, and that some people will choose some paths and others will choose other paths, then we would neither have bodies and ultimately humans forming from the atoms and the void, nor would we ever have any organized patterns of thought that we could define as Epicurean or Stoic or Buddhist or anything else. The point being that the development and following of basic key principles should not be viewed as a bad thing, but as an example of how the glue of the universe works to hold anything and everything together.

Post by “Cassius” of January 28, 2022 at 3:11 PM

In contrast to the ambiguity I see everywhere in discussions of Buddhism, I think it's relatively easy to construct a list of simple points that describe the Epicurean approach to life. I think we can use Thomas Jefferson as an illustration of someone who saw the same things, and we can build on one of his letters to John Adams to show an description of the sequence. I will put the full cite at the bottom:

1. **'I feel: therefore I exist.'**
2. **I feel bodies which are not myself: there are other existencies then. I call them *matter*.**
3. **I feel them changing place. This gives me motion.**
4. **Where there is an absence of matter, I call it *void*, or *nothing*, or *immaterial space*.**
5. **On the basis of sensation, of matter and motion, we may erect the fabric of all the certainties we can have or need.**
6. I can conceive *thought* to be an action of a particular organization of matter, formed for that purpose by it's creator, as well as that *attraction* in an action of matter, or *magnetism* of loadstone. When he who denies to the Creator the power of endowing matter with the mode of action called *thinking* shall shew how he could endow the Sun with the mode of action called *attraction*, which reins the planets in the tract of their orbits, or how an absence of matter can have a will, and, by that will, put matter into motion, then the materialist may be lawfully required to explain the process by which matter exercises the faculty of thinking.

7. When once we quit the basis of sensation, all is in the wind. **To talk of immaterial existences is to talk of nothings. To say that the human soul, angels, god, are immaterial, is to say they are nothings, or that there is no god, no angels, no soul. I cannot reason otherwise.**

To That I Would Add For Purpose of This Discussion:

8. It is a certainty that I am not going to be here very long. I am going to die and forever cease to exist much more quickly than I would like.
9. It is a certainty that Nature gives us nothing other than pleasure and pain as the ultimate foundation of all choice and decision making.
10. Since I am going to be here for only a short time, I want to experience as much pleasure, and as little pain, as possible.
11. I consider it to be a certainty that it takes effort to remain alive, and effort means pain, and so I am ready and willing to accept some amount of pain as the price for achieving pleasure.
12. Therefore I am attracted to philosophies and religions and ways of ordering life that target the promotion of pleasure in my life.
13. And I am also repelled by philosophies and religions and ways of life that target anything other than the promotion of pleasure in my life.
14. And finally for purposes of this exercise, I consider pleasure to be a feeling that is unmistakable, so when someone tries to tell me that I should pursue a definition of pleasure that doesn't feel pleasurable to me, I run the other direction.
15. Thus I am an Epicurean and not a Buddhist.

Quote

Jefferson to John Adams, August 15, 1820: [\(Full version at Founders.gov\)](#)

... But enough of criticism: let me turn to your puzzling letter of May 12. on matter, spirit, motion etc. It's crowd of scepticisms kept me from sleep. I read it, and laid it down: read it, and laid it down, again and again: and to give rest to my mind, **I was obliged to recur ultimately to my habitual anodyne, 'I feel: therefore I exist.' I feel bodies which are not myself: there are other existencies then. I call them matter. I feel them changing place. This gives me motion. Where there is an absence of matter, I call it void, or nothing, or immaterial space. On the basis of sensation, of matter and motion, we may erect the fabric of all the certainties we can have or need.** I can conceive *thought* to be an action of a particular organisation of matter, formed for that purpose by it's creator, as well as that *attraction* in an action of matter, or *magnetism* of loadstone. When he who denies to the Creator the power of endowing matter with the mode of action called *thinking* shall shew how he could endow the Sun with the mode of action called *attraction*, which

reins the planets in the tract of their orbits, or how an absence of matter can have a will, and, by that will, put matter into motion, then the materialist may be lawfully required to explain the process by which matter exercises the faculty of thinking. When once we quit the basis of sensation, all is in the wind. **To talk of immaterial existences is to talk of *nothings*. To say that the human soul, angels, god, are immaterial, is to say they are *nothings*, or that there is no god, no angels, no soul. I cannot reason otherwise:** but I believe I am supported in my creed of materialism by Locke, Tracy, and Stewart.

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 28, 2022 at 9:31 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

It is a certainty that Nature gives us nothing other than pleasure and pain as the ultimate foundation of all choice and decision making.

Since I am going to be here for only a short time, I want to experience as much pleasure, and as little pain, as possible.

I consider it to be a certainty that it takes effort to remain alive, and effort means pain, and so I am ready and willing to accept some amount of pain as the price for achieving pleasure.

I think this generally makes sense for me, but yet there are times where I feel physical discomforts and then it becomes a matter of surviving the pain/discomfort. Which brings up the idea that Epicureanism may work best for people with a strong and healthy physical constitution. Unless there is some allowance for the pleasure of release from pain, some people will be left out. Also, sometimes pain or the fear of pain is a greater motivator, and if we can endure a little bit of pain now, to make sure that we don't have greater pain in the future, then that makes sense.

Post by “Don” of January 28, 2022 at 9:52 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Which brings up the idea that Epicureanism may work best for people with a strong and healthy physical constitution

According to DeWitt (and some ancient sources?), Epicurus himself suffered from ill health and (according to DeWitt) had to to taken back and forth from home to the Garden in a 3-wheeled cart/chair.

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Unless there is some allowance for the pleasure of release from pain

I think that's supposed to be the intent of the last two lines of the Tetrapharmakos:

Quote

On the one hand, the good [pleasure] is easily obtained;
On the other, the terrible (pain) is easily endured.

But the last line has to be understood to include chronic pain in that, even then, some pleasure can be "easily" found if one looks for it and also remembers past pleasures.

Post by “Godfrey” of January 29, 2022 at 1:02 AM

Quote

[PD04](#): Pain does not last continuously in the flesh; instead, the sharpest pain lasts the shortest time, a pain that exceeds bodily pleasure lasts only a few days, and diseases that last a long time involve delights that exceed their pains

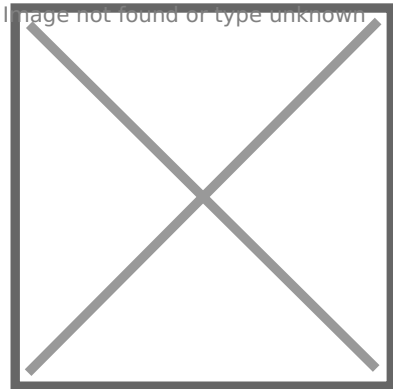
Today I've been using this one myself!

And then there's his letter to Idomeneus:

Quote

On this blissful day, which is also the last of my life, I write this to you. My continual sufferings from strangury and dysentery are so great that nothing could augment them; but over against them all I set gladness of mind at the remembrance of our past conversations....

Post by “Don” of January 30, 2022 at 8:48 AM



["Was Epicurus a Buddhist? An Examination and Critique of the Theories of Negative Happiness in Buddha and Epicurus"](#)

Comparisons between western and eastern philosophies are uncommon and this, among other things, hinders global philosophical discourse. Thus, in this essay I...

www.academia.edu

Just found this paper at Academia.edu: Was Epicurus a Buddhist?

Haven't read it but the title was intriguing enough to post here. Don't know anything about the author's credentials.

Post by “Godfrey” of January 30, 2022 at 1:00 PM

Thanks for the post [Don](#) , intriguing title!

Unfortunately this author saddles Epicurus with preaching the absence of pain, and his overall conclusion is that one needs a Platonic or religious world view for true happiness.

Post by “Don” of January 30, 2022 at 1:24 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Unfortunately this author saddles Epicurus with preaching the absence of pain, and his overall conclusion is that one needs a Platonic or religious world view for true happiness

I figured as much. At least it shows what we continue to be up against. (Insert sad trombone here)

Post by “Joshua” of January 30, 2022 at 1:57 PM

I will attempt to take Cassius up on his request for an *epitome* of Buddhist teachings; assuming here that the Theravada school represents them best, and with the caveat that I have not studied these teachings for a number of years.

Let's pretend that what follows is the voice of a believer;

1. In spite of appearances, I am convinced after meditating deeply that I have no 'self'. ['No self' = *anatta* or no *atta*, Hindu *atman*]
2. Having no self, "I" shall not reincarnate; neither shall "I" die.
3. But something of me shall be reborn or passed on, the way the heat from one candle passes on to ignite a second candle.
4. I perceive other sentient beings; animals, and other humans, and also gods. I conclude that these also have no 'self'.
5. These, too, shall experience rebirth; even the gods are part of this cycle.
6. The condition of this cycle, from the lowliest cockroach to the wisest among gods, is the condition of suffering.
7. The way to end the cycle is to end suffering.
8. That part of me which has been reborn in this life cannot have ended suffering, else it should not have been reborn.
9. Therefore suffering leaves traces, a residue (*kamma*) and to end suffering I must erase the residue of suffering of my cosmic past.
10. If I can accomplish this, I will no longer be bound to the cycle: I will not be reborn, but will have achieved *nibbana*, a complete quenching of suffering.

11. This can only be achieved in a human rebirth; the lower animals have no ability to look beyond their immediate suffering, and as for the gods, they are too caught up in palliative pleasures to see the need to break the cycle.

12. To break the cycle is immensely difficult. It cannot be done in one life, but only by successive rebirths working toward the goal.

13. For most people it might not be possible at all---except that my master the Buddha has found the way.

14. He is not a god, nor a savior; he is only a guide. He attained *nibbana*, and tarried here long enough to show others the way, crying always, like a ferryman, "anyone for the other shore?"

15. I wish to end the cycle for myself; therefore, I am a Buddhist.

I take refuge in the Buddha [the awakened], the Dhamma [his teachings], and the Sangha [the body of his enlightened followers].

I will avoid the three fetters of 1. Belief in self, 2. Doubt, and 3. Attachment to rites and rituals.

I will avoid the three poisons of 1. Greed, 2. Ignorance, and 3. Hatred

I will follow the Noble Eightfold Path, of;

1. Right View

2. Right Intention

3. Right Speech

4. Right action

5. Right livelihood

6. Right effort

7. Right concentration

8. Right mindfulness

I can easily recommend Huston Smith's book on the World's Religions to anyone who wishes to know more, and I am happy to be corrected on any of the above points.

Post by "Joshua" of January 30, 2022 at 2:14 PM

In view of the above list, you will apprehend the impossibility of removing rebirth, kamma [karma] or nibbana [nirvana] from Buddhism. They are integral. There are those in the secular community who keep the name of Buddhism for its ethics, or for its mindfulness, or for its psychology---but whatever it is that remains, it is not Buddhism.

Post by “Don” of January 30, 2022 at 2:57 PM

That seems to be a solid epitome to me! Well done!

[Quote from Joshua](#)

as for the gods, they are too caught up in palliative pleasures to see the need to break the cycle

This always intrigued me about the Buddhist gods on the wheel of samsara: They're so blissed out and pleasure-filled, they can't conceive of not being reborn as a god (to greatly simplify the situation).

Which got me thinking: How does this apply to the [Epicurean gods](#)? They are supposedly experiencing pleasure all the time. Is that correct? Isn't this just another form of "harps in heaven"? Would a blissful, pleasure-filled eternity get old? If every variety of pleasure could be experienced eventually in infinite time by an incorruptible being/spirit/entity/god, wouldn't pleasure get old? Is that one reason we don't need an infinite life to experience the most pleasurable life? 🤔

I bring this up because I also just recently finished all four seasons of [The Good Place](#), and this was exactly the dilemma the characters faced when redesigning the Good Place. All the "people" there were numb, lethargic etc because they had experienced *everything* they had ever wanted to do. Now, the biggest excitement was milkshakes (according to Hypatia). The main characters decided it was human life's mortality that gave life meaning. So, in the redesign of the Good Place, they decided to provide an exit. When you've experienced everything you could ever want, you could decide to leave the Good Place for good and "return your essence to the universe," i.e., cease to exist. Which struck me as almost Epicurean in the end. Your atoms will eventually get recycled for other purposes by the cosmos. That's not an afterlife btw, just the natural process to be clear.

Thinking out loud here and open to thoughts.

Post by “Joshua” of January 30, 2022 at 3:16 PM

"The Good Place" is indeed a worthwhile show, Don, and your question a good one!

I can give no answer to this objection: Epicurus assures us of the existence of his gods, but for me they are symbols merely; something imagined, and imaginary--but pedagogically useful, and to be kept, as it were, "before the eyes". 😊

Post by “Matt” of January 30, 2022 at 3:27 PM

[Joshua](#) thank you for that epitome. That distillation is truly needed. As you said...these articles (karma, rebirth and nirvana) are integral to Buddhism, without them what would be left isn't Buddhism. That's pretty much it...I see this as the main point... Without these very specific concepts, Buddhism isn't Buddhism and we can't even discuss this in any meaningful way, and frankly I'm not sure how a Buddhist could come to terms with this NOT being the case. If we can't nail down some "consistency" within a tradition it would be impossible to both criticize it or practice it if the person was a devotee.

Post by “Matt” of January 30, 2022 at 3:35 PM

There are multiple sects of Judaism, Christianity, Islam etc. that have differing opinions about certain articles of faith and certain formulas and certain disciplic successions...but there has to be very "core" concepts that cannot be removed from the faiths...otherwise we would never be able to say this faith is "Christianity" and this faith is "Islam" in generic terms....if the articles are so different from each other as they are for the position of Jesus in Islam and Christianity , then the differences qualify them to be completely different religions.

It is very obvious that Buddhism in general in a very similar way, except for secular Buddhists who might only be so in name only, all share these these very specific concepts in some way. There may be differing opinions among schools or sects, but if we can't pin down some consistent teachings taught by a historical Gautama Buddha that are recognized among ALL Buddhists regardless of sect, then I'm not sure any comparison or discussion is possible. "Buddhism" would be a completely meaningless and nebulous term.

Which I personally don't believe is true.

Post by “Cassius” of January 30, 2022 at 4:25 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

Would a blissful, pleasure-filled eternity get old? If every variety of pleasure could be experienced eventually in infinite time by an incorruptible being/spirit/entity/god, wouldn't pleasure get old? Is that one reason we don't need an infinite life to experience the most pleasurable life?

I am not going to be able to offer it in this post, but this is where I think there is one of those "logical" answers which may not be satisfactory to everyone. What we perceive as boredom may be in fact be a deficiency in us (such as our aging) that a more highly evolved being would also have been able to dispose of, just as with other sources of pain.

Not gonna represent that this is anywhere near a complete answer but it's something I bet could be reconstructed within our existing framework of Epicurean textual knowledge and wouldn't be hopeless task - at least from a "logical" perspective.

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 30, 2022 at 5:36 PM

"Buddhism in America"...is very much eclectic. At the Zen Buddhist Temple I attended there were rituals which were "more" Japanese Zen than what most lineages in Japan practice, and so monks from Japan would occasionally come to the Temple to study and practice under the head priest to learn the forms.

When people asked questions about "rebirth" the head priest's answer was very much in line with what [Joshua](#) wrote. But yet the head priest never forced or required anyone to hold to any one belief of "rebirth", so that people often interpreted it with a modern twist. Also, in Zen Buddhism rituals are very important and are considered to be the gateway to enlightenment (which goes against the Theravada avoidance of the fetter of attachment to rites and rituals). So Buddhism isn't so cut and dry, even if that would make it easier to talk about, and as [Matt](#) appears to hope for.

And this should be a lesson here for Epicureanism: It is really difficult to make people conform to one view of something. Everyone will have their own unique understanding of various points within the doctrine, and even that understanding may evolve and change over time.

So for example: there are now the two "camps"...one who's goal is "tranquil pleasures" vs. the other's goal is "all pleasures which do not lead to greater pains" (and which is our school). This will continue to be an issue and so we probably need to "make peace with it"...reach across this divide and make a truce, because it will be up to each person to decide their goal and also which interpretations best suit their temperament.

And something similar may happen for people within Epicureanism as with Buddhism. (Many people try out multiple schools of Buddhism (Theravada, Zen, Tibetan) before they find the one that feels right to them. Although in Epicureanism right now we don't have the formal level of development, other than what is online, but to me there appears to be two "camps".

Of course we still need to be clear about exactly where we stand here in this forum.

@Cassius...looking forward to hearing what you think?

Post by “Cassius” of January 30, 2022 at 6:04 PM

We definitely have a truce!

The "Life is Short, Pleasure is the good, and I want all the pleasure that I can get at a price in pain that I find reasonable" group are invited to dig in here and work with us to reconstruct a viable modern implementation of Epicurean philosophy.

The "Tranquillist" camp has my best wishes, and those who are open minded and still thinking about that issue are welcome to study with us here. But those who are committed Tranquillism are ultimately welcome to post elsewhere, because Tranquillism (or any form of Humanism or other philosophy or religion that doesn't posit "Pleasure" to be the highest good) is something that I respectfully have to insist isn't compatible with Epicurean philosophy.

But I really don't expect that to be a problem or cause many hard feelings. Those who confront the issue, and come to realize that they are committed to the logical position that something other than Pleasure is the highest good, usually have no problem realizing that their project isn't consistent with what we're doing here.



Post by “Matt” of January 30, 2022 at 6:05 PM

[Kalosyni](#) I'm trying to make this as "easy" as possible for the purposes of an Epicurean comparison. My main point is that there have to be some core tenets among all Buddhists that give some commonality. Interpretations of what those concepts mean can vary greatly. But if a Zen practitioner and a Theravada monk cannot agree that they both take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha because nirvana, samsara and karma are specific concepts expounded upon within their particular traditions by the historical Siddhartha Gautama, then it will be impossible to even discuss this subject...because Buddhists would have such disagreements that it would be meaningless to classify them as Buddhists or that they have any cohesion of any kind.

This really be far more of a Buddhist problem than it is for anyone else because I'm not concerned with intricacies of interpretations of nirvana, samsara and karma...I'm just pointing out that these specific concepts are very much integral to Buddhism, as other concepts are to other religions.

Post by "Scott" of January 31, 2022 at 12:09 AM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

I will attempt to take Cassius up on his request for an epitome of Buddhist teachings

What you wrote seems basically correct for Theravada, Joshua. Mahayana Buddhists, however, would take issue with certain points of it. Some of them would throw out most of it.

[Quote from Joshua](#)

In view of the above list, you will apprehend the impossibility of removing rebirth, kamma [karma] or nibbana [nirvana] from Buddhism. They are integral. There are those in the secular community who keep the name of Buddhism for its ethics, or for its mindfulness, or for its psychology---but whatever it is that remains, it is not Buddhism.

You have every right to call things what you choose, Joshua. But Secular Buddhists will probably continue to identify themselves as Buddhist. In fact those who follow Stephen Batchelor's line will say the Theravada tradition is NOT true Buddhism, that it suffers from translation errors that fundamentally distorted the Buddha's message, and also that the elements you describe such as karma and rebirth and so forth were NOT part of the Buddha's message at all but rather muddied their way into the Buddha's recorded teachings over time. Batchelor suggests this happened as part of an attempt to better conform the new "religion" to the widely accepted and deeply engrained soteriology in India thought.

Post by “Joshua” of January 31, 2022 at 12:28 AM

Quote

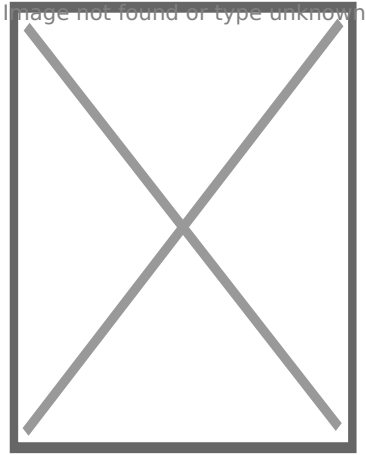
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That is all fair enough, and I have no dog in this fight. I read Buddhism Without Beliefs sometime--oh--ten years ago perhaps. I seem to recall that his views on the prevalence of rebirth in Indian thought at the time of the Buddha were somewhat controversial. But I may be mistaken in that.

What will be really helpful is to have not one outline, but three; Theravadin, Mahayana and Secular. And I will happily yield to whomever shall take the lists (pun intended!)

Post by “Matt” of January 31, 2022 at 7:23 AM

Here is an expansive compilation of Buddhist texts online. Mahayana and Theravada Pali texts:



[Buddhist Sutra's : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

A collection of Buddhist Sutras
archive.org

[Ancient Buddhist Texts Home Page](#)

Post by “Matt” of January 31, 2022 at 7:40 AM

I know we are beating this dead horse into the dust, but the issues can't be obfuscated about what the core tenets are within Buddhism.

I would say yes to three outlines...

So that we can see clearly what the core common articles that all Buddhists share are without any controversy about interpretations.

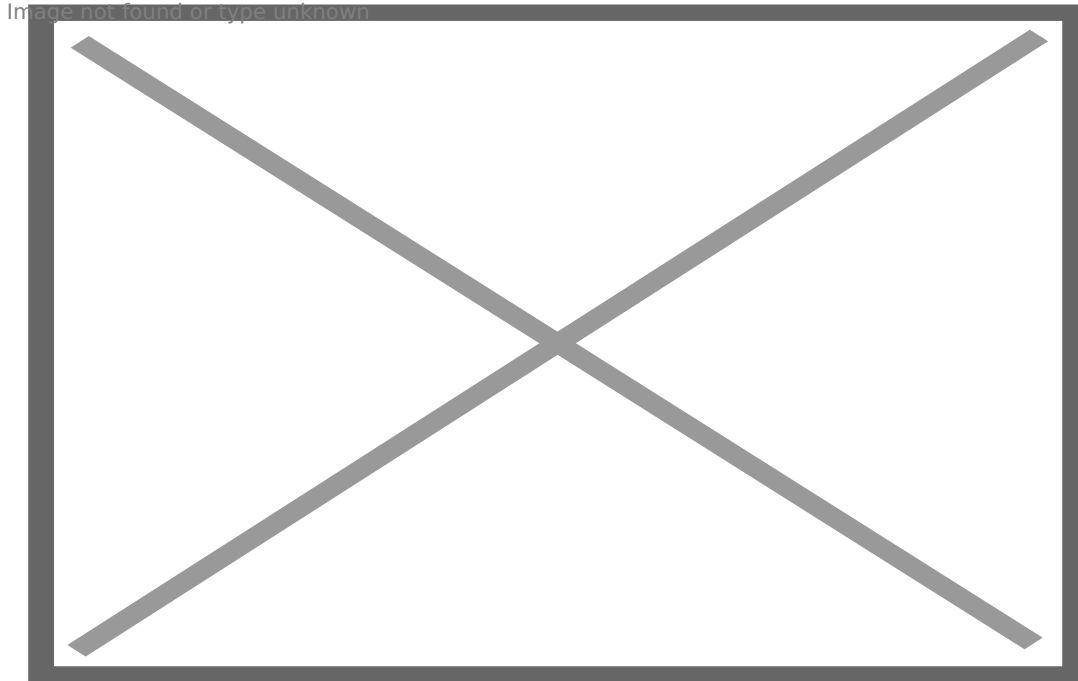
I've read the Dhammapada and In the Buddha's words:

<https://ia800909.us.archive.org/2/items/InTheBuddhasWordsBhikkhuBodhi/In%20the%20Buddha%27s%20Words%20Bhikkhu%20Bodhi%20%28Editor%29.pdf>

I personally cannot see how the ideas of karma, nirvana, and re-birth are somehow not a part of the original Buddhist doctrine when the main historical branches such as Theravada, Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhism all seem to share them and the neighboring Indian philosophies within Hinduism and Jainism also use the same terminology, albeit slightly different from tradition to tradition, but still they have them. Any sort of dissenting opinion would appear to to be an extreme minority.

Post by “Matt” of January 31, 2022 at 7:59 AM

Here’s a good test...if a historical critic of Buddhism (Adi Shankara) spent enough time to attempt to refute Buddhist doctrine (and there were many other Vedantists who did) it must’ve meant that the interpretation of concepts even back in medieval times in India were close enough to the Hindu interpretations that they needed to attack them.



[Adi Shankara’s critique of Buddhism - Home](#)

While maintaining the existence of only Brahman in the absolute sense, Sankara posits that the experience of the world is not invalid at the time of that...

cisindus.org

This tells me that at the very least, what we know as “historical” Buddhism shared deep commonalities with other Indian philosophies. This is why especially in Southern India there was syncretism between Buddhism and Hindu Shaivism. In fact there are temples that simultaneously invoke images of Shiva, while also depicting Buddhist stories. If this is the case, it meant that the historical Buddhists must’ve shared commonalities with certain Hindu doctrines for them to be compatible enough for devotees to mix and match the traditions.

Post by “Cassius” of January 31, 2022 at 8:46 AM

[Quote from Matt](#)

I would say yes to three outlines...

Matt I am not quite sure what this refers to?

Are you pointing to a chart or outline that shows a comparison of types of Buddhism and the ideas that all share? If so or you know of such a thing that would be useful.

It wouldn't be very productive to trace each minor sect into their own detailed twists and turns, but it would be productive to develop references as to what the major groupings share.

Post by “Matt” of January 31, 2022 at 8:56 AM

I want succinct outlines of the core tenets of the main Buddhist schools...the ones that make up the major populations of Asia. Mahayana, Theravada, Vajrayana and Tibetan Buddhism...and secular Buddhism. So we can see without any controversy of interpretation what each school's common precepts are. And I'm certain that there are common concepts among them....

That way we can lay them out without controversy of interpretation and see what they are. That way we won't have disagreement about the basics.

Post by “Matt” of January 31, 2022 at 9:03 AM

My concern with this thread is that it seems to want to become ambiguous about the nature of what Buddhism is and why the religion and philosophy came into existence and what specifically it came for. You can't have a cure for something if there isn't something to cure.

I don't believe it is helpful for an Epicurean comparison if we cannot pin down generic qualities that are universally “Buddhist.” Almost as if there are so many disconnected versions of Buddhism with such radically different doctrines that we can't pin them down at all under the coinage of “Buddhism.” I very much disagree with this.

Buddhism is no different than Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Neoplatonism and Stoicism in that we can apprehend and certainly comprehend “what” it's about in generic terms. There is nothing “special” about Buddhist doctrine, its “various” doctrines can 100% be understood by

non-Buddhists who can easily analyze it...if a person believes this isn't the case then most likely they are far more Buddhist than Epicurean.

I totally understand that there may be some subconscious sympathies and deference for the Buddha by some who have experience in it...I get that, but the reality is that Buddhism is not Epicurean Philosophy...it's in fact quite different and often hostile to it. My position is that we as Epicureans need to be able pin down what Buddhism is in generic terms to be able to criticize it and analyze it. Just as someone who may have come from an Islamic background would need to be objective about criticism and analysis of Mohammed and Islam. We are not here to bolster the often fanciful claims of the Buddha or further his philosophy, we are here for Epicurus.

I believe Buddhism to be, among other Indian schools of thought, to address the common "metaphysical" beliefs of karma, reincarnation and the various soteriological ways to be released from this cycle that are native to Indian thought as would be accessible to the "common" uneducated person living in the 5th and 6th century BCE.

Post by "Eikadistes" of January 31, 2022 at 9:03 AM

Without going too deep into doctrines, here's a brief historical sketch:

In general, Theravada Buddhists are a doctrinally-conservative group who follow a trend of Buddhism that recommends a withdrawn life of monasticism. Monks and nuns are typically separated like the Catholic Church. It's sort of like ... if the only expression of the Catholic tradition were the Desert Fathers who withdrew into contemplation. This form is found predominately in Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia, where Buddhism first spread under Emperor Ashoka.

Mahayana Buddhism is sort of our "Protestant" catch-phrase for everything from deity-worshipping Chinese Buddhists (Buddhism processed through Confucianism, among other philosophies, and Taoism) to Zen Buddhism (Buddhism processed through Taoism and Shinto) in Japan. Depending on your preferred scholar, we may also group Tibetan Buddhism into the group of Mahayana, though, it often gets its own designation.

Vajrayana, Tibetan, or Tantric Buddhism is what American teenagers were admiring in the 1960s, when they weren't stuck on the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (see: "Tomorrow Never Knows" by the Beatles for an example of Tibetan Buddhism). This form is highly related to early Indian Buddhism, and was the first form of Buddhism to migrate Northward. This form later influenced Mongolian Buddhism (Tantra processed through Tengriism).

Then we have, what I'll personally call, our "Western Buddhism". While "Western" is a poor adjective to describe anything in comparative cultural studies, I think we'll find a markedly different version of Buddhism that was evangelized through modern market economies to consumer societies that offer a highly eclectic form of Buddhism. I almost want to call it Eclecticism instead of Buddhism, and Siddhartha's teachings aren't as important as later Buddhist scholars.

Post by “Cassius” of January 31, 2022 at 9:57 AM

It's almost like we need a chart with the major different branches on the X axis and the major beliefs on the Y and then check boxes or short yes or no entries in the grid at each intersection?

Again this is never likely to satisfy a committed Buddhist, but that's not our audience or intent here. Rather we are aiming only at a fair overview helpful for our own needs in categorizing the issues.

We've never satisfied the Stoics in our comparisons there, and we won't satisfy the Buddhists, but since we are neither that's a secondary consideration.

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 31, 2022 at 11:23 AM

[Quote from Matt](#)

There is nothing “special” about Buddhist doctrine, Its “various” doctrines can 100% be understood by non-Buddhists who can easily analyze it...if a person believes this isn't the case then most likely they are far more Buddhist than Epicurean.

I don't agree...Buddhism isn't just "doctrine" because it is also a daily practice and how you live your life..You can't just "think" your way to "enlightenment". Enlightenment is for this present life. What all Buddhist schools have in common is dealing with the problem of suffering and dissatisfaction that seem to be part of the human inner experience.

A friend texted these words to me recently:

"I think it's safe to assume that most of us (meaning all humans) are not overly happy people in general. Life allows for some pleasures here and there...the basics, but real joys are sometimes

few and far between. I personally often feel a level of somberness that comes with a litany of experiences."

For myself I at times feel not only somber, but mildly depressed at times. So then Buddhism seeks to deal with this problem. It is a combination of doctrine and practice.

I would really like to see a side-by-side comparison of Buddhism and Epicureanism which shows the differences of how each one deals with feelings of "somberness" and "mild depression" (the kind of sadness which arises due to loss, grief, disappointment, loneliness, lack of freedom, lack of control)...as well as stressful feelings of anxiety, agitation, fear, and anger.

Buddhist meditation helped me with anxiety...but I left Buddhism because it wasn't helping me deal with my feelings of sadness. In fact I think that it made my feelings of sadness worse.

Anybody who had done Buddhist meditation at an organized Buddhist group...I would ask for help on creating this comparison.

And anyone who feels they have good Epicurean practices for dealing with sadness...please help, thank you 😊

Post by “Matt” of January 31, 2022 at 11:38 AM

Again, whatever form this “enlightenment” is, is specific to Buddhism. So if you can’t think your way to enlightenment and you practice it...that begs the question what are we being enlightened to? It means that the Buddha is making a very specific claim about the world that is only accessible through certain practices.

Meditation in its own right could be a pleasurable experience, but meditation to achieve “enlightenment” in the Buddhist context is very different.

These are two very separate things.

Post by “Matt” of January 31, 2022 at 12:12 PM

As far as the somberness comment goes it’s important to place it context.

Happiness and pleasure are not the same thing. And frankly this is a huge topic for another thread. Happiness is a very nebulous word that can mean many things for many different situations. The “happy” person who claims to be happy 100% of the time is either heavily medicated or is not being truthful about their experiences.

The reason why people seek out philosophy and religion is that they are seeking a pathway to “happiness”...but the reality is they go after an idealistic philosophy like Buddhism and they don't find “pleasure” in it, only more unanswerable questions and dissatisfaction with its metaphysical claims.

Life is full of dissatisfaction and miserable circumstances. Life is NOT easy. Unhappiness is certainly rampant among many people who experience the sorrows and hardness of life. This is why many people adopt Stoicism as their main philosophy because they seek detachment. But in truth happiness is NOT the goal, the seeking of a pleasurable life is. Net positive pleasure, not painlessness. The person living in a country engulfed in civil war is probably pretty “unhappy” in general but can still find pleasure in basic things such as food and friends. That's a pleasurable thing.

So we certainly may have droves of unhappy, dissatisfied, melancholy people walking around, which has more to do with nature, brain chemistry and biology than anything else.

Which again, as I mentioned in the depression thread is a clinical thing. True clinical depression is something that is in brain chemistry and is something that only a medical professional can diagnose or treat.

If anyone believes they are depressed or experiencing some mental issues, detach from the internet and immediately consult a medical professional.

Post by “Cassius” of January 31, 2022 at 12:15 PM

Quote

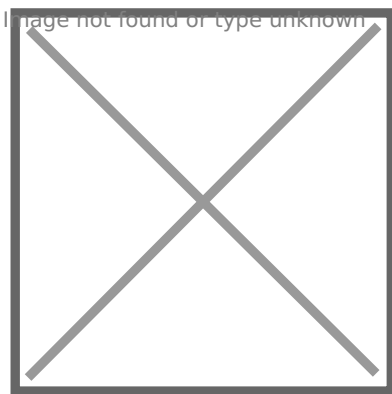
"I think it's safe to assume that most of us (meaning all humans) are not overly happy people in general. Life allows for some pleasures here and there...the basics, but real joys are sometimes few and far between. I personally often feel a level of somberness that comes with a litany of experiences."

This observation is a key one. There's something about the way different people categorize their view of life that we're really dealing with here, and I don't think it's a purely "logical" difference in conclusion. I don't know if it's cultural, clinical, genetic, chemical, educational, or

some combination of these or even other factors, but to reach the conclusion that "life allows for some pleasures here and there...." is indeed a somber attitude that everyone does not share.

I would have to think about better ways to illustrate it than this quote, but this is what comes immediately to mind from the "head and heart" letter:

In a life where we are perpetually exposed to want and accident, yours is a wonderful proposition, to insulate ourselves, to retire from all aid, and to wrap ourselves in the mantle of self-sufficiency! For assuredly nobody will care for him who cares for nobody. But friendship is precious not only in the shade but in the sunshine of life: and thanks to a benevolent arrangement of things, the greater part of life is sunshine. I will recur for proof to the days we have lately passed. On these indeed the sun shone brightly! How gay did the face of nature appear! Hills, vallies, chateaux, gardens, rivers, every object wore it's liveliest hue! Whence did they borrow it? From the presence of our charming companion. They were pleasing, because she seemed pleased. Alone, the scene would have been dull and insipid: the participation of it with her gave it relish. Let the gloomy Monk, sequestered from the world, seek unsocial pleasures in the bottom of his cell! Let the sublimated philosopher grasp visionary happiness while pursuing phantoms dressed in the garb of truth! Their supreme wisdom is supreme folly: and they mistake for happiness the mere absence of pain. Had they ever felt the solid pleasure of one generous spasm of the heart, they would exchange for it all the frigid speculations of their lives, which you have been vaunting in such elevated terms. Believe me then, my friend, that that is a miserable arithmetic which would estimate friendship at nothing, or at less than nothing. Respect for you has induced me to enter into this discussion, and to hear principles uttered which I detest and abjure. Respect for myself now obliges me to recall you into the



Maybe these sentiments are hard to reduce to a logical formula, but I see in the difference between these two perspectives something that goes to the heart of Epicurus vs the Buddhist perspective.

Post by “Godfrey” of January 31, 2022 at 12:15 PM

Not to make this chart idea even more complicated, but it seems as if it would need a time element as well. What major form(s) of Indian Buddhism was active at the time of the ancient Greeks v what major forms are currently available to Westerners.

Post by “Cassius” of January 31, 2022 at 12:26 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Not to make this chart idea even more complicated, but it seems as if it would need a time element as well. What major form(s) of Indian Buddhism was active at the time of the ancient Greeks v what major forms are currently available to Westerners.

I think Godfrey knows me well enough that I am not saying this to be disagreeable, but that kind of historical exposition is probably beyond what people here would need, unless they are truly historians. Several of the comments above have made points about "Secular Buddhism" or something similar, and in truth that's probably where our focus ought to be: we're here to help people, so our efforts probably ought to focus on the major forms into which people we come into contact with regularly would have themselves come into contact with it. Almost like, again using the analogy of the Hermotimus dialogue, there were sort of like callers from the varying schools on every corner, calling people into their particular school. It would be those high-sounding and attractive points that they would focus on to get people attracted in the first place, and I would think a lot of the distinctions we are most needing to know are probably visible even on that superficial level.

Does it really surprise people who are first being attracted to Buddhism that "nothingness" is a central idea? I suspect most people get that message pretty quickly, and it's already at that level that the warning flags and buzzers need to be waving and going off in our minds.

Post by “Eikadistes” of January 31, 2022 at 12:34 PM

I found a few quick images for some context:



I didn't create this, but it matches up with what I'd generalize:

6. What is the difference between the Theravada and Mahayana expressions of Buddhism?

- | THERAVADA | MAHAYANA |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Theravada expression was championed by monks and nuns who withdrew from society to devote themselves fully to the quest for nirvana.• It portrayed the Buddha as an immensely wise teacher and model, but certainly not divine.• It was more psychological than religious, a set of practices rather than a set of beliefs.• Gods, while never completely denied, played little role in assisting believers in their search for enlightenment. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Mahayana expression proclaimed that help was available to reach enlightenment.• Within this expression, bodhisattvas, spiritually developed people who postponed their own entry into nirvana in order to assist those who were still suffering, could help the believer.• The Buddha became something of a god, and both earlier and future Buddhas were available to offer their help on the path to enlightenment.• The Mahayana expression developed elaborate descriptions of these supernatural beings, together with various levels of heavens and hells that ultimately transformed Buddhism into a popular religion of salvation.• As part of this development, religious merit leading to salvation might now be earned by acts of piety and devotion, and merit might be transferred to others. |

Post by “Godfrey” of January 31, 2022 at 12:37 PM

If nothing else, this thread is a good example of why it's important to fully understand a philosophy (say, EP) on its own terms before dipping one's toe into comparisons 😬

Post by “Eikadistes” of January 31, 2022 at 12:41 PM

Keep in mind, we're talking about different denominations caused by political schisms throughout the centuries, no different than Christianity. Just like all Christians adopt the Nicene Creed, agree on Biblical literary canon, and accept the early intellectual tradition of the Church Fathers, all Buddhists accept a common liturgy (the *Pali Canon*, with some cultural-specific additions) and a common intellectual tradition originating from Siddhartha Gautama.

None of the Buddhist denominations are more or less similar to Epicurean philosophy (especially compared with other heterodox ancient Indian philosophical traditions). "Mind over matter" is a fairly universal Buddhist attitude. The current Dalai Lama's rejection of mysticism and embracing of particle physics is the closest similarity we'll find.

Post by “Eikadistes” of January 31, 2022 at 1:08 PM

Here's another way to approach this discussion that I think can be fruitful. Let's ask:

"Why are peoples in the modern world so drawn to ancient Idealism?"

My short answer is that they feel like the modern world (which they relate to particle physics) is missing a heart, an substantive, meaningful context for a person within a rapidly changing world of symbols and technology. Epicurus' moral take on atomism, I think, provides a bridge between particle physics over what many perceive (*ironically*) as nihilism.

We predominantly find Theravada and Mahayana forms of Buddhism within the cultures in which they developed. Removed from this context (for me in America), "Buddhism" becomes a sort of "Eclectic, Pseudo-Religious, Psycho-therapeutic, mental compliment to the de-contextualized physical analogue of Hindu Yoga".

What I think we'll find is that the measurably beneficial practices that have developed within the Buddhist tradition are compatible with Epicurean ethics, in general. Any scientific findings from competing traditions that have a physiological basis and a measurably-positive impact are coherent with atomism, materialism, and the pleasure principle.

Therein, the parts of "Buddhism" that a lot of Americans like are really just secular practices, in the same way that Yoga has become a secular practice for non-Yogis. And a lot of American "Buddhists" are just non-religious.

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 31, 2022 at 1:12 PM

Buddhism

practicing meditation as a way to "deal" with negative emotions

impartiality to all experiences

nothing is inherently good or bad

solitude and quietude is a good way to live, and not seeking to add anything to a simple life

continued "rebirth" until you become enlightened

life is by nature difficult and filled with suffering

a happy life is not the goal because pleasure is short-lived and only temporary - the best that can be hoped for is a state of calm tranquility which is neither happy nor sad - which can be achieved by meditation, religious study, and "taking refuge" in the religious community

Epicureanism

focusing on what is pleasureable and enjoyable in friendship as a way to "deal" with negative emotions

gratitude and savoring of all pleasant and pleasureable experiences

pleasure is inherently good and pain is inherently bad

pleasure in all forms is to be sought (as long as pains are not greater) and actively seeking out pleasure

there is only this one life and no experience will occur after death

life has basic necessities and once fulfilled then pleasure is easy

a happy life comes from a life filled with enjoyment and pleasure, and can be achieved by pursuing that which is necessary for happiness - friendship, wisdom, personal freedom, and enjoyment of the pleasing things in life, as well as active engagement with the Epicurean community

This is just off the top of my head...Is anything incorrect, or is anything missing?

Post by “Cassius” of January 31, 2022 at 6:23 PM

Kalosyni on that chart, does life have a goal or highest good in Buddhism, and if so what is it ?

Post by “Cassius” of January 31, 2022 at 6:25 PM

I wonder if some of these categories on the Y axis (left column, which label the rows) would be useful for the comparison?

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 31, 2022 at 7:25 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

does life have a goal or highest good in Buddhism, and if so what is it ?

There could be several goals:

- 1) the goal is Buddhist practice/meditation of "letting go" and realizing "aimlessness, signlessness, and emptiness" as the path to "nirvana"
 - 2) to become a "bodhisattva of compassion" to help others (a Buddhist teacher)
-

Post by “Cassius” of January 31, 2022 at 7:45 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

and realizing "aimlessness, signlessness, and emptiness" as the path to "nirvana"

Apparently I know a lot more Buddhists in my local life than I realized! 😊

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 31, 2022 at 8:24 PM

Buddhists when feeling a sense of "unsatisfactoriness" in oneself might cultivate indifference toward it.

Where as Epicureans when feeling "unsatisfactoriness" might put more effort into cultivating friendship and sharing pleasant and pleasureable experiences with others.

Which has me wondering...how often were festivals, celebrations, shared meal gatherings, etc. part of an ancient Epicurean lifestyle?

Post by “Eikadistes” of January 31, 2022 at 8:50 PM

	EPICUREAN PHILOSOPHY	THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM	MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHISM
Founder	Epicurus	Siddhārtha Gautama	Siddhārtha Gautama, Nāgārjuna
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 poet <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>Siddhārtha Gautama</i> (c. 563-483 BCE), the "Awakened One" proposed a "Middle Way" between the "Eternalism" of the Brahmin religion (that proposes the existence of an eternal <i>atman</i> or "soul"), versus the "Annihilationism" of <i>Ajita Kesakambalī</i>'s hedonistic school of <i>Chārvāka</i>. Buddha rejected all metaphysical propositions and described the true nature of one's being as <i>anattā</i>, the "non-self", lacking permanency.</p>	<p><i>Nāgārjuna</i> (c. 150-250 CE) developed the highly influential <i>Madhyamaka</i> school of Buddhism (possibly influenced by Pyrrhonism through the works of Sextus Empiricus; Pyrrhonism, <i>itself</i>, was inspired by Sañjaya Belaṭṭhiputta, the founder of Ajñāna, a competitor of early Buddhism). Many other influential Buddhists helped spread the religion, such as <i>Bodhidharma</i> to China and <i>Padmasambhāva</i> to the Tibetan Plateau.</p>

EPICUREAN PHILOSOPHY

THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHISM

Epistemology All knowledge begins with [1] *sensation* (aisthesis) caused by the interaction of external particles with our sensory organs. We detect pleasurable or painful [2] *feelings* (pathē) associated with the various sensations. Through repeated stimulation, we form [3] *anticipations* (prolepsis) about the patterns of nature.

Metaphysics 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.

All knowledge is validated by two *paramana* or "proofs", [1] *pratyakṣa* or "perception" and [2] *anumāna* or "inference". *Perception* and *inference* are due to the six *āyatana* or "sense objects" of *sight*, *sound*, *odor*, *taste*, *touch*, and *thought*. The *āyatana* are not organs, but rather, appearances.

Reality is a changing, experiential aggregate, composed of [1] the elemental forms (*rūpa*) - solid earth, cohesive water, mobile gas, warm fire, and empty space, [2] sensuous feeling (*vedanā*), [3] mental cognition (*saṃjñā*), [4] willful determination (*saṅkhāra*), and [5] consciousness (*vijñāna*). Natural patterns are observed, but propositions about them are dismissed as meaningless speculations.

The only meaningful thing to *know* is that all objects lack independent existences. Things only meaningfully exist within the continuum of the mind. Physical phenomena is dismissed as *māyā* meaning "magic" or "illusions", and the appearance of the natural world is dismissed as a dream.

Reality is *sūnyatā* or "emptiness". All things lack a *svabhava* or "independent nature" (as was used by the atheistic *Chārvāka* to refer to the physical nature of reality). The only "real" existence is consciousness. The energetic activities of nature are simply objects that exist within the mind, including the "body" and the "self", which are also just temporary illusions within the continuous *citta-santāna* or "mindstream".

EPICUREAN PHILOSOPHY

THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHISM

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 <i>kosmoi</i> are made of atoms. The seeds of life are everywhere.</p>	<p>Beings migrate through numerous planes of existence (<i>ascending</i> to heavens and <i>descending</i> to hells). One's directionality at death reflects their <i>kamma</i> or "moral causality".</p>	<p>A variety of mythic beings inhabit the various realms, from gods to hungry ghosts. Heavens are idealized as Pure Lands, each of which is inhabited and ruled by its respective Bodhisattva.</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>Divine entities are called <i>Devas</i>, blissful beings who inhabit emotional "planes of existence". As they refine their <i>kamma</i> or "moral causality", they get closer to the goal of <i>Nibbāna</i>. Each realm is defined by the disposition of its inhabitant.</p>	<p><i>Buddha</i> is treated as a deity, and other Buddhas are acknowledged to exist besides Shakyamuni (Gautama Buddha). Buddhahood is available to everyone and the achievements of <i>Siddhārtha</i> are not as emphasized as is the <i>Buddha-nature</i>, itself.</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>Follow the <i>Noble Eightfold Path</i> according to the <i>dhamma</i> or "law" taught by Buddha to achieve <i>Nibbāna</i>, the "extinguishment" of suffering: [1] Right Resolve, [2] Right Speech, [3] Right Conduct, [4] Right Livelihood, [5] Right Effort [6] Right Mindfulness, [7] Right Meditation, and [8] Right view that death is not the end.</p>	<p>The path of the Mahāyāna <i>bodhisattva</i> involves going beyond the <i>Eightfold Path</i> of the <i>arhat</i> to devote themselves toward practicing Buddhism for the benefit of all beings before finally achieving a state of <i>Nirvāṇa</i>. This continuous mission is thought to extend beyond an individual's life into their future lives.</p>

EPICUREAN PHILOSOPHY

Goal of Life: 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.

THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHISM

Nibbāna, the end of *dukkha* or "suffering" and release from *saṃsāra*, the cycle of rebirths caused due to one's *avidyā* or "ignorance" of *anicca* or "impermanence".

To achieve *Nirvāṇa*, one must pursue the altruistic path of the *bodhisattva*, who works for the benefit of all beings by helping others achieve *bodhi* or "enlightenment".

Post by “Don” of January 31, 2022 at 8:55 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Which has me wondering...how often were festivals, celebrations, shared meal gatherings, etc. part of an ancient Epicurean lifestyle?

According to Philodemus's *On Piety*, Epicurus regularly took part in the rites inherent to the city of Athens. And it seems the ancient Greeks had some kind of religious observance or festival on a regular basis.

Post by “Cassius” of January 31, 2022 at 9:02 PM

Wow that is a whopper of a chart thank you Nate!

Post by “Kalosyni” of February 1, 2022 at 11:26 AM

@Nate ...thank you for the amazing chart you made comparing Epicureanism, Theravada, and Mahayana!!!

Also, it is interesting to read your Epicurean goal, and appears you are synthesising several of the [Principal Doctrines](#)...

[Quote from Nate](#)

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.

Post by “Cassius” of February 1, 2022 at 11:40 AM

"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."

I largely agree with that statement too and think it's a good highlevel summary. At what point however does it need however to have a caveat that since there is no fate, and not every person can become wise (see Diogenes Laertius) that "the practice of prudence the best course most likely to lead the wide person to a good life" (which hints at the truth that this result is not guaranteed due to factors that sometimes occur that are out of our control.

Or is that something to explain later after the first statement?

Post by “SimonC” of February 5, 2022 at 6:08 AM

An interesting article about various cultures view of death and the self, with surprising results: [Death and the self. Nichols et al.](#)

Quote

Compared with other groups, monastic Tibetans gave particularly strong denials of the continuity of self, across several measures. We predicted that the denial of self would be associated with a lower fear of death and greater generosity toward others. To our surprise, we found the opposite. Monastic Tibetan Buddhists showed significantly greater fear of death than any other group. The monastics were also less generous

than any other group about the prospect of giving up a slightly longer life in order to extend the life of another.

Post by “Matt” of February 5, 2022 at 9:55 AM

Makes sense to me...if your entire philosophy is based on the aforementioned concepts of death, re-birth etc. it's going to be on your mind constantly.

Post by “Sid” of September 28, 2022 at 1:57 AM

Just one observation of mine on the topic of Buddhism. In the west where people are increasingly finding it difficult to believe in a theistic view of the universe, Buddhism seems to have become popular as several Buddhist teachers have popularised it as a rational and non-dogmatic way of life, rather than a religion per se. However this presentation of Buddhism is not entirely accurate. Though Buddhism doesn't have a creator entity Buddhist cosmology is full of supernatural beings. My own initial attraction to Buddhism was because I just couldn't rationally accept the teachings of Hinduism and the abrahamic faiths. The Buddha's exhortation to not accept things on faith and his encouragement of critical thinking really struck a chord with me. However as I dived deeper into it I found the same issues with Buddhism as with other faiths. For instance the concept of Jambudvipa and Mount Mandara go entirely against any modern scientific view. Also many sects of Buddhism do worship Buddhas for the sake of emancipation from this world...so even though a buddha isn't a creator deity we still have a system of faith and submission via prayer similar to other religions.

Post by “Sid” of September 28, 2022 at 2:06 AM

Incidentally since we are comparing vs. Buddhism I'm just wondering has anyone looked at other non-dualistic teachings like Advaita? It would be very interesting to compare I think, especially since Epicureanism stresses reliance on the senses, but radical Advaita dismisses the entire concept of an external reality altogether 😊.

Post by “Don” of September 28, 2022 at 6:34 AM

[Quote from Sid](#)

The Buddha’s exhortation to not accept things on faith and his encouragement of critical thinking really struck a chord with me. However as I dived deeper into it I found the same issues with Buddhism as with other faiths.

Although I wasn't a serious Buddhist (getting bestowed a refuge name being evidence to the contrary I suppose 🤔) I found I eventually had some of the same initial attractions and then objections/misgivings as you in trying to reconcile myself with that philosophy/religion. Epicurus filled a void (no pun intended... Well, maybe unintentionally intended) in providing a completely material non-supernatural perspective.

Welcome aboard the forum!

Post by “Sid” of September 29, 2022 at 1:38 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

Welcome aboard the forum!

Thanks so much for the welcome Don. Greatly looking forward to interacting with all the folks here.

Post by “Eikadistes” of October 2, 2022 at 6:04 PM

[Quote from Sid](#)

Incidentally since we are comparing vs. Buddhism I’m just wondering has anyone looked at other non-dualistic teachings like Advaita? It would be very interesting to compare I think, especially since Epicureanism stresses reliance on the senses, but

radical Advaita dismisses the entire concept of an external reality altogether 😊.

All forms of Vedanta are at odds with Epicurean philosophy and inhabit opposite sides of the philosophical spectrum. Every historical iteration of Vedanta rejects other schools of ancient Indian philosophy that make similar claims to Epicureanism, such as *Vaisheshika*, which proposes a form of atomism, and the heterodox tradition of *Charvaka*, which proposes an atheistic form of hedonism. *Incidentally*, there **are** a number of similarities between Vedanta (especially Advaita Vedanta) and Platonism. Indeed, it is widely supposed that the neo-Platonists (such as Plotinus and his student Porphyry) had direct, historical influences from Indian philosophers that informed their Neo-Platonic positions.

Post by “Eikadistes” of October 3, 2022 at 1:04 PM

One other noteworthy point to mention [Sid](#) is that there is (*a proposed*) historical link between Advaita Vedanta and Mahāyāna Buddhism. The 6th-century Hindu philosopher Gauḍapāda (an early inspiration of Adi Shankara) was supposedly influenced by the teachings of the Mādhyamaka tradition of the Buddhist monk Nāgārjuna. While Mahāyāna Buddhism differs in many ways from Advaita Vedanta, they are much more closely related to each other than either of them are related to Epicureanism (or, for that matter, other materialist schools of ancient Indian thought).

Post by “Sid” of October 10, 2022 at 3:33 AM

Thanks @Nate I agree, while Epicurus clearly states reliance on the senses as the only way we can know the world, Advaita classifies the world as ‘maya’ or illusion (as in what we sense is only illusory and not real in the ultimate sense). The neo-Advaita tradition (esp. Tony Parsons et al) take this to ridiculous lengths asserting that there is only ‘nothing and everything’. As such this philosophy doesn’t seem to offer anything at all of any value, yet curiously many people seem to flock to it...To paraphrase a famous philosopher there is no use of philosophy unless it makes a tangible difference to our lives.

On the point of Mahayana Buddhism, or Buddhism in general is that the ethical doctrines seem more compatible with Stoicism the emphasis being on virtue or accumulation merit, though of course this is more pronounced in Mahayana given the whole Bodhisattva ideal.

Post by “Godfrey” of June 18, 2024 at 9:00 PM

[3-Week SASA Reading Group: The Milindapañha: A Conversation Between a Greek King and an Indian Buddhist Sage | Save Ancient Studies](#)

This reading group popped up in my email feed, along with several others in the same email. I've never heard of this text before, but it sounds like it may pertain to this thread.

Post by “Eikadistes” of August 29, 2024 at 11:58 AM

Incidentally, I am re-reading parts of the *Dhammapada*, and I am reminded how antithetical many of the propositions in ancient Buddhist scriptures are to Epicurean Philosophy. We **do** find similarities in the evaluation of *mindfulness*, the importance of *community*, and a commitment to a *behavioral code*, but I think we will find these features in most wisdom traditions. The rest is ... well, I believe that Nietzsche shares a useful conclusion in referring to it as "life-negating":

- **Just as a storm throws down a weak tree, so does Mara overpower the man who lives for the pursuit of pleasures...** (7)
- **"Just as rain does not break through a well-thatched house, so passion never penetrates a well-developed mind."** (14)
- **"Do not give way to heedlessness. Do not indulge in sensual pleasures. Only the heedful and meditative attain great happiness."** (27)
- **"But those who act according to the perfectly taught Dhamma will cross the realm of Death, so difficult to cross."** (86)
- **"Giving up sensual pleasures, with no attachment, let the wise man cleanse himself of defilements of the mind."** (88)
- **"Inspiring are the forests in which worldlings find no pleasure. There the passionless will rejoice, for they seek no sensual pleasures."** (99)
- **"... upon dissolution of the body that ignorant man is born in hell."** (140)
- **"Easy to do are things that are bad and harmful to oneself. But exceedingly difficult to do are things that are good and beneficial."** (163)
- **"... The righteous live happily both in this world and the next."** (169)
- **"Swans fly on the path of the sun; men pass through the air by psychic powers; the wise are led away from the world after vanquishing Mara and his host."** (175)
- **"Happy indeed we live, we who possess nothing. Feeders on joy we shall be, like the Radiant Gods."** (200)

- **"Seek no intimacy with the beloved and also not with the unloved, for not to see the beloved and to see the unloved, both are painful. Therefore hold nothing dear, for separation from the dear is painful. There are no bonds for those who have nothing beloved or unloved. From endearment springs grief, from endearment springs fear. From him who is wholly free from endearment there is no grief, whence then fear? From affection springs grief, from affection springs fear. From him who is wholly free from affection there is no grief, whence then fear? From attachment springs grief, from attachment springs fear. From him who is wholly free from attachment there is no grief, whence then fear?"** (210-214)
- **"Your life has come to an end now; You are setting forth into the presence of Yama, the king of death. No resting place is there for you on the way, yet you have made no provision for the journey!"** (237)
- **"Unchastity is the taint in a woman..."** (242)
- **"Of all the paths the Eightfold Path is the best; of all the truths the Four Noble Truths are the best; of all things passionlessness is the best: of men the Seeing One (the Buddha) is the best. This is the only path; there is none other for the purification of insight. Tread this path, and you will bewilder Mara."** (273-274)
- **"Cut off your affection in the manner of a man plucks with his hand an autumn lotus..."** (285)

Like Epicurus' opponents, early Buddhists (as recorded in the texts) do not distinguish between *stable* pleasure versus *excessive* pleasures. They describe pleasures to be necessarily *excessive*, intrinsically insatiable, fundamentally destructive, and ultimately evil. In this regard, as far as general ethical positions go, this attitude is categorically Platonic or Stoic.

Likewise, the treatment of *identity* and *death* seems to be irreconcilable with Epicurean Philosophy. Most ancient Indian philosophies (Buddhism included, among dozens of others) propose that our identity can be reduced to an indestructible *Self*, distinct from bodily phenomena, carrying a trans-dimensional record of a *Self's* ethical history, and that record dictates into which new, animal body the indestructible *Self* will manifest, and from which bodies it will be restricted.

Granted, while the physics are off, there is some ethical coherence. The descriptions of the *Awakened One* by Buddhists and the *Wise Man* by Epicureans share similar descriptions: *an admirable person, godlike in behavior, fearless, patient, mindful, kind, peaceable, a preventer of violence, never impulsive, who acts in accordance with their beliefs.* (Then again, as I propose, the reason for this coherence is because ethics is grounded in nature, and that nature affects everyone, regardless of the beliefs that arose from their niche, cultural context:)

- **"One is not wise because one speaks much. He who is peaceable, friendly and fearless is called wise."** (258)

However, even as such, the specific ethical rules dictated by early Buddhists are extensive, uncompromising, and, from my perspective, perilously conservative. Most of these rules (as I understand them) were not intended for people outside of the early monastic community. Siddhartha prescribes a monastic life for his followers, so ethical guidelines are contextualized within the life of a monk or nun. As far as that goes, Sex seems to be Enemy #1.

The very first book of the Pāli Canon (the ancient Buddhist scriptures) is a code of conduct for bhikkhus ("monks") and bhikkhunis ("nuns"). To note a few of those rules:

- Sexual intercourse leads to complete expulsion from the monastic community. (Pārājika 1)
- Masturbating warrants correction. (Saṅghādisesa 1)
- Holding hands with another person warrants correction. (Saṅghādisesa 2)
- Marriage proposals warrant correction. (Saṅghādisesa 5)
- Huts not built to the Buddha's design specifications warrant correction. (Saṅghādisesa 6)

This is followed by hundreds (and hundreds) of other restrictions that seem to govern every aspect of an early Buddhist mendicant's day, from the way they dress, to the way they shave, walk, eat, speak and, most importantly, which thoughts are acceptable thoughts to entertain.

If there is a foil to *Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'n' Roll*, I think it might be *Buddhism*.

Now, having levied that critique, let me also add that I don't know of many Buddhists who hold themselves accountable to a 2,500-year-old monastic code, so I don't want to skewer Buddhism and Buddhists on the basis on texts, and a historical figure, who are no longer as revered as are more recent texts, mantras, and historical figures who have cultivated the tradition. My friends who have invited me to Buddhist gatherings primarily use East Asian literature that has been written in the last few hundred years, as opposed to Indian literature that goes back thousands of years. I find similarities with my own, Protestant upbringing, in which the hymns and liturgy we recite are only as old as the King James Bible, and Bible Study *rarely* included a study of ancient Greek.

Still, I hold other traditions to the same standard that I hold my own: "*Why would I follow X/Y Tradition if I genuinely reject X/Y Founder's teachings?*" For me, as a kid, the teachings of Jesus seemed antiquated, and did not provide me with solutions to apply to my troubles. *However*, Epicurus nailed evolution and quantum indeterminism, and I award him bonus points for his insight in the form of representing myself as a member of his tradition. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Siddhartha said that sex is as questionable as murder. I have to reject this.

Post by “Cassius” of August 29, 2024 at 12:30 PM

Thanks for that exhaustive treatment Twentier!

Post by “Eikadistes” of September 26, 2025 at 10:12 AM

Huh ... I guess my brain is set to auto-update my file on the Dhammapada once a year.

Anyway, I came back to ask myself the exact opposite question, for an unrelated reason, and I came across these verses that strike me as being very "epicurean" in tone:

6. There are those who do not realize that one day we all must die. But those who do realize this settle their quarrels.

11. Those who mistake the unessential to be essential and the essential to be unessential, dwelling in wrong thoughts, never arrive at the essential.

12. Those who know the essential to be essential and the unessential to be unessential, dwelling in right thoughts, do arrive at the essential.

24. Ever grows the glory of him who is energetic, mindful and pure in conduct, discerning and self-controlled, righteous and heedful.

26. The foolish and ignorant indulge in heedlessness, but the wise one keeps his heedfulness as his best treasure.

28. Just as one upon the summit of a mountain beholds the groundlings, even so when the wise man casts away heedlessness by heedfulness and ascends the high tower of wisdom, this sorrowless sage beholds the sorrowing and foolish multitude.

41. Ere long, alas! this body will lie upon the earth, unheeded and lifeless, like a useless log.

66. Fools of little wit are enemies unto themselves as they move about doing evil deeds, the fruits of which are bitter.

67. Ill done is that action of doing which one repents later, and the fruit of which one, weeping, reaps with tears.

68. Well done is that action of doing which one repents not later, and the fruit of which one, reaps with delight and happiness.

73. The fool seeks undeserved reputation, precedence among monks, authority over monasteries, and honor among householders.

76. Should one find a man who points out faults and who reproves, let him follow usch a wise and sagacious person as one would a guide to hidden treasure. It is always better, and never worse, to cultivate such an association.

81. Just as a solid rock is not shaken by the storm, even so the wise are not affected by praise or blame.

84. He is indeed virtuous, wise and righteous who neither for his own sake nor for the sake of another (does any wrong), who does not crave for son, wealth, or kingdom, and does not desire success by unjust means.

101. Better than a thousand useless words is one useful word, hearing which one attains peace.

102. Better than a thousand useless verses is one useful verse, hearing which one attains peace.

110. Better it is to live one day virtuous and meditative than to live a hundred years immoral and uncontrolled.

116. Hasten to do good; restrain your mind from evil. He who is slow in doing good, his mind delights in evil.

123. Just as a trader with a small escort and great wealth would avoid a perilous route, or just as one desiring to live avoids poison, even so should one shun evil.

127. Neither in the sky nor in mid-ocean, nor by entering into mountain clefts, nowhere in the world is there a place where one may escape from the results of evil deeds.

128. Neither in the sky nor in mid-ocean, nor by entering into mountain clefts, nowhere in the world is there a place where one may will not be overcome by death.

131. One who, while himself seeking happiness, oppresses with violence other beings who also desire happiness, will not attain happiness hereafter.

132. One who, while himself seeking happiness, does not oppress with violence other beings who also desire happiness, will find happiness hereafter.

141. Neither going about naked, nor matted locks, nor filth, nor fasting, nor lying on the ground, nor smearing oneself with ashes and dust, nor sitting on the heels (in penance) can purify a mortal who has not overcome doubt.

157. If one holds oneself dear, one should diligently watch oneself. Let the wise man keep vigil during any of the three watches of the night.

206. Good is it to see the Noble Ones; to live with them is ever blissful. One will always be happy by not encountering fools.

280. The idler who does not exert himself when he should, who though young and strong is full of sloth, with a mind full of vain thoughts — such an indolent man does not find the path to wisdom.

290. If by renouncing a lesser happiness one may realize a greater happiness, let the wise man renounce the lesser, having regard for the greater.

328. If for company you find a wise and prudent friend who leads a good life, you should, overcoming all impediments, keep his company joyously and mindfully.

333. Good is virtue until life's end, good is faith that is steadfast, good is the acquisition of wisdom, and good is the avoidance of evil.

365. One should not despise what one has received, nor envy the gains of others. The monk who envies the gains of others does not attain to meditative absorption.

I'm going to condense all of this somewhere soon, but I this is a great repository for review, so I wanted to place it here, first ... to the growing list of things I keep re-forgetting.

Post by “Robert” of September 28, 2025 at 8:58 PM

@Eikadistes

This thread is of great interest to me. I was involved in Buddhism, fairly seriously at one point, for more than a decade. It's what finally led me to Epicureanism: in a nutshell, I saw that Epicureanism contains many of the things I like about Buddhism (you've touched on some of these in your comparison of the respective wisdom models), without some of the things I dislike.

I see the incompatibilities as stemming from the fundamentally different premises of the two systems. Buddhism is predicated on the idea that conscious life doesn't end with the breakup of the body; rather, we (viewed in Buddhism as compounds that lack an intrinsic Self) get regenerated again and again in various planes of existence, most of them painful. The life-negating aspects follow from this premise. I've noticed that more modern, "secular" approaches to Buddhism that downplay samsaric rebirth are also less negative in their appraisal of life, and closer to Epicureanism.

Regarding the austerity of Buddhist ethics, the traditions I'm most familiar (Indian and Chinese) do hold up monasticism as the ideal. A monastic is seen as a kind of spiritual hero who has resolved to escape samsara once and for all. Laypeople aren't expected to abide by the monastic code, as you noted--the Buddha set out a more relaxed ethical regimen for

"householders," consisting of five precepts. But there's a clear implication that someone practicing at that level is settling for a lower-level aspiration--i.e., to gain a favorable rebirth and hopefully to complete the path in some later incarnation.

The idea is that such a person lacks insight into the nature of samsara--if they were to gain that insight, they would abandon worldly pursuits and ordain. Indeed, in the traditionally Buddhist countries it's not uncommon for layfolk to ordain later in life. The model works and has sustained Buddhism for millenia, yet I'm not intellectually comfortable with it--I don't feel inspired by a system that demands such an extreme degree of renunciation as the pre-req for deeper insights and sagely bliss. Maybe I'm being too demanding. 😊

Anyway, I look forward to more additions to the repository!

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 29, 2025 at 9:00 AM

[Quote from Robert](#)

I see the incompatibilities as stemming from the fundamentally different premises of the two systems. Buddhism is predicated on the idea that conscious life doesn't end with the breakup of the body

There are within ancient Theravadin Buddhist texts - the Pali Sutta - certain passages which point to how consciousness is dependent on factors (**Eye-consciousness:** Arises dependent on the eye and visible forms. **Ear-consciousness:** Arises dependent on the ear and sounds. **Nose-consciousness:** Arises dependent on the nose and odors. **Tongue-consciousness:** Arises dependent on the tongue and flavors. **Body-consciousness:** Arises dependent on the body and tactile sensations. **Mind-consciousness:** Arises dependent on the mind and mental objects. (Theravadin Buddhism was the earliest form of Buddhism, and texts date back before Zen texts and Tibetan texts).

When studying and understanding this properly, then one can see that there actually is no rebirth. But the idea of rebirth is so entrenched culturally in countries which have Theravadin monastic groups, (and a few textual passages do speak of rebirth) so then this rebirth idea keeps going forward, taught by Theravadin teachers.

[Quote from Robert](#)

The idea is that such a person lacks insight into the nature of samsara

The idea of "samsara" is a very negative view of life, but yet certain people do have a lot of suffering depending on their circumstances (war, poverty, low wage-slavery, lack of sanitary infrastructure in third-world countries).

Then there are the "first-world" mental sufferings ...🤔...and we can see that Lucretius wrote about that in the De Rerum Natura -- the [vessel analogy](#).

I believe that there are aspects Epicurean philosophy which can help relieve these "first-world" mental sufferings (and much more effectively than Buddhist teachings).

An major issue that I have with Buddhism is that it has an extremely "skeptical" take on the ability of the mind to understand things (as well as using skepticism as a method for how to overcome suffering through mental thought regulation rather than by taking actions). Parallels can be seen between Pyrrhonism and Buddhism. (I just found this if you want to [read about the comparison between the two](#)). If a mentally unstable person practices this, it can have bad results (and likely bad results for a mostly mentally stable person also).

So a major difference is that Epicureanism takes a firm stand on things:

[VS41](#) - "We must laugh and philosophize at the same time, and do our household duties, and employ our other faculties, and never cease proclaiming the sayings of the true philosophy."

And also regarding the idea of rebirth:

[VS14](#) - "We are born once and cannot be born twice, but for all time must be no more. But you, who are not master of tomorrow, postpone your happiness. Life is wasted in procrastination, and each one of us dies while occupied." (See [this thread to read about what is implied by "occupied"](#).)

(P.S. [Robert](#) I also studied and practiced Buddhism before discovering Epicurean philosophy).

Post by "Pacatus" of September 29, 2025 at 1:22 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Parallels can be seen between Pyrrhonism and Buddhism.

Undoubtedly the best scholarly introduction to Pyrrhonism is Adrian Kuzminski's ***Pyrrhonism: How the Ancient Greeks Reinvented Buddhism***. Although Kuzminski uses (particularly Nagarjuna's) Buddhist philosophy as a helpful interpretive lens, the book is about Pyrrhonism.

It is a sympathetic introduction (which I think is the best way to begin – think Emily Austin’s introduction to Epicureanism). He insists that Pyrrhonists accept the testimony of the senses – as evident, rather than non-evident affairs; that Pyrrhonists accept the evidence of the senses, and reasonable inferences therefrom; and that they withhold judgment only with regard to categorically non-evident things – which are subject to non-confirmable *belief*. It is that kind of belief that, according to Kuzminski, the Pyrrhonists meant by “dogmatic.”

It’s a well-researched and well-written book. I won’t comment one way or the other on his interpretations – or the differences between Pyrrhonism and Epicureanism: I’m sure that Kalosyni can do a much more competent job on that score. (I’m not sure if Kuzminski would agree with Doug Bates – whose site Kalosyni linked, and who wrote a big book on Pyrrhonism – on everything. Or with other neo-Pyrrhonists such as Diego Machuca.)

I just thought I’d share that reference for anyone interested.

Post by “Eikadistes” of September 29, 2025 at 2:54 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Parallels can be seen between Pyrrhonism and Buddhism. (I just found this if you want to [read about the comparison between the two](#)).

I include a brief mention of those parallels in my paper about [holy shit](#). There is a historical possibility that [Nāgārjuna](#) (the founder of the [Madhyamaka](#) philosophy, one of the primary influences of [Mahāyāna Buddhism](#) which represents the majority of practitioners), was directly inspired or influenced by the works of Sextus Empiricus. He may literally have had physical access to translations of those works. Granted (so I think), Pyrrhonism was, in the first place, inspired by a [tradition](#) (or traditions) that shared similar philosophical positions as Buddhism, so there is a direct, historical exchange between ancient Greece and India when it comes to skeptical philosophy.

Post by “Robert” of September 29, 2025 at 8:33 PM

[Kalosyni](#) Glad to meet another Epicurean former Buddhist! Were you affiliated with a particular Buddhist school/tradition? I started off with Zen but gravitated towards Theravada, in part

because I like reading those ancient texts.

Yes, the idea of rebirth seems to founder on various paradoxes. We could say that the causal factors ("dependent origination") will spawn a new being, after I die, that inherits my karma. But since that new being doesn't remember being me, where's the continuity? And if it does remember, then there must be some vehicle for transmitting that memory, and doesn't that end up becoming a sort of Self -in-disguise? Questions, questions ..

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

An major issue that I have with Buddhism is that it has an extremely "skeptic" take on the ability of the mind to understand things (as well as using skepticism as a method for how to overcome suffering through mental thought regulation rather than by taking actions). Parallels can be seen between Pyrrhonism and Buddhism. (I just found this if you want to [read about the comparison between the two](#)). If a mentally unstable person practices this, it can have bad results (and likely bad results for a mostly mentally stable person also).

That was a concern for me also. Not only the skepticism that knowledge is possible, but the denial that it has actual value--things are only worthwhile if they aid in the escape from samsara. Knowledge negation is bound up with life negation.

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

The idea of "samsara" is a very negative view of life, but yet certain people do have a lot of suffering depending on their circumstances (war, poverty, low wage-slavery, lack of sanitary infrastructure in third-world countries).

An interesting question here about how philosophy and/or religion address this kind of suffering. Buddhism sometimes seems close to Stoicism in that it teaches us to overcome suffering by devaluing it. You don't need to grieve for your lost friend or loved one--he or she was just another transient being. Poverty, ill health, slavery (wage or otherwise) are the fruits of bad karma. The hope offered is that by taking refuge in Buddha you'll have less of this next time around.

How should an Epicurean address it? We have the tetrapharmakon. But is it sufficient in some of the extreme cases you mention?

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 29, 2025 at 9:27 PM

[Quote from Robert](#)

Were you affiliated with a particular Buddhist school/tradition?

Started briefly with a Tibetan Buddhist group, then interspersed for a few times with a visit to a bay area Soto Zen Center, also once attended a Thai Forest Tradition short retreat for lay practitioners, and my main practice of several years of regular attendance was at a Soto Zen Temple.

[Quote from Robert](#)

An interesting question here about how philosophy and/or religion address this kind of suffering. Buddhism sometimes seems close to Stoicism in that it teaches us to overcome suffering by devaluing it

Later Mahayana (Zen and Tibetan) have added the Bodhisattva ideal, which brings in a bit more compassion for suffering, compared to Theravadin.

[Quote from Robert](#)

How should an Epicurean address it?

This is a very good question... so to state the question: how would an Epicurean think and act regarding: 1) one's own suffering; 2) other people's suffering - friends/family; community; strangers/unknown visitors/people living in distant lands.

Edit note: Oct.1, 2025, I have removed the website links which were originally embedded in this thread, but you can private message me with any further questions regarding specific Buddhist groups.

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 29, 2025 at 9:43 PM

Thomas Jefferson had this to say about ancient philosophers (in the forward letter of his "Jefferson Bible"):

Quote

1. Their precepts related chiefly to ourselves, and the government of those passions which, unrestrained, would disturb our tranquility of mind. In this branch of philosophy they were really great.

2. In developing our duties to others, they were short and defective. They embraced indeed the circles of kindred and friends, and inculcated patriotism, or the love of country in the aggregate, as a primary obligation; toward our neighbors and countrymen they taught justice, but scarcely viewed them as within the circle of benevolence. Still less have they inculcated peace, charity, and love to our fellow-men, or embraced with benevolence the whole family of mankind.

Source: https://uuhouston.org/files/The_Jefferson_Bible.pdf

And it does seem that much of this could be said of Epicurean philosophy.

Post by “Pacatus” of September 30, 2025 at 2:44 PM

I seem to recall that Douglas Bates (whose site [Kalosyni](#) linked above), in his book *Pyrrho's Way: The Ancient Greek Version of Buddhism* – a thick, small-print tome in paperback – said that he gave up meditating because there was no record of Pyrrho or the Pyrrhonists engaging in meditation, or bringing that practice from India. I think he said that he took up long walks instead – no doubt a very good practice in itself, but

My initial reaction: I bet there’s no record of them playing golf, either – better take up disc-throwing instead! 😂😏😄

Post by “Robert” of September 30, 2025 at 6:00 PM

[Kalosyni](#), I'm always interested to hear about the experiences/trajectories of others who have been involved with Buddhism at some point, so thank you for sharing yours--and for the links. Some of those communities look inviting.

I still feel gratitude towards Buddhism; I learned a lot from it and it was my entry into philosophy.

Since Soto is so meditation-centric ("sit down and shut up!" as one teacher puts it), you must have spent much time on the zafu. What are your thoughts on integrating a meditation practice into Epicureanism?

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 30, 2025 at 6:34 PM

[Quote from Robert](#)

Since Soto is so meditation-centric ("sit down and shut up!" as one teacher puts it), you must have spent much time on the zafu. What are your thoughts on integrating a meditation practice into Epicureanism?

I never considered myself an "intense" meditator. Some of the people attending the Buddhist group would be meditating every day for 40 minute sessions, at home.

For me it might have been just 5 or 10 minutes at home, but on Sundays I would attend the public group that had 40 minute zazen, and also weekend retreats (just a few times), and also mid-week class which had 40 minutes, and then over several years it starts adding up (lol).

But I feel like the meditation process which is based on sitting still, is training a certain part of your brain that is different than the part of your brain that is active when you are moving around doing stuff or talking to people. And you are still left with solving all the real-life issues that require a thinking, rational mind that needs to make choices and take action. If you are lacking in certain basic needs of modern life (work, monetary resources, friends, etc), then no amount of meditation will solve those problems. In fact it could end up causing you to "let go" too much, such that you aren't properly doing what you need to do to solve those life issues.

As for Epicureans, if it gives you pleasure and doesn't cause any longterm problems then meditation gets a thumbs-up.

[Quote from Robert](#)

I still feel gratitude towards Buddhism; I learned a lot from it and it was my entry into philosophy.

Yes, same here. 👍

Post by “Kalosyni” of October 1, 2025 at 11:13 AM

This Vatican Saying comes up:

VS54. We must not pretend to study philosophy, but study it in reality, for it is not the appearance of health that we need, but real health.

I always interpret this as a combination of both physical and mental health.

And this could be applied to Buddhism as well...even if someone sits in meditation, and appears to be doing well, what is actually going on inside their minds?

Epicureanism helps one make sense of death and desires, and that leads toward liberation without the need for years and years of long meditation sessions. You drop your mental worries because you have arrived at a sense of true personal sufficiency - through a combination of putting effort into setting up your life and lifestyle to be conducive to personal well-being and developing specific attitudes/understandings toward pleasure & pain and life & death.

Post by “Robert” of October 1, 2025 at 10:54 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

But I feel like the meditation process which is based on sitting still, is training a certain part of your brain that is different than the part of your brain that is active when you are moving around doing stuff or talking to people. And you are still left with solving all the real-life issues that require a thinking, rational mind that needs to make choices and take action. If you are lacking in certain basic needs of modern life (work, monetary resources, friends, etc), then no amount of meditation will solve those problems. In fact it could end up causing you to "let go" too much, such that you aren't properly doing what you need to do to solve those life issues.

This makes a lot of sense. It also helps explain a phenomenon that used to puzzle me; I'd experience these very nice states of tranquility during meditation, often with a feeling of bliss mixed in there as well, and it would feel like I'd accessed some reservoir of inner peace. But then as soon as the meditation ended and I had to get back to worldly stuff, dealing with normal tasks and interacting with people, it all dispersed quickly and I'd even start to feel irritated and grumpy. And I'd think, "well, that didn't accomplish much, did it, since it's not helping me at all right now." But since, as you point out, different parts of the brain were involved, this is all easily explained.

I wasn't one of those virtuoso meditators, either--when I had a regular, daily sitting practice, I

usually did about 10-20 mins. Some occasional experiences with longer meditations in a group setting. These days, I'd worry about dozing off.

Post by “Robert” of October 1, 2025 at 10:58 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Epicureanism helps one make sense of death and desires, and that leads toward liberation without the need for years and years of long meditation sessions. You drop your mental worries because you have arrived at a sense of true personal sufficiency - through a combination of putting effort into setting up your life and lifestyle to be conducive to personal well-being and developing specific attitudes/understandings toward pleasure & pain and life & death.

I have a similar take. I do feel that the engagement with Buddhism helped prepare me, though--not sure what would have happened if I'd encountered Epicureanism first!

Post by “Eikadistes” of October 17, 2025 at 11:30 AM

[Quote from Eikadistes](#)

I'm going to condense all of this somewhere soon...

[I did the thing.](#) I came up with a more exhaustive list, and found corresponding quotes by Epíkouros and Epicureans that either support or conflict with Theravada Buddhist positions.