

The Epicurean Alternative to "Cogito Ergo Sum" Would Be?

Post by "Cassius" of February 2, 2023 at 10:36 AM

Just a passing thought this morning. We've discussed several times on the podcast the famous statement by Descartes, and I see that in 2017 I set up a primitive graphic:


Use Your Mind To Create Your Own Reality?

I think, therefore I am
When I imagine a triangle, even though such a figure may exist nowhere in the world except in my thought, indeed may never have existed, there is nonetheless a certain nature or form, or particular essence, of this figure that is immutable and eternal, which I did not invent, and which in no way depends on my mind.
- Renee Descartes

Or Use Your Mind To Grasp The Reality Nature Gave You?

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.
- Thomas Jefferson

*Jefferson got it right because he followed Epicurus, and Epicurus said:
"If you fight against all your sensations, you will have no standard to which to refer, and thus no means of judging even those sensations which you claim are false."*

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epicureanfriends.com/wcf/attachment/3460/

It hasn't occurred to me to ask:

(1) How closely do we think Epicurus would endorse Jefferson's formulation? and

(2) If we were looking for an Epicurean Latin response to cogito ergo sum, what would be the best formulation of Jefferson's first sentence? (maybe it should be considered whether to use _____ ergo sum vs _____ ergo ___ (exist)_____

Reference: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cogito,_ergo_sum

Post by “Cassius” of February 2, 2023 at 11:16 AM

Quote

Descartes's statement became a fundamental element of [Western philosophy](#), as it purported to provide a [certain foundation for knowledge](#) in the face of [radical doubt](#). While other knowledge could be a figment of imagination, deception, or mistake, Descartes asserted that the very act of doubting one's own existence served—at minimum—as proof of the reality of one's own mind; there must be a [thinking entity](#)—in this case the [self](#)—for there to be a thought.

One critique of the dictum, first suggested by [Pierre Gassendi](#), is that it presupposes that there is an "I" which must be doing the thinking. According to this line of criticism, the most that Descartes was entitled to say was that "thinking is occurring", not that "I am thinking".[\[5\]](#)

It's interesting that Gassendi, notable fan of Epicurus, is listed there as having an objection. Would be interesting to know what else Gassendi thought about Descartes

Post by “Eikadistes” of February 2, 2023 at 12:27 PM

I believe we are looking for the following:

sentio, ergo sum

"I ***feel***, therefore I am."

Post by “Cassius” of February 2, 2023 at 1:49 PM

Nate how close do you think that is to something Epicurus would say? Not knowing the details of what Gassendi was complaining about, I don't really think the issue if any would be "is there an 'I'?" If there is an issue, there might be something along the lines of some logical objection, analogous to not admitting that Metrodorus must be alive or dead tomorrow. Maybe he would have a concern about the "ergo" or maybe the whole basis of the discussion would be questionable (does our thinking or our feeling really answer the question? Don't we still exist even when asleep or unconscious?)

But in general I think I could see Epicurus endorsing "sentio, ergo sum" especially in the context of a debate with Descartes.

Post by “Godfrey” of February 2, 2023 at 3:46 PM

"*Sum, sentio, cognosco*", or something along those lines? The idea here is that we exist, and we work from that basis. No *ergo* involved. Maybe add "I act" to the end: *sum, sentio, cognosco, ago*.

(I don't know Latin, so my word choices may be goofy...)

Post by “Don” of February 2, 2023 at 4:06 PM

Non fui, fui, non sum, non curo

Post by “Cassius” of February 2, 2023 at 5:04 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

"Sum, sentio, cognosco", or something along those lines? The idea here is that we exist, and we work from that basis. No ergo involved. Maybe add "I act" to the end: sum, sentio, cognosco, ago.

Yes I am thinking too possibly Godfrey that Epicurus might not like the "ergo." But I presume at times (lots of them) Epicurus did use the equivalent of "ergo" so the issue is more subtle than I can process right now.

[Quote from Don](#)

Non fui, fui, non sum, non curo

Good point that we know that one. So I definitely think "sum" is correct and the issue is what short Latin makes sense to precede it as evidence, plus what "connector" makes sense (ergo?)

Post by “Don” of February 2, 2023 at 10:35 PM

Sum ergo sentio; si non sensibus, non sum.?

I am, therefore I feel; if no senses, I am not.

Post by “Cassius” of February 2, 2023 at 11:40 PM

Don any thoughts as to why you would put the "I am" first? I have to think back to the purpose of the construction in the first place. Is the purpose to establish to our own satisfaction that we really "exist"? Or are we primarily defining what it means to exist?

Post by “Godfrey” of February 3, 2023 at 12:06 AM

To establish to our own satisfaction that we exist, @Nate 's post #3 above seems to me to be the best answer. It goes directly to [PD02](#), and I imagine that most of us take that as a basic fact

of existence.

Post by “Little Rocker” of February 6, 2023 at 6:21 PM

Yeah, as I remember it (ever so vaguely from a long time ago and I could be wrong), Descartes didn't initially have the 'ergo,' but he does take it to prove something, so it might as well be there. I can't help but wonder whether Epicurus would consider Descartes' skeptical exercise a bit precious. Makes me think of GE Moore's proof of the existence of the external world--'Here is one hand. And here is another. Hands exist!'

Post by “Don” of February 6, 2023 at 6:28 PM

[Quote from Little Rocker](#)

'Here is one hand. And here is another. Hands exist!'

I can't shake the image of a baby laying in a crib being amazed at their hands. 😊