

The Description of Epicurean Philosophy on Reddit

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 23, 2023 at 1:22 PM

Here's what is happening on the r/Epicureanism on Reddit...found their introductory description:

Quote

Welcome to [r/Epicureanism!](#)

I'm sure you have a few questions. The foremost is probably “What the hell is Epicureanism, and why should I subscribe?” I've put together this introductory post to make the case for you becoming a follower of both this subreddit and the philosophy.

What is Epicureanism?

Epicureanism is an ancient philosophy based on the teaching of Epicurus of Samos (341-270BC). He based his thinking on a few simple physical principles and built from them an all encompassing philosophy. At its simplest Epicureanism can be summed up as the belief that ‘Pleasure is good, pain is bad.’ It is a misinterpretation of this which has led to Epicureans being painted as depraved pleasure seekers.

Epicurus taught that pleasure is good and should be pursued, but that not all pleasures were worth getting. If a pleasure requires a lot of pain to reach, or gives pain in the long run, then it is foolish to go for it. On the other hand not all pains are to be avoided if they give pleasure in the long run. So while Epicureanism is a form of Hedonism it is a lot more contemplative than Hedonism is usually assumed to be. The careful weighing of the outcomes of our actions reveals which pains and pleasures we should introduce into our lives.

This sort of pleasure-calculation is only valuable however if we agree with Epicurus that pleasure is good and pain bad. How did he reach this conclusion?

What exists?

Epicurus was part of a tradition in Classical Greece of quasi-scientific thinkers. He based his notion of physics on those of the Atomists Leucippus and Democritus. All that existed, they and Epicurus taught, were atoms and the void they move in. All things that we can sense are productions of the movement and compounding of atoms.

Epicurus took this belief and applied it to the human soul. The mind is simply a product of atoms acting within us. On death these atoms disperse and the mind is thus broken

up. There is not immortal soul which continues after death. This means that all our concerns should be with the life we lead before death.

While Epicureans in the ancient world were, and still often are, called atheists Epicurus did believe in gods. These gods were made of atoms, exist within the universe, and take no interest in humanity. They live lives of complete tranquillity. This position, and the unusual nature of the [Epicurean gods](#), does lend itself to atheism but is not a requirement of the philosophy. A theistic interpretation of Epicureanism is entirely possible.

What should we do?

There were, and are, many answers to the question of how we should live our lives. A philosophy which aims to be complete must offer us guidance.

Epicurus asked what motivates humans, all living things really. What makes us want to do something? Pleasure. What makes us not want to do something? Pain. We like pleasure. Since we are going to disappear on death we should focus on the things which make us happy. What is the point of living a virtuous life if it makes you miserable? You end up just as dead in the end.

Epicurus therefore rejected the idea of being beholden to society. He withdrew with his followers to a school called the Garden where they studied how to live the good life.

The Good Life

Epicurus separated our desires into categories. There are those that are:

Natural and Necessary – These are those that are required by life. Food, shelter, and the necessities of survival.

Natural, but unnecessary – These are those things that nature has shaped us for but that we can survive without. We might like drinking wine, but water serves just as well.

Unnatural desires – These are the ones that must be cultivated before we even desire them at all. Addiction to cigarettes would be an example, but so would any overly refined desire.

For Epicurus our focus should be in filling those desires which are natural and necessary. We cannot avoid eating if we wish to live so we should take pleasure in simple fare that removes the pain of hunger. If you take pleasure in just removing the pain of hunger then you will not be disappointed when you don't receive a three Michelin star meal

But it is natural to desire delicious food. It is in the realm of desires which are natural but not necessary that we have to train ourselves. We might want that world class chef to cook our meal but it is unlikely we will have it every day. We have to get used to not having it, but should it appear on our table we should take pleasure from it.

Obviously unnatural desires should be scorned. Why? Because their removal causes pain. Can you guarantee that you will always have an adequate supply of your drug of choice? Anyone who has suffered a caffeine headache might warn people away from that addiction.

This division of desires will tend towards the simple life. Epicureanism will not lead to riotous orgies (at least not all the time) but nor will it lead to asceticism. Pleasure is still good, you just have to take care with which ones you introduce to your daily life.

What else?

A short summary like this will never do credit to Epicureanism. The members of the subreddit have brought together a huge number of articles and posts which you should read. There are great overview articles on Epicureanism [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

In the sidebar you'll find links to some useful Epicurean websites that have interesting articles and the surviving Epicurean texts.

If you have any questions ask them here or make a self-post. The members of the sub are friendly. Epicurus placed huge importance on friendship.

Quote

“Of all the means to insure happiness throughout the whole life, by far the most important is the acquisition of friends.”

I'll leave you with the message written over the entrance to the Garden which welcomed new members.

Quote

Stranger, here you would do well to tarry; for here our highest good is pleasure.

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Post by “Cassius” of September 23, 2023 at 1:49 PM

"A theistic interpretation of Epicureanism is entirely possible."

What? Where does he get that?

Post by "Joshua" of September 23, 2023 at 2:04 PM

Quote

Theism is broadly defined as the belief in the existence of at least one deity.^{[1][2]} In common parlance, or when contrasted with deism, the term often describes the classical conception of God that is found in monotheism (also referred to as classical theism) — or gods found in polytheistic religions — a belief in God or in gods without the rejection of revelation as is characteristic of deism.

Deity:

Quote

A deity or god is a supernatural being who is considered divine or sacred.

I suppose you could argue about definitions, but not without wholly muddying the waters. Epicureanism is non-theistic.