

"If You Wish To Be An Epicurean, Get Used To Being Called 'Cockeyed'" - or - "Why Vatican Saying 29 Would Make A Good Epicurean Tatoo"

Post by "Cassius" of July 9, 2024 at 7:57 AM

I want to get this down before I forget the list - at the moment I forget where the "cockeyed" reference comes in, but we can circle back for that. This only took me about ten minutes to put together. I am sure there are many more.

Every one one of these major positions of Epicurus can easily be ridiculed. Nevertheless, most of us who study Epicurus come to the conclusion that when we look close they actually contain much more than a "grain" of truth, from at least one very important perspective.

There's enough of this going on that we ought to consider that there is a pattern here. Especially when considered [VS29](#), and the argument in Gellar-Goad's article describing "the sun is the size it appears to be" as an Epicurean "shibboleth." To be an Epicurean in the ancient world apparently meant being willing to be accused of being ridiculous, so why not even today get used to it and revel in the experience?

Every one of these requires that we set aside superficial interpretations and look for the perspective that makes them true:

1. [All sensations are true.](#)
2. Gods are plainly visible to us.
3. A truly blessed and imperishable being spends a life totally unoccupied.
4. [Death is nothing to us.](#)
5. Pleasure is the highest good.
6. Pleasure is the absence of pain.
7. The complete absence of pain is not only a pleasure, but the greatest pleasure.
8. The hand in its normal condition is not only experiencing pleasure, but the greatest pleasure.
9. The host who is not in pain is in the same condition of pleasure as the thirsty guest who is given drink.
10. Infinite time contains no greater pleasure than a limited life.
11. Acute pain is short, lesser pains are also short and manageable, and even longer-term pains permit a predominance of pleasure over pain.
12. The size of the sun is at it appears to be.

13. Virtue is not the same for all people at all times and all places, but it is impossible to live a happy life without living virtuously.
14. If the pleasures of a profligate could in fact bring a pleasurable life we would have no cause to blame them, because they would be achieving the goal, which is pleasure, and avoiding the evil of life, pain.
15. If any pleasure could be magnified so as to occupy and remain over time our total experience, pleasures would never differ from ne another.
16. The pleasure in the flesh is not increased when pain due to want is removed, but only varied. [PD18](#)
17. Images moving through the air cause us to see ghosts which can be considered to be real and make us think about gods and dead people. (e.g. Cicero's taunt of Cassius Longinus)
18. The dreams of madmen are true.
19. It is not easy to decide how we would act if we could commit crimes without being discovered.
20. Democracy is the worst form of government (Twentier's Philodemus quote)
21. Kings are fine to live under if they bring about an end to men fearing each other. PD6
22. If we were not troubled by fear of gods and death and the limits of pains and desires, we would have no need for natural science.

One good use of this thread would be to point out more we can add to this list.

Post by “Cassius” of July 9, 2024 at 10:39 AM

Quote from DeWitt Epicurus and His Philosophy Chapter 7, page 127

Plutarch, who employed part of his leisure in digging up old slurs out of the archives, wrote scornfully: "It was not because Colotes had read 'the heaven-descended Canons' that bread was perceived by him to be bread and fodder fodder." Even after the time of Plutarch the Canon seemed good to the frivolous Alciphron for a joke between two courtesans, the Epicurean Leontion and Lamia, mistress of Demetrius the Besieger: "How long will one have to put up with this philosopher? Let him keep to his books on Physics, to his Authorized Doctrines and his cock-eyed Canons."

The footnote to that last part referencing Alciphron is *Ep.* 2.2.2 (Loeb 4.17, p.309), where the translator uses "distorted."

That letter can be read in full here: <https://archive.org/details/in.ern...ge/308/mode/2up>

From the introduction to that volume of Alciphron:

INTRODUCTION

1. GENERAL

Of the prose letters that have come down to us from Greek antiquity a few, like the short letters of Epicurus, are letters in the simple sense of the word ; most are "literary efforts," some genuine, like the amusing and informative letters of Synesius or the vapourings of Dionysius of Antioch, some forged, like the letters attributed to Phalaris or to Socrates. 'Forged' is perhaps a dangerous word to use in some cases, the line between letters forged with intent to deceive and letters forged without such intent is often difficult or impossible to draw. In the case of the letters in the present volume, however, there is no such difficulty they are forged without intent to deceive (i.e., they are "imaginary"), and they all illustrate, in one or way another, the workings of that "Second Sophistic" which so rarely had the art to hide its art. Some of them are genre letters suggestive of the pastoral idyll, the names of writers and of addressees being avowedly fictitious some of them purport to be written by historical characters to historical characters.

Post by "Don" of July 9, 2024 at 2:09 PM

cock-eyed Canons = διεστραμμενους Κανονας

διεστραμμενους < διαστρέφω "turn different ways, twist about, τὰ σώματα, as in the dance; also of persons, to have one's eyes distorted, or to have one's neck twisted; metaph., distort, pervert"

Post by "Joshua" of July 22, 2024 at 8:43 PM

Funnily enough, the very first thing Lucretius says to his readers is "empty your ears!"

quod superest, vacuas auris; "As for the rest (of you), ears empty"...