

# Repackaged Epicureanism from a Christian writer?

**Post by "Robert" of September 1, 2024 at 2:13 PM**

All--a friend on social media posted this. When I read it, I thought "hmm, this sounds quite Epicurean." Thoughts?

I can see some possible objections. An Epicurean might not use the phrase "becoming more fully human," and "God" here is presumably the Christian version (though perhaps perfect and incorruptible, as an Epicurean deity should be). Still, the idea seems to be that we humans can reach a divine state through a practice of mindful living, as opposed to traveling after death to some mysterious region outside of physics and nature.

What is saving my life now is the conviction that there is no spiritual treasure to be found apart from the bodily experiences of human life on earth. My life depends on engaging the most ordinary physical activities with the most exquisite attention I can give them. My life depends on ignoring all touted distinctions between the secular and the sacred, the physical and the spiritual, the body and the soul. What is saving my life now is becoming more fully human, trusting that there is no way to God apart from the real life in the real world.

*An Altar in the World*  
*Barbara Brown Taylor*

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**Post by “Kalosyni” of September 1, 2024 at 4:22 PM**

Very interesting...partly Epicurean: "no spiritual treasure to be found apart from the experiences of human life on earth".

But there is a lot to unpack in the sentence: "My life depends on ignoring all touted distinctions between the secular and the sacred, the physical and the spiritual, the body and the soul."

And in my mind this is still talking about a search for something "supernatural". Then the following sentence says: "there is no way to God apart from the real life in the real world". I would wonder about the idea of "finding a way to God" -- is it some kind of (Platonist) drive to find perfection, or an ideal form, or ideal love, etc ?

#### [Quote from Robert](#)

(though perhaps perfect and incorruptible, as an Epicurean deity should be)

For myself, I don't think that there is enough within the Epicurean extant texts to flesh out this idea (of an Epicurean deity) into any type of "spiritual practice".

Also, I wonder how to properly define some of these words...especially "sacred" and "spiritual"... which may not have a place within the Epicurean philosophy. But I do think we can look to Lucretius' poem (in Book 3) in order to know how Epicureans conceived the understanding of the "soul".

There does remain the question of what happens to "mystery", the "unknowable", or "magick", etc. for an Epicurean (or in ancient times the [Eleusinian Mysteries](#)). But when we consider the Epicurean stance of "[death is nothing to us](#)" (which in practice is actually a much deeper and complex idea than the way that it sounds on the surface) then the "supernatural" is no longer needed, as well as the "spiritual" or the "sacred".

Perhaps @Twentier or [Don](#) may like to add some other additional ideas on this.

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Edit note:

8:02 pm ET

Added reference to Lucretius' Book 3 talks about the nature of the soul.

Also, I was incorrect when I said the Torquatus section contained something on the nature of the soul, and removed that reference from above.

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**Post by "Cassius" of September 1, 2024 at 5:20 PM**

### [Quote from Robert](#)

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i see your point Robert and think you're on the right track. Certainly the embrace of focusing on living now and denying christian distinctions between body and soul ring true to Epicurus.

And as you say the problem would be in the connotations of how "god" is used there, and "saving" life, and becoming "more fully human."

And last but not least, it's always a major red flag in my book when a formulation completely fails to use the word "pleasure." There are lots of people who have lots of good ideas on lots of things, but in my view probably the core trait of something being "Epicurean" is that it is willing to stand up and say straightforwardly that it is the "pleasure" of living that makes life worth living. It can sound like a word game sometime to insist on the word "pleasure," but anyone whose not willing to go all the way to the use of that term, in defiance of all the normal prejudice and peer pressure against it, isn't really in sync with Epicurus. Being willing and unafraid to stand up for "Pleasure," as in Emily Austin's book title "Living for Pleasure," is to me one of the best possible litmus tests to apply.

And sadly this is where a lot of the "atheist" literature out there fails so badly. The "Good without God" approach accepts the Platonic and other premise that there is a "good" other than "pleasure," and in the end that philosophical debate is the real battleground.

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## **Post by "Robert" of September 1, 2024 at 8:20 PM**

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Also, I wonder how to properly define some of these words...especially "sacred" and "spiritual"... which may not have a place within the Epicurean philosophy. But I do think we should look to Lucretius' poem or Cicero's Torquatus section in order to conceive of the idea of the "soul".

There does remain the question of what happens to "mystery", the "unknowable", or "magick", etc. for an Epicurean (or in ancient times the [Eleusinian Mysteries](#)). But when we consider the Epicurean stance of "[death is nothing to us](#)" (which in practice is actually a much deeper and complex idea than the way that it sounds on the surface) then the "supernatural" is no longer needed, as well as the "spiritual" or the "sacred".

Perhaps @Twentier or [Don](#) may like to add some other additional ideas on this.

Display More

Hi, Kalosyni,

The problem areas you've pointed to do complicate the alleged (by me) Epicurean-ness of this passage! I do wonder, though, if this is a case of the writer faltering a bit in the face of her opening declaration ("no spiritual treasure to be found apart from the experiences of human life on earth") and its implications. In rejecting the various dualities she mentions, is she implicitly embracing a materialist perspective, whether she acknowledges this or not?

I'm interested in the passage partly because of claims (by DeWitt and others) that Christianity has a history of appropriating Epicurean ideas and practices. I've been keeping an eye out for possible instance sof how this is done...

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**Post by "Robert" of September 1, 2024 at 8:38 PM**

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Hi, Cassius,

I'm glad you brought this up--it's been on my mind. Not to use the word "pleasure" would, I agree, amount to misrepresentation. So I probably should clarify that I don't see the passage as being genuine Epicureanism--but perhaps an example of Epicureanism bubbling up within a nominally Christian framework,

As far as I know, no Christian would unabashedly espouse "pleasure" as a good in itself. Yet these things get to be complicated. I had a conversation recently with someone from an evangelical Christian background. I asked her what the draw was. Her answer: "it just feels good."

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## **Post by “Kalosyni” of September 2, 2024 at 9:12 AM**

### [Quote from Robert](#)

I had a conversation recently with someone from an evangelical Christian background. I asked her what the draw was. Her answer: "it just feels good."

And further curiosity...what part of it "feels good"?

Perhaps a community of friends with like-minded worldview and shared spiritual practices?

(btw, I was raised Penticostal Protestant but moved away from that worldview at about age 15, and then later as an adult spent time studying Buddhism with some time of active involvement with Buddhist groups (Tibetan, Zen), but Buddhism didn't work out for me for various reasons).

I would very much like to see an Epicurean movement which provides a sense of community in the same way that I experienced within the Buddhist groups I participated in. However, I am still trying to nail down the nuts and bolts of Epicurean philosophy, and also figure out how to hold in-person meetings.

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## Post by “Kalosyni” of September 2, 2024 at 9:24 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

[Quote from Robert](#)

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And further curiosity...what part of it "feels good"?

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(btw, I was raised Penticostal Protestant but moved away from that worldview at about age 15,...

I still remember a song from church when I was a kid that went this way, with a very happy/upbeat melody:

"The joy of the Lord is my strength"

(repeat 3 more times)

Then:

"He gives me living water and I thirst no more"

(repeat 2 more times, then end with the first line above)

Perhaps this a sort of "ignorance is bliss" situation...requiring a suspension of rational thought processes. But this shows an activity that is enjoyable --singing-- together with "a kind of meditation on positive uplifting thoughts" (if you subscribe to the complete worldview of Christianity).

Perhaps something to consider for Epicurean group activities -- singing! 😄

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### **Post by “Robert” of September 2, 2024 at 10:45 PM**

Yes, my friend suggested that it had to do with the communal experience, the singing, the endorphin flow and all of that. The trouble, of course, is that acceptance of the ideology is the "ticket" needed for access to this pleasant experience. Not as much of a problem for children, perhaps--when I was small, I just assumed the adults around me were telling the truth. But when we grow older and wise up a bit, then a difficult choice has to be made.

Incorporating music into Epicurean practice is a great idea, if you ask me! I feel that Epicurus himself would have approved. He seems to have appreciated music. One of the things that put me off Buddhism was its rejection of music and theater--the suttas warn that people involved in these activities are bound for various hells.

So...maybe time to get started on the Epicurean songbook!

#### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

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That would be my wish too! Hopefully it will become more feasible once the Epicurean revival gains critical mass...

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### **Post by “Martin” of September 3, 2024 at 4:48 AM**

#### Quote

So...maybe time to get started on the Epicurean songbook!

Here it is:

[Music With Epicurean Philosophical Themes - Epicureanfriends.com](https://www.epicureanfriends.com)

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### **Post by “Don” of September 3, 2024 at 6:57 AM**

[Quote from Robert](#)

So...maybe time to get started on the Epicurean songbook!



I'll offer my attempt at an Epicurean hymn from 3(!) years ago, sung to the tune of "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing" which I originally heard while attending a Unitarian Universalist church:

[epicureanfriends.com/thread/?postID=11342#post11342](https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/?postID=11342#post11342)

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### **Post by “Cassius” of September 3, 2024 at 8:29 AM**

Don -- Some of these old hymns seem to be sung in "unrecognizable" ways nowadays. Do you have a youtube link to the version of the tune you're thinking of?

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### **Post by “Don” of September 3, 2024 at 8:36 AM**

Orchestral:

<https://youtu.be/gPKpkrqBwNs?feature=shared>

Guitar:

<https://youtu.be/g3w9nvXuVnk?feature=shared>