

2022 Epicurus vs Buddhism Compare and Contrast Thread

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.