

What Makes Someone "An Epicurean?"

Post by "Cassius" of March 30, 2019 at 7:49 PM

In a nearby thread the question was raised about who should be considered to be an Epicurean. No one has the authority to give such a list, and probably no one after Epicurus himself, or the last head of the Epicurean school in Athens in the ancient world, ever had that authority. But we ought to give thought to what the key components of the philosophy are, so we can consider how many of them fit the person we're considering labeling as an Epicurean.

My own first question is "Does the person call himself an Epicurean?" Epicurean philosophers have always acknowledged a debt to the person of Epicurus himself as the founder of the school. So if the person doesn't explicitly talk about Epicurus, that is probably a bright line that would eliminate that person from being considered to be a part of the Epicurean school, no matter how many admirable personality traits or interests we can identify in them.

But today, in another context I was asked for my view of the most important points of Epicurean philosophy, and I came up with the list in the graphic below. The way I formulate these points regularly changes, but I think most versions of this list tend to revolve around similar core points that we can find in the [Principal Doctrines](#), Epicurus' letters, and Lucretius. So I *personally* think, and I think that the majority of ancient Epicureans would think, that an Epicurean would agree with most and very probably all of the following points on this graphic.

Epicurean Philosophy Is A Foundation On Which A Person Sees:

- (1) that supernatural religion is not only false but a lie;
- (2) that there is no punishment, reward, or life of any kind after death;
- (3) that one's life is all one has and is very important, meaning that nihilism is an abomination;
- (4) that there are no absolute standards of right and wrong that apply to all people at all times,
- (5) that rather than absolute standards, Nature has provided us with the faculty of feeling - pleasure and pain - as the guide by which we should base our decisions on how to live,
- (6) that "reason" and "logic" and "virtue" are dependent on the natural faculties, and have no value in themselves apart from those faculties; and
- (7) that it is proper to be confident that the Epicurean positions on these issues is correct, and
- (8) that through Epicurean philosophy that we can overcome the priests and false philosophers who try to keep the gates of knowledge tightly barred.



Epicurean Philosophy Is A Foundation On Which A Person Sees:

- (1) that supernatural religion is not only false but a lie;
- (2) that there is no punishment, reward, or life of any kind after death;
- (3) that one's life is all one has and is very important, meaning that nihilism is an abomination;
- (4) that there are no absolute standards of right and wrong that apply to all people at all times,
- (5) that rather than absolute standards, Nature has provided us with the faculty of feeling - pleasure and pain - as the guide by which we should base our decisions on how to live,
- (6) that "reason" and "logic" and "virtue" are dependent on the natural faculties, and have no value in themselves apart from those faculties; and
- (7) that it is proper to be confident that the Epicurean positions on these issues is correct, and
- (8) that through Epicurean philosophy that we can overcome the priests and false philosophers who try to keep the gates of knowledge tightly barred.