

Epicurean Friends Newsletter - April 2019

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"Nothing Can Be Created From Nothing"

** Welcome to this month's edition of the EpicureanFriends.com newsletter!

** Our home base for discussion, where you can find links to major Epicurean news and websites across the internet, is <https://www.epicureanfriends.com/>. Our goal is to better understand and apply the wisdom of Epicurus, and in the words of Lucian, "*strike a blow for Epicurus - that great man whose holiness and divinity of nature were not shams, who alone had and imparted true insight into the good, and who brought deliverance to all that consorted with him!*" For more background, [check here](#) and also [here](#). For interim updates between editions of this newsletter, check out EpicurusToday.com for daily updates taken from the newsfeeds of major Epicurean websites.

FIRST - A GENERAL WORD ABOUT ABSOLUTISM VS EPICUREAN PHILOSOPHY

There are an almost unlimited number of places in the real and on-line world where people can go to discuss general philosophy. There are also a number, but far fewer, of places where Epicurean philosophy is featured as a significant part of the discussion. But there are only a very few locations where people who are serious about applying Epicurean philosophy in its fundamental form can gather to discuss and work together toward that goal. The goal of EpicureanFriends.com is to be one of those places, and that's what makes it uniquely helpful to those who are pursuing Epicurean philosophy.

At the same time, however, that uniqueness means that EpicureanFriends.com - just as with Epicurean philosophy as a whole - is not going to be appreciated by everyone.

Much of the modern world considers Epicurus as nothing more than an atheistic self-help guru who preached escape from pain and dropping out of society. It makes no difference that every aspect of that description is fundamentally flawed - that is the understanding that the majority of people have. As a result, people who are serious about Epicurus frequently come into contact

with people of a self-constructed worldview that is essentially theistic in nature. Such people (especially in a Stoic or Platonic or Aristotelian form) find Epicurus because they are looking to add some sprinkle of pleasure to escape the dreariness that is inherent in their own doctrines.

That's perfectly understandable, and any step in the right direction is a good one. Epicurean philosophy is friendly and benevolent by nature, as shown in the outreached hand extended by both Lucretius in his poem and Diogenes of Oinoanda in his wall inscription. Everyone who takes Epicurus seriously is happy to interact with such people and point them in the right direction.

But we need to be clear. Epicurean philosophy is not eclectic in nature. It was not built by Epicurus by throwing together a hodgepodge of conflicting ideas. Epicurus is recorded to have said that the wise man will "dogmatize." Stripped of its pejorative connotations, that means that the wise man is going to be confident in the things that he holds to be true. While the wise man is not going to take a position on obscure issues where evidence is conflicting or absent, the wise man is not going to hesitate to take positions where evidence is clear and consistent. What's the obvious implication? In Epicurean philosophy, some opinions are going to be labeled "true" and some are going to be labeled "false." Therein is found the unbridgeable divide between Epicureans and other major philosophies and positions - especially about theism, free will, and idealism.

Epicurean philosophy is based on its physics - the observations about the nature of the universe that it holds to be true. Epicurean philosophy rules out the existence of the kind of supernatural universe-creating omnipotent omniscient and omnipresent beings to which most people give the name "gods." Epicurus rejects out of hand the existence or even the possibility of such gods. Nor does Epicurean philosophy allow an "I don't know" position about supernatural beings. Read the letter to Herodotus or any of Epicurus' letters; read Lucretius; read Diogenes of Oinoanda. It is unmistakable that Epicurean philosophy is grounded on confidently taking the position that the universe as a whole is eternal, and was never created by any supernatural being. Those who insist on any form of supernatural theism are never going to be able to reconcile their views with Epicurean philosophy. As long as the Theists maintain their absolutist position on theism, they will always remain in irreconcilable tension with Epicurean philosophy and see it as their enemy.

Another aspect of Epicurean physics that cannot be ignored is the swerve of the atom. The swerve plays an essential role in another issue that many people find unacceptable: that humans have "free will" and "personal responsibility." Just as with theism, those who argue "determinism" will constantly assault the walls of the Epicurean garden with arguments as to why no degree of free will or personal responsibility is possible. They will ignore the clear surviving texts which show that Epicurus fully understood that "free will" is not unlimited, and that events beyond our control do on occasion disrupt or even terminate our lives. They will ignore those evidences because as long as they maintain their absolutist position on determinism, the Determinists will always remain in irreconcilable tension with Epicurean philosophy and see it as their enemy.

Of equal or even greater emotional implication is issue of "virtue" or "idealism." Epicurean physics eliminates "virtue" or "idealism" as having absolute independent existence outside of their nature, which is that of inventions of the human mind. In a universe in which nothing is eternal except elements moving through void, NOTHING is eternal except elements moving through void. No matter how beloved to us are our ideas of "virtue," "nobility," "dignity," "equality," "fairness," and the like, those views are constructed by the human mind. They they have no sanction in a supernatural dimension of realm of "forms" or "ideals." Were it not sad, it would be funny to observe how this type of person will ignore the last ten of Epicurus' [principal doctrines](#), number ten in particular, or the many other recorded statements which establish the conclusion that there are no "absolutes" in any of these categories. Epicurean philosophy hold that there are only living human beings, doing the best they can to live their lives within the span nature has given to them, in much the same way that Jefferson said that "the Earth belongs to the living." The Earth does not belong to nonexistent gods or human-created idealism of any kind. There is no need to further inflame this type of person by listing the moral and political ideals that are so dear to them. These people know who they are, and they know that their view of what "should be" trumps - for them - anything that Epicurus might teach to the contrary. As long as they maintain their absolutist position on virtue and political idealism, those whose primary goal is political idealism in the form of "Justice" or "Virtue" will always remain in irreconcilable tension with Epicurean philosophy and see it as their enemy.

Is this all that needs to be said about the subject, to note these irreconcilable positions and wish each other well? I don't think so. Here's what else remains: It is in the nature of the atomistic world view - Epicurean philosophy - to respect divergent opinions, and to allow other people to live as they see fit, as long as we are allowed to live as we see fit.

But that is not the nature of the absolutist mindset in theism, in determinism, or in political idealism. Across the world today a wave of censorship is building. As we come into contact with others who are not confirmed Epicureans, we see the same thing in our own discussions. Many people are quick to call for the silencing of views that they find to be offensive to themselves. It makes no difference to such people that Epicurean philosophy requires the discussion of controversial ideas which are very different from those into which we have been indoctrinated by two thousand years of ascendant absolutism. Free expression of ideas has never been, and never will be, a value of the Absolutist mindset. As they see it, why should they allow difference of opinion? Their theology and their idealism transcends all other considerations for them, so why should anyone be allowed to question the ideals they already know to be true?

These issues are not going to go away. As long as there are those of us who are devoted to Epicurean philosophy, rather than popular opinion, we need to consider that "friendship" as an Epicurean value means standing up for each other when the expression of Epicurean viewpoints is under attack. The rest of the world outside is thoroughly under the sway of anti-Epicurean absolutism. We should not accept that kind of behavior within our own small gardens. "The man who best knows how to meet external threats makes into one family all the creatures he can; and those he can not, he at any rate does not treat as aliens; and where he finds even this impossible, he avoids all dealings, and, so far as is advantageous, excludes

them from his life."

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND LINKS FROM THE PAST MONTH:

**** Gods Do Not Protect Their Temples**** We had a vigorous discussion of the philosophical implications of the Notre Dame Fire both at [Epicureanfriends](#) and at [Facebook](#).

**** Happy Twentieth from the Society of Epicurus**** The monthly update from the Society of Epicurus is [here](#).

**** More Thoughts on The "Idealist" vs "Realist" Interpretations of the Epicurean Theory of "Gods"**** is [here](#).

**** Research on the Herculaneum Texts** This past month we had several discussions about the current state of recovery of texts from Herculaneum. As part of that we came across a website that was new to some of us set up by the [Werzburg Center For Epicurean Studies](#). Much of that discussion stemmed from Hiram's post on "[Against the Use of Empty Words](#)."

**** Presentation on the Letter to Marcella By Porphyry** ** This past month the Garden of Athens organized a presentation which included discussion of the Epicurean aspects of this text. Check it out [here](#).

**** Pleasure and Reality**** Some of our best independent thinking on aspects of Epicurean philosophy is on display [in this thread started by E](#).

**** Latest Threads**** For a list of the latest threads over the past month at EpicureanFriends, click [here](#).

**** In addition to the other [links mentioned above](#), if you are an active Facebook user, please check out the [Epicurean Philosophy Facebook Group](#). You will probably also want to follow the [Epicurus Page on Facebook](#) as well as the various pages of the [Society of Friends of Epicurus](#).**

**** Thanks to all who have participated at EpicureanFriends.com over the past month. It can't be emphasized enough that proper application of Epicurean philosophy demands that we have Epicurean friends, so we urge you to join one of the many Epicurean venues and study Epicurus with like-minded people - and then you too will be well on your way to becoming a *god among men*!**

As always, if you have any comments, questions, or suggestions, please let us know at [the forum](#).

Live Well!

Notes:

** We are frequently asked for help in connecting with a local Epicurean group. At present there are only a few established groups in the world, notably in Greece and Australia. If you are interested in connecting with Epicureans in your local area, please [check this Regional Epicurean Group Forum](#) for help in organizing and finding local connections. The forum is divided into sections for each area of the world, and also contains hints for using Meetup.com as a method of getting started.

** Let's also review how to find links to active Epicurean websites. In addition to the links at EpicurusToday.com, an updated list is maintained [here at EpicureanFriends](#). If you are someone who is studying Epicurus and trying to apply his lessons in your life, you're well aware of the emphasis on friendship and on communicating with like-minded people. Wherever you are, even if there is no local group yet, please stop in at one of the on-line websites and introduce yourself. The best way you can help yourself and the Epicurean websites is to ask questions, comment, criticize, praise, and otherwise give us your feedback so we can get to know you better. At EpicureanFriends you are welcome to subscribe anonymously, and as long as you follow the rules of the group your postings are welcome. Reading a book or even a website is no substitute for personal interactions with other Epicureans. If you meet someone who isn't friendly and interested in talking about Epicurus, then you aren't talking to an Epicurean!

** If you received this newsletter as a forward from someone else, please join us at <https://www.epicureanfriends.com> and register for an account, where you will receive your own copy of the newsletter each month. If at any point you would like to unsubscribe, please [go to your account here and deselect the "Newsletter" user group](#). If you have any difficulties doing that, please notify the [admin](#) and we will assist you promptly.