

Looking for constructive feedback on my mostly Epicurean philosophy of life

Post by “Eikadistes” of September 18, 2024 at 8:49 AM

Right off the bat, I appreciate that you describe your outline as a philosophical exercise. As far as our sense of Epicurean spirituality goes, writing an outline is a key practice.

Epicurus would agree with your theological rejection of supernatural deities; *however*, he positively affirms that *natural* deities **do** exist (though, those deities are simply inspiring mental objects). Now, if our definition of theism identifies the divine as being responsible for creation, for maintaining natural forces, and for interfering with the development of human history, then Epicurus could reasonably be called an "atheist". However, Epicurus wrote against the atheism of his time, and positively recommends to his pupils that they consider the divine nature to be blessed and imperishable (though the spiritual objects of the masses are incoherent).

I absolutely identify with your position on theology. But I think that the way Epicurus discussed religion was less in terms of abstract metaphysics, and more in terms of cultural anthropology. In which case, "god-belief" is just a natural, human practice, like wolves howling at the moon. Certainly, the moon will never respond to howling: *but that's not why wolves howl*.

Your discussion of one's own death is very much so Epicurean in approach. Epicurus describes death as ΑΝΑΙΣΘΗΤΕΙ from from ἀν- (*án-*, "without") + αισθητός (*aisthetós*, "perceptibility", "sensitivity") meaning "**devoid of sensation**", "unconsciousness", "no sense-experience", "absence of sensation", "lacks awareness", "no feeling", "no perception". Contextualizing death as the absence of sensation is exactly how Epicurus saw it. I think the only discrepancy here is that Epicurus did not associate the decision-making faculty of the mind with the prefrontal cortex in a human skull.

I can see why you would both propose both physical determinism and moral nihilism: if one supposes that *freedom*, *choice*, and *responsibility* are illusions, then one would have to admit that we lack any kind of moral agency. Democritus would sympathize with you here, **but not Epicurus**. Epicurus rejects determinism, not only because it violates his principle of particles' unpredictable swerving, but also in an ethical sense, because the belief in determinism can be measurably paralyzing and unhealthy. Even if most of our thoughts and actions are just dominoes in a line of falling particles, the belief in determinism just surrenders whatever small bit of control we do have over our imaginations, even if its only memorizing data, or intentionally daydreaming.

As far as the moral nihilism goes, we treat this proposition with suspicion because, overwhelmingly, pleasure can be equated with physical health. Most things that are physically healthy are inherently pleasurable, whereas physically destructive behaviors tend to be painful.

Since Epicurus identifies pleasure with The Good and pain with that which is terrible, and since the feelings of pleasure and pain come from Nature, we reason that good and evil are grounded in nature. Nature compels us to pursue pleasure (to be healthy), and we suffer when we reject these natural compulsions. There may not be an absolute *Ten Commandments* to which all human beings are held, but there are natural, behavioral tendencies that reinforce an organism's ability to thrive.

Overall, your perspective on fear of death aligns with Epicurean philosophy insofar as recognizing it as being an irrational source of anxiety. He might question your proposition that death is harmful; surely, *dying* is harmful, but once *the process of dying* has finished, and death is the case, there is neither pleasure nor pain, good nor evil, because those things require consciousness. Still, the general, thanatological position that fear of death is unhealthy and irrational is on point.

I appreciate your list of ways in which to pursue a better life. Epicurus proposed a number of conclusions at which you have arrived. I think the biggest thing I see as being (in my humble opinion) a contradiction, is the tension between "responsibility impossibilism", "moral nihilism" and your thoughtful list of helpful habits. I maintain, from an Epicurean position, that the fact that we are concerned with ethics in the first place, that we hold ourselves responsible for choice and avoidance, and that we pursue education are evidence that we have at least a little bit of control, and that the choices that we make are subject to our own moral evaluation.