

Ben's personal outline of Epicurean philosophy

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This is my personal outline and interpretation of Epicurean philosophy:

On the nature of reality

1. Nature, being the physical universe consisting of matter, energy, and void, is all that exists. The supernatural does not exist.
2. There are no gods, in the traditional religious sense of supernatural beings that interact with our universe.
3. The mind is an emergent function of the physical body, most importantly the brain. When the body dies and disintegrates, so does the mind. There is no afterlife in which the mind survives the death of the body.

On the nature of knowledge

4. Nature is knowable. We observe it using our senses. And we use our mind to order these observations and integrate them into knowledge.
5. Our feelings of pleasure and pain inform us as to what is beneficial and what is detrimental to us.
6. We are born with certain innate ideas, such as a sense of justice. These form a kind of genetically transmitted knowledge which is beneficial to our life.
7. We should test our mental conclusions against these three sources of knowledge, and adjust them accordingly.

On the nature of the good life

8. The goal of a good life is to achieve the greatest possible happiness.
9. To enhance happiness, we should pursue pleasure, and avoid pain.
10. It may at times be necessary to accept temporary pain in order to achieve greater pleasure later, or to avoid a pleasure in order to avoid a greater pain later.
11. We should not fear death, as in death we will no longer have sensations and feelings. So, we should make the most of this life.

12. There is no absolute morality, and each person should freely make their own hedonistic calculations. That said, because of the nature of knowledge, we can make general statements about which choices would bring greater pleasure and happiness to the majority of people.

13. Virtues are only good and worth pursuing insofar as they contribute to greater happiness through avoiding pain and offering pleasure. A choice is not virtuous if it does not lead to greater happiness.

14. In order to better understand pleasure and pain, we need to study nature. A better understanding of reality will help us achieve greater happiness.

Comments?