

# What Makes Someone "An Epicurean?"

Post by "Onenski" of May 16, 2025 at 9:16 PM

Hi, I think [Don](#) has brought up a very important point. I'll try to explain why.

Dear [Kalosyni](#), I believe we can distinguish at least two types of descriptions of an 'Epicurean person'. **On one hand**, we can attempt to give a description of what an ideal Epicurean would be like—that is, a description of the Epicurean sage. This was more or less already done by Diogenes Laertius in Book X. We could also try to give our own description with slightly more modernized traits or attempt to reconstruct it from the texts we have available (as I'm sure [Cassius](#) would agree to do). This would be the 'true Scotsman' description in the fallacy Don mentioned. This description has a **prescriptive function**—it guides us toward what we *should* do to live more happily.

**On the other hand**, we have the description of people who **try** to be Epicurean. This description is much looser than the previous one because it doesn't aim to say how we *ought* to be, but rather how we actually *are* (or at least those of us who strive to live more Epicurean lives). Here, you'll find a wide range of people, some of whom you might filter out.

For example, there are people who consider themselves Epicurean simply because they enjoy eating delicious, even luxurious, food. You might filter out those descriptions if you think they're missing something essential to being truly Epicurean (like knowing at least who Epicurus was).

Here, it's worth mentioning something I myself have said in my own interpretation of Epicurus (and which perhaps has been somewhat inappropriate, or careless). I've said before that we are *all* Epicureans (meaning that we are all psychological hedonists), and the only thing we lack to be happy is recognizing it and acting in accordance with a calculus of pleasure and pain. It's possible that Epicurus also thought that we all act in pursuit of pleasure (i.e., hedonistically), and if we acknowledged this, we'd avoid many mistakes and sufferings by directly seeking what brings us the most long-term pleasure.

What I mean is that we can even give a loose description under which we are all, in some way, Epicureans and, likewise, we can give descriptions that require greater commitment to be considered Epicurean. The important point of this kind of description is that it simply tells how people are.

From this simple distinction, follows that if you want to define a group of people committed to this philosophy to some degree, then the second type of description would be appropriate. If, instead, you'd like to use the description to guide your actions, then the first type would be preferable.

Based on what you write in your post, it seems to me that you want to establish certain criteria to define a group of epicurean people. I suggest some to you, ranging from the loosest to the strictest:

1. "We are all Epicureans, insofar as we act in pursuit of pleasure."
2. "Those who say they are Epicureans, in fact, *are*, because by applying the label to themselves, they suggest they know what they're talking about, and we can take them at their word."
3. "Those who have read (at least) Epicurus and agree with his ideas but aren't very interested in putting them into practice."
4. "Those who have read (at least) Epicurus, agree with his ideas, and *want* to put them into practice—even if they don't fully succeed."
5. "Those who have read (at least) Epicurus, agree with his ideas, *want* to put them into practice, and *actually* succeed in doing so."

For the last three criteria, I leave open how much they've read and how they've interpreted it. We already know there are more ascetic readings and less ascetic ones. We could also establish criteria regarding the *type* of reading.

As you can see, the choice of criteria isn't something set in stone—it's perhaps somewhat arbitrary. In any case, one can argue in favor of any of them, with greater or lesser success.

I hope I haven't just stated the obvious and that this distinction is somewhat useful. Likewise, I hope you're all doing well—I haven't been able to meet up with you, but I hope to do so soon.

