

Sunday May 25th, Zoom Discussion: "What Would Epicurus Say About the Search For 'Meaning' In Life?"

Post by "Rolf" of May 26, 2025 at 11:16 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

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As far as I understand, Epicurean philosophy would say that this feeling of having a "spirit/soul" is legitimate, but it is dependent on the body, and so it dies when the body dies. And so we are not eternal, but we exist only for a short time.

Perhaps, if there is any aspect of Epicurean philosophy that could feel "spiritual", it would be this. And then we would value and honor our friends in a kind of awe of life - that this is amazing that we are alive, thinking, feeling, contemplating, reasoning, celebrating -- we would regularly bestow gratitude and words of appreciation.

Perhaps. Though for me personally, even this strays too far from a strictly materialist worldview. That said, I'm not sure there's any harm in framing it as so if it helps people.

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Needing a sense of "meaning" can be considered "natural" and arising out of human consciousness.

This is an interesting topic, and something I'm not sure about. Is meaning something concrete, or is it just another mirage like enlightenment? The term almost reminds me of a secular version of such spiritual goals, when used in a certain way.

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Perhaps for those people who were not raised with a particular religion, they will cognate "meaning" as something different than those who were raised with religious "fundamentalism".

This is a very good point - I was thinking something similar during our meeting yesterday, as from what I remember, the majority of us were raised in a somewhat religious environment. I,

on the other hand, was raised incredibly secular. I wonder if this has any impact on the way one interprets "meaning", and whether or not they care for the idea at all.

When thinking about this conundrum, I keep circling back to the need to define "meaning (of life)". Wiktionary has it as follows:

Quote

1. (*philosophy, religion*) A hypothetical answer to all of life's ultimate questions; the purpose or *raison d'être* of human life.

Focusing on the second part, I feel this is incompatible with a strictly material Epicurean view of the world. As Josh so eloquently discussed in yesterday's meeting, a "purpose" or "reason for existence" implies, to me, that something has a preordained intent. However, in a world that is made up of only atoms and void, such an intent is impossible, and the realm of the supernatural.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy seems to have a [good page on the meaning of life](#). Upon a brief skim, it appears to go through differing takes on the concept, with a section devoted to discussing the *meaning* of "the meaning of life". One such perspective is as follows:

Quote

Focusing on meaning in life, it is quite common to maintain that it is conceptually something good for its own sake or, relatedly, something that provides a basic reason for action

Under this definition, "the meaning of life" describes the core of Epicurean philosophy very well. What is good for its own sake and provides a basic reason for action? Pleasure, of course!

To be honest, I feel debate over "the meaning of life" is mostly semantics and largely unnecessary (generally speaking, not here on this forum specifically). My personal view is that the word is, ironically, meaningless, and that it's a red herring in the pursuit of happiness. That said, it's obviously an extremely common point of discussion when it comes to philosophy, so I understand and agree with the need to discuss it in an FAQ, particularly for those new to Epicurus. I'm not entirely sure what the best way of doing this is - the answer depends very much on how the reader is defining "meaning".

Additionally, is the aim to answer based solely upon Epicurean literature, or are our own interpretations permissible? If the former, I imagine it could be tricky to answer due to the idea of "meaning" perhaps not being conceptualised in the same way during that time period.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4448-sunday-may-25th-zoom-discussion-what-would-epicurus-say-about-the-search-for-mea/?postID=35492#post35492>