

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

Post by "Don" of May 26, 2025 at 11:40 AM

I'm looking at the word "meaning" itself. Wiktionary gives definition 2 as:

The purpose, value, or significance (of something) beyond the fact of that thing's existence. (the meaning of life)

People seem to want/need a "greater purpose" for their lives, or to understand the "value" of the lives, to understand the significance of their lives in the grand scheme. That search for "meaning" seems like trying to chase a mirage. There is no ultimate or supernatural or divine purpose, value, or significance to an individual's living their life over and above pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain, just like every other living creature. That's it. Now, that said, people can derive a lot of pleasure out of what are often lumped into "meaningful" acts and experiences. But I sincerely think people are fooling themselves (and more power to them) when they call that their life's purpose or meaning rather than acknowledge they're seeking pleasure. The pundits who pontificate about having a life of meaning have it backwards. Sincerely investigate what will truly bring you pleasure, and pursue that (within the limits of justice and ethical behavior Epicurus outlined). That might indeed be humanitarian causes like working in a war-torn country providing assistance, but it might not be. It might indeed be a life spent in service to people in need, but it might not be. Looking for a "grand purpose" almost seems to set people up to see themselves as inadequate in some way. "Pleasure is the highest good" seems a good antidote to that.