

# Thoughts On Alain de Botton

Post by "Cassius" of June 29, 2019 at 9:51 AM

The following comes from a recent discussion in which the work of [Alain de Botton](#). It started in the context of whether there were ever Epicurean communities in the ancient world outside the garden in Athens, but the main reason I am posting this is that I want to preserve Elayne's commentary (below, EC) with which I totally agree and think to be very important:

**SG:** I remember, Alain de Botton stated the same thing about Epicurean communities. He even added some of what we know as old monasteries, belonged to Epicureans before Christianity came to power and declared them as heretic and illegal cults. Well, he may not be a legit source. But do we have any?

**Cassius:** I don't consider Alain to be a legitimate source for this because I have never seen him (or anyone else) produce documentation / source material for these suggestions. No personal offense intended to him, but in general my observation is that Alain is a good example of someone who is basically an eclectic / humanist who has set out to adopt some, but by no means all, of Epicurus' views in support of his own political agenda.

The part of Alain's material that I have seen focuses so heavily on "anticommercialism" that I find his material to be detrimental some who might otherwise dig in and pursue he deeper points Epicurus was making. My experience is that Alain is one of many who immediately jump to "pleasure is the absence of pain" so they can write normal feelings of pleasure out of the playbook and then forget about it as they pursue a minimalist / ascetic lifestyle. That minimalist lifestyle, which he has selected for reasons of his own, appears to me to be the true goal of his work.

**SG:** Cassius, I agree with your criticism. I also think his project, if developed, can lead to a secular community which has a lifestyle of his own, as he briefly refers to, in his Atheism V. 2.0 lecture.

**EC:** SG, I liked Alain's book on "Religion for Atheists", which was focused not on a communal living arrangement but on groups which would meet regularly, as churches do, to develop and reinforce their understanding of what is important to them in life... and to enjoy the non religious benefits church members enjoy, such as singing together, friendship, etc.

Really, this is what a modern Epicurean Garden would do, in my opinion. Follow Epicurus' advice about studying nature together, with friends!

I was actually a member for a couple of years of a small secular group based on that atheism book. We met every Sunday night and took turns presenting a topic, then ate dinner together.

I did not know about Epicurean Philosophy at the time, but the one I was working out for myself was almost exactly the same, just not fully elaborated.

So I would talk about, for instance, the fact that our desires CAN be satisfied-- that we reach a point where we are happy with the amount of food or sleep we have had-- so desire is not insatiable. Or that just because a pleasure is transitory does not make it invalid. Or that one can directly seek happiness, pleasure, successfully-- that failures are not due to impossibility of seeking happiness but of ineffective methods. Or that there is no such thing as universal consciousness. Or that there is nothing wrong with having an ego, a self-- that part of our brain is what allows us to make decisions for our happiness! To get rid of it is an error, and it is biological, not an illusion.

And nobody in that group ever understood those ideas. ? I had no clue why I was always out of sync with them, on almost every point, until I learned about Epicurus.

That is when I realized how far off modern secular groups were from my philosophy and how much they had been affected by Stoics and Buddhists.

So anyway, I think that idea of the groups can work, but not unless it is explicitly Epicurean and the members are solidly supporting EP -- otherwise the current type of atheists will drag it in a direction we wouldn't want to go.