

Welcome Ontologix!

Post by "Cassius" of September 3, 2025 at 9:47 AM

On the hedonism question, we've recently gone over what Cicero reports Zeno the Epiurean was teaching about Epicurus in his time (Tusculan Disputations, Part 3 Section XVII):

Quote

Do I explain your opinion rightly? for your disciples are used to deny that we understand at all what Epicurus means. This is what he says, and what that subtle fellow, old Zeno, who is one of the sharpest of them, used, when I was attending lectures at Athens, to enforce and talk so loudly of; saying that *he alone was happy who could enjoy present pleasure, and who was at the same time persuaded that he should enjoy it without pain, either during the whole or the greatest part of his life; or if, should any pain interfere, if it was very sharp, then it must be short; should it be of longer continuance, it would have more of what was sweet than bitter in it; that whosoever reflected on these things would be happy, especially if satisfied with the good things which he had already enjoyed, and if he were without fear of death, or of the Gods.* You have here a representation of a happy life according to Epicurus, in the words of Zeno, so that there is no room for contradiction in any point.

We talk frequently here about the issue of how Epicurus advised the fine-tuning of luxuries, but as in your earlier comments Ontologix I would say that the standard label of Epicurus as "atomist" is far to restrictive, as are the standard views that he was either a pursuer of food that was either primarily luxurious or primarily simple.

The way that Zeno characterizes the main point seems to me to be authoritative and focuses properly on the most important issues. Zeno doesn't fine-tune our tastes as ends in themselves, but seems to focus on enjoying a life in which we have a general level of confidence about core goals. Those goals that Zeno lists are that physical and mental pleasures will predominate over pains, that we appreciate what we have without obsessing over the shortness of life, and that there are neither any supernatural gods to threaten us nor life after death in which we are punished or rewarded.

I personally don't like the term "hedonist" either. As best I can tell the ancient Epicureans identified themselves as "Epicureans," not "hedonists," because Epicurean philosophy is much more subtle and wide-ranging than what the term "hedonist" evokes.