

2022 Epicurus vs Buddhism Compare and Contrast Thread

Post by “Robert” of September 28, 2025 at 8:58 PM

[Eikadistes](#)

This thread is of great interest to me. I was involved in Buddhism, fairly seriously at one point, for more than a decade. It's what finally led me to Epicureanism: in a nutshell, I saw that Epicureanism contains many of the things I like about Buddhism (you've touched on some of these in your comparison of the respective wisdom models), without some of the things I dislike.

I see the incompatibilities as stemming from the fundamentally different premises of the two systems. Buddhism is predicated on the idea that conscious life doesn't end with the breakup of the body; rather, we (viewed in Buddhism as compounds that lack an intrinsic Self) get regenerated again and again in various planes of existence, most of them painful. The life-negating aspects follow from this premise. I've noticed that more modern, "secular" approaches to Buddhism that downplay samsaric rebirth are also less negative in their appraisal of life, and closer to Epicureanism.

Regarding the austerity of Buddhist ethics, the traditions I'm most familiar (Indian and Chinese) do hold up monasticism as the ideal. A monastic is seen as a kind of spiritual hero who has resolved to escape samsara once and for all. Laypeople aren't expected to abide by the monastic code, as you noted--the Buddha set out a more relaxed ethical regimen for "householders," consisting of five precepts. But there's a clear implication that someone practicing at that level is settling for a lower-level aspiration--i.e., to gain a favorable rebirth and hopefully to complete the path in some later incarnation.

The idea is that such a person lacks insight into the nature of samsara--if they were to gain that insight, they would abandon worldly pursuits and ordain. Indeed, in the traditionally Buddhist countries it's not uncommon for layfolk to ordain later in life. The model works and has sustained Buddhism for millenia, yet I'm not intellectually comfortable with it--I don't feel inspired by a system that demands such an extreme degree of renunciation as the pre-req for deeper insights and sagely bliss. Maybe I'm being too demanding. 😊

Anyway, I look forward to more additions to the repository!