

The dark Epicureanism in the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam

Post by “Kalosyni” of February 16, 2026 at 4:21 PM

It is important to see that there are a number of differences between Epicurean philosophy and the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam...and the Rubaiyat takes a dark and pessimistic tone.

Labeling Epicurean philosophy as pessimistic is incorrect (rebuttal to post #1 above) and there are enough large differences between Epicureanism and the Rubaiyat that we should not label the Rubaiyat as Epicurean.

Here is short comparison and then a full table of comparison follows. (source: Google AI):

Epicureanism and the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (particularly in Edward FitzGerald's famous translation) share a "carpe diem" spirit that emphasizes seizing the present moment. However, they differ significantly in their underlying tone: while Epicureanism is a structured system for achieving tranquility (*ataraxia*), the *Rubaiyat* is often viewed as a more somber, skeptical exploration of life's transience and the perceived silence of the divine.

Feature	Epicurean Philosophy	The <i>Rubaiyat</i> (FitzGerald)
Primary Goal	Ataraxia: Absolute peace and the absence of mental/physical pain.	Carpe Diem: Finding immediate joy (often symbolized by wine) in a fleeting life.
View of the Divine	Gods exist but are indifferent and do not interfere in human affairs.	The Divine is mysterious, silent, or even arbitrary/unjust in the face of suffering.
Attitude Toward Death	" Death is nothing to us "; the soul is material and ceases to exist.	Death is a "final and unyielding reality" that turns us back into clay/dust.
Source of Pleasure	Refined, simple pleasures; friendship and intellectual pursuit over decadence.	Sensuous and symbolic pleasures; often uses wine and love as a refuge from existential dread.
Moral Outlook	Rational and empirical; based on understanding the natural laws of atoms and void.	Skeptical and agnostic; questions the efficacy of religious or philosophical "certainty".
Tone	Didactic and liberating: A system meant to free followers from fear.	Somber and fatalistic: Reflects "disillusionment" and the "temporality of human existence".

Edit note: In the table under "primary goal" it says ataraxia, and we must be sure to understand it through the lens of [PD10](#) - "If the things that produce the pleasures of profligates could dispel the fears of the mind about the phenomena of the sky, and death, and its pains, and also teach the limits of desires (and of pains), we should never have cause to blame them: for they would be filling themselves full, with pleasures from every source, and never have pain of body or mind, which is the evil of life."