

FollowUp On Quote Submitted By Pacatus - "It is not a sign of good health to be well adjusted to a sick society."

Post by "Cassius" of July 9, 2026 at 7:34 PM

Ok so Jiddu Krishnamurti is the guy who was raised by the Theosophists to be a guru and walked away from it. I'd have to do a lot more reading before I ventured much comment on whether he's an admirable figure or not - presumably he is at least partly so.

But I am very glad Pacatus posted the quote and Bryan expanded on it.

I see this as very closely related to what I see as the biggest problem in the "modern Epicurean" movement.

Are we to interpret Lucretius in Book 2 as saying "Na na hey hey... your boat is in a storm sinking and I am safe on land?" Are we to read that as advice to turn inward and ignore the troubles around you just so you yourself can preserve your precious "lack of disturbance"?

Or are we to see Lucretius as using that as an example of something that he could do nothing about, but that in turn on issues where he COULD do something about he did. And where he could help deal with what was going on around him he did - with all his strength - wade into a hotbed of philosophical dispute,. He risked his reputation and possibly his life by campaigning against the gods and the religious authorities, and doing his best to help the "hearts in darkness" whom he could help.

Is all of Epicurean philosophy just a tranquilizer for those who are immobilized by fears from every direction? Or is it a call to reform and to take action and to - to the extent you can, even where it's a small part - challenge the established cultural and religious institutions that are doing so much hard.

Was Epicurus locked in cave doling out his last beans to a few friends all his life, or was he a leader moving from city to city, gathering followers as he went, going straight to the heart of the best back in Athens to talk to anyone who wanted to listen about the corruption all around him?

Epicurus wasn't a politician, but his reforms were far more sweeping than that of any politician.

Was Diogenes of Oinoanda guarding all his money to keep it for himself or pass it to his children, or was he getting the enjoyment - and yes a strong form of peace of mind - by doing what he could do to make his surroundings a better place?

I think the answer is clear, and that's why "tranquility" has to be placed in context. When your world is crumbling around you the worst thing you can do is say "oh shucks there's nothing I can do, anyway I'll be dead soon and I'll have no pain then!" And I won't even mention the issues involved in declining to experience joy or delight or exhilaration when you can do so at reasonable cost in temporary pain or inconvenience.

I see no evidence whatsoever that "save me from every pain no matter what the cost" is how the ancient Epicureans lived. The academics of the last fifty years will no doubt deny that that is what they are saying, but that's the clear logical conclusion of putting the common understanding of "absence of pain" first in life. And while that terminology can easily be defended from the Pleasure perspective, rarely if ever does the "relief from pain" crowd make any effort whatsoever to explain tranquility or absence of pain in the terms I am discussing. Rather than explain the context of tranquility as a single facet of the active fully-lived life, they have magnified it to the entirety of it to the effective denial that Pleasure itself plays a significant role in the best life.

From my perspective, the Peace of Mind that I am interested in comes from doing what is possible in the face of adversity to make a better life for myself and my friends. The satisfaction that comes from that is worth all the "calmness" that might be achieved by declining to save a friend in danger, or standing back rather than protecting your wife or children in time of war, or - as in Frances Wright's example - riding to the rescue of Hedeia to prevent her from drowning in a storm.

What someone really means by "peace of mind" -- and how they explain it -- is one of the most telling things about how someone interprets Epicurean philosophy.