

Discussion of the Society of Epicurus' 20 Tenets of 12/21/19

Post by “Hiram” of December 22, 2019 at 12:14 PM

Admin Edit

ADMIN NOTE BY CASSIUS 01/07/20:

This is a thread for discussion of the [Society of Epicurus' 20 Tenets posted on 12/21/19](#). The thread is now closed, but it is retained here for historical interest as it touches on many aspects of the issues involved in forming an Epicurean (or any other) organization.

As stated in the description of this forum, the Society of Epicurus is a project led by Hiram Crespo which is independent of and separate from Epicureanfriends.com. The positions taken by Hiram and/or the Society of Epicurus should not be presumed to be the same as those of the moderators of Epicureanfriends. As this thread will illustrate, there are instances of agreement and there are also instances of dramatic differences of opinion. Also, note that this set of 20 Tenets is labelled with 12/21/19 as a reference to the original list. As I understand it the list is subject to revision and is likely to be different as of the date you are reading this post. Finally, there are many excellent points made by many people in this thread - my own point by point commentary is [here](#).

The 20 Tenets of Society of Friends of Epicurus 12/21/19

[Lea en español.](#)

In the initial years of forming groups of friends and intellectual peers with the goal of studying, applying, and teaching Epicurean philosophy, we have frequently considered that it might be a good idea to have a concise, summarized set of clear Tenets to facilitate the process of teaching, to connect theory with practice, and to more clearly explain what it is that we believe in.

This has not been easy. We do not wish to risk over-simplifying ideas that, when summarized, lose either their potency or some aspect of them that requires further qualification in order to avoid grave errors. We also wish to keep a big tent that allows for opinions that are varied, yet orthodox enough to still be coherent with EP. Hence, for instance, the “three acceptable interpretations” of Epicurean theology in Tenet 12.

Ancient and modern Epicureans have always been encouraged to write down Outlines of their personal philosophy. This actually has great benefits: it helps to cognitively organize and make sense of what we believe, to find the coherence between our values and ideas, and to articulate them clearly. The Tenets are roughly based on the Outline that I (Hiram) wrote some time ago, edited and expanded.

The first five Tenets relate to the Canon (or, epistemology). The next five relate to the Physics (or, the nature of things). The final ten relate to the Ethics (or, the art of living). These are the three parts of Epicurean philosophy. In the notes section, you will find Epicurean sources and essays cross-referenced for each Tenet.

1. **“Objective” nature is knowable via the sensations.**
2. **“Subjective” nature is knowable via the value-setting pleasure and aversion faculties, by which we know what is choice-worthy and avoidance-worthy.**
3. **While sensations tell us that something IS or exists, it does not tell us WHAT it is. For THAT cognitive process, we must rely on a faculty tied to both language and memory. The faculty of anticipation helps us to recognize abstractions and things previously apprehended.**
4. **We may infer the unseen / un-apprehended based on what has been previously seen / apprehended by any of our faculties; and we may re-adjust our views based on new evidence presented to our faculties.**
5. **Our words and their meanings must be clear, and conform to the attestations that nature has presented to our faculties.**
6. **All bodies are made of particles and void.**
7. **Bodies have essential properties and incidental properties.**
8. **Nothing comes from nothing.**
9. **All things operate within the laws of nature, which apply everywhere.**
10. **All that exists, exists within nature. There is no super-natural or un-natural “realm”; it would not have a way of existing outside of nature. Nature is reality.**
11. **The end that our own nature seeks is pleasure. It is also in our nature to avoid pain.**
12. **There are three acceptable interpretations of the [Epicurean gods](#): the realist interpretation, the idealist interpretation, and the atheist interpretation.**
13. **The goal of religion is the experience of pure, effortless pleasure.**
14. **[Death is nothing to us](#) because when we are, death is not and when death is, we are not. Since there is no sentience in death, it is never experienced by us.**
15. **Under normal circumstances, we are in control of our mental dispositions.**
16. **Choices and avoidances are carried out successfully (that is, producing pleasure as the final product) if we measure advantages/pleasures versus disadvantages/pains over the long term. This means that we may sometimes defer pleasure in order to avoid greater pains, or choose temporary disadvantage, but only and always for the sake of a greater advantage or**

pleasure later.

17. **To live pleasantly, we must have confident expectation that we will be able to secure the chief goods: those things that are natural and necessary for life, happiness, and health. Therefore, whatever we do to secure safety, friendship, autarchy, provision of food and drink and clothing, and other basic needs, is naturally good.**
18. **Autarchy furnishes greater possibilities of pleasure than slavery, dependence, or relying on luck; The unplanned life is not worth living, and we must make what is in our future better than what was in our past.**
19. **Friendship is necessary for securing happiness. It is advantageous to promote Epicurean philosophy in order to widen our circle of Epicurean friends.**
20. **Human relations should be based on mutual benefit.**

Notes:

1. "The doctrine of the first leg of the canon: sensations". [PD 23. The Epicurean Canon.](#)
2. "The second leg of the canon: pleasure and aversion". [The Pleasure / Aversion Faculty: an Introduction.](#)
3. "The third leg of the canon: anticipations". The canon is known as the "tripod" because it stands on three legs. [Epicurus and His Philosophy - Chapter VIII - Sensations, Anticipations, and Feelings.](#)
4. "The doctrine of inference". [Review of Philodemus' On Methods of Inference. Philodemus: On Methods of Inference - A Study in Ancient Empiricism. in?at=ataraxia0c-20&hl=am2&o=1&a=B002DQY68Q](#)
5. [Epicurus: Against the use of empty words.](#)
6. "Fourth, Nothing exists in the universe except bodies and space. We conclude that bodies exist because it is the experience of all men, through our senses, that bodies exist. As I have already said, we must necessarily judge all things, even those things that the senses cannot perceive, by reasoning that is fully in accord with the evidence that the senses do perceive. And we conclude that space exists because, if it did not, bodies would have nowhere to exist and nothing through which to move, as we see that bodies do move. Besides these two, bodies and space, and properties that are incidental to combinations of bodies and space, nothing else whatsoever exists, nor is there any evidence on which to speculate that anything else exists that does not have a foundation in bodies and space". - [Letter to Herodotus, Section 2](#)
7. "We must distinguish particles, which have eternal and essential properties, from bodies, which are combinations of particles and void, and which have qualities that are merely transitory while they are so combined. These temporary qualities we call "incidental" to the bodies with which they are associated. As with the permanent properties of particles, transitory incidental qualities of bodies do not have material existences of their own, nor can they be classified as incorporeal. When we refer to some quality as "incidental," we must make clear that this incidental quality is neither essential to the body, nor a permanent property of the body, nor something without which we could not conceive the body as existing. Instead, the incidental qualities of a body are the result of our

apprehending that they accompany the body only for a time. Although those qualities which are incidental are not eternal, or even essential, we must not banish incidental matters from our minds. Incidental qualities do not have a material existence, nor do they exist independently in some reality that is beyond our comprehension. We must, instead, consider the incidental qualities of bodies as having exactly the character that our sensations reveal them to possess". - [Letter to Herodotus, Section 7](#)

8. "First, nothing can be created out of that which does not exist. We conclude this to be true because if things could be created out of that which did not exist, we would see all things being created out of everything, with no need of seeds, and our experience shows us that this is not true. Second, nothing is ever completely destroyed to non-existence. We conclude this because if those things which dissolve from our sight completely ceased to exist, all things would have perished to nothing long ago. If all things had dissolved to non-existence, nothing would exist for the creation of new things, and we have already seen that nothing can come from that which does not exist. Third, the universe as a whole has always been as it is now, and always will be the same. We conclude this because the universe as a whole is everything that exists, and there is nothing outside the universe into which the universe can change, or which can come into the universe from outside it to bring about change". - [Letter to Herodotus, Section 2](#)
9. [PD 10-13](#).
10. "To talk of immaterial existences is to talk of nothings. To say that the human soul, angels, god, are immaterial, is to say they are nothings, or that there is no god, no angels, no soul. I cannot reason otherwise . . . without plunging into the fathomless abyss of dreams and phantasms. I am satisfied, and sufficiently occupied with the things which are, without tormenting or troubling myself about those which may indeed be, but of which I have no evidence". - Thomas Jefferson ; "I conjure you, my brethren, remain true to the earth, and believe not those who speak unto you of superearthy hopes! Poisoners are they, whether they know it or not. Despisers of life are they, decaying ones and poisoned ones themselves, of whom the earth is weary: so away with them! Once blasphemy against God was the greatest blasphemy; but God died, and therewith also those blasphemers. To blaspheme the earth is now the dreadfulest sin, and to rate the heart of the unknowable higher than the meaning of the earth!" - Nietzsche, in [Thus Spake Zarathustra](#)
11. "The doctrine of the telos, or the end". "[I call you to constant pleasures!](#)" - Epicurus.
12. [The third way to look at the Epicurean Gods. Philodemus On Piety: Critical Text with Commentary](#)
[ir?t=ataraxia0c-20&l=am2&o=1&a=0198150083](#)
13. [Epicureanism as a Religious Identity](#); "We all regard our views as the true cause of our tranquility. ... In *On Holiness*, he (Epicurus) calls a life of perfection the most pleasant and most blessed, and instructs us to guide against all defilement, with our intellect comprehensively viewing the best psychosomatic dispositions for the sake of fitting all that happens to us to blessedness ..." - Philodemus of Gadara, *On Piety*; [Philodemus On Piety: Critical Text with Commentary](#)
[ir?t=ataraxia0c-20&l=am2&o=1&a=0198150083](#)

14. [Review of Philodemus' On Death. Letter to Menoecus, third paragraph. Philodemus: On Death \(Writings from the Greco-Roman World 29\)](#)
[in?title=ataraxia0c-20&id=ham2&o=1&a=1589834461](#)
15. [Diogenes' Wall: on PD 20.](#)
16. "The doctrine of hedonic calculus". [Back to the Basics. On Choices and Avoidances.](#)
17. "The doctrine of confident expectation". See the Metrodorus portion in the essay [In Memory of the Men.](#)
18. "The doctrine of personal sovereignty". See the Metrodorus portion in the essay [In Memory of the Men; How Epicurean Principles Can Help You Transform Your Financial and Personal Life. Vatican Sayings 36, 47, 65, 67; PD 15, 16](#)
19. "The doctrine of friendship". [On Friendship. Organization and Procedure in Epicurean Groups](#) (PDF file), by Norman DeWitt.
20. "The doctrine of mutual advantage". See [PDs 31-40.](#)

The Remainder of this post was posted by Hiram on 12/22/19:

[Quote from Elayne](#)

When I read Hiram's recent writing about Buddhist forms of introspection being a way to learn about the self, for instance, I know clearly that our versions of Epicurean philosophy are different. Buddhists do have some variations, but a core feature is the assertion that by closely introspecting on oneself, a person will experience directly that there is no self and that our ordinary experience of self and reality is a delusion. There are neurologic events that cause this and are related to what the brain does when typical environmental stimuli are removed. A concerning number of people without prior psychiatric disturbances have suffered long lasting dysfunction from this, anything from dissociative symptoms to psychosis.

I will be interested in seeing the Society of Epicurus' statement. I am expecting it to incorporate elements that I will find to be structurally unsound. If it does not, I will be thrilled!

And those of us who adhere to the classical teachings of Epicurus will continue to clarify our position, sometimes by contrasting it with alternate views, just as Epicurus did.

Hi Elayne. The English translation of our Tenets is live here:

<http://societyofepicurus.com/the-20-tenets-of-society-of-friends-of-epicurus/>

I don't expect you to agree with all of them, but maybe the admins from Epicurean Friends can create their own version for their own use based on their own outlines. Ours is meant to connect theory with practice, to facilitate teachings and cross-reference with key sources, and

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1319-discussion-of-the-society-of-epicurus-20-tenets-of-12-21-19/?postID=5559#post5559>

to potentially guide us in our future endeavors and teaching mission. It worked out to a total of twenty, but I also probably also chose to stick to twenty subconsciously in order to have another excuse to call ourselves "twentiers" 😊

RE engaging Buddhist ideas, I am happy that you are doing so. Secular Buddhism is advocated by Sam Harris, who has a huge influence in many intellectual circles, particularly among atheists, and he is sold on the Buddhist doctrine of no-self. These ideas are gaining a lot of currency in the West these days.

I believe that those of us in EP who are versed in Buddhist philosophy of no-self have a unique opportunity to articulate an alternative that is self affirming and that views the self as an emergent property of the body, but there's a lot of work to be done in articulating these views clearly. I have begun this work and am curious about what you make of this, particularly I cite from an essay by a feminist intellectual who wrote an amazing piece in defense of an interdisciplinary theory of self for Aeon magazine, which I hope you will read. Hers is a very well written and well argued piece.

[A Concrete Self | Society of Friends of Epicurus](#)