

# Avowed Enemies of Epicurus: Epictetus

Post by “Cassius” of February 12, 2020 at 10:13 AM

Placeholder for posting references to anti-Epicurean statements made by Epictetus. We probably have other Stoics to quote as well but this is the first that comes to mind

For example: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...%3Achapter%3D20>

## Against the Epicureans and Academics.

THE propositions which are true and evident are of necessity used even by those who contradict them: and a man might perhaps consider it to be the greatest proof of a thing being evident that it is found to be necessary even for him who denies it to make use of it at the same time. For instance, if a man should deny that there is anything universally true, it is plain that he must make the contradictory negation, that nothing is universally true. What, wretch, do you not admit even this? For what else is this than to affirm that whatever is universally affirmed is false? Again if a man should come forward and say: Know that there is nothing that can be known,<sup>1</sup> but all things are incapable of sure evidence; or if another say, Believe me and you will be the better for it, that a man ought not to believe any thing; or again, if another should say, Learn from me, man, that it is not possible to learn any thing; I tell you this and will teach you, if you choose. Now in what respect do these differ from those? Whom shall I name? Those who call themselves Academics? 'Men, agree [with us] that no man agrees [with another]: believe us that no man believes anybody.'

Thus Epicurus<sup>2</sup> also, when he designs to destroy the natural fellowship of mankind, at the same time makes use of that which he destroys. For what does he say? 'Be not deceived, men, nor be led astray, nor be mistaken: there is no natural fellowship among rational animals; believe me. But those who say otherwise, deceive you and seduce you by false reasons.'—What is this to you? Permit us to be deceived. Will you fare worse, if all the rest of us are persuaded that there is a natural fellowship among us, and that it ought by all means to be preserved? Nay, it will be much better and safer for you. Man, why do you trouble yourself about us? Why do you keep awake for us? Why do you light your lamp? Why do you rise early? Why do you write so many books, that no one of us may be deceived about the gods and believe that they take care of men; or that no one may suppose the nature of good to be other than pleasure? For if this is so, lie down and sleep, and lead the life of a worm, of which you judged yourself worthy: eat and drink, and enjoy women, and ease yourself, and snore.<sup>3</sup> And what is it to you, how the rest shall think about these things, whether right or wrong? For what have we to do with you? You take care of sheep because they supply us with wool and milk, and last of all with their flesh. Would it not be a desirable thing if men could be lulled and enchanted by the Stoics, and sleep and present themselves to you and to those like you to be shorn and milked? For this you ought to say to your brother Epicureans: but ought t you not to conceal it from others, and particularly

before every thing to persuade them, that we are by nature adapted for fellowship, that temperance is a good thing; in order that all things may be secured for you?<sup>4</sup> Or ought we to maintain this fellowship with some and not with others? With whom then ought we to maintain it? With such as on their part also maintain it, or with such as violate this fellowship? And who violate it more than you who establish such doctrines?

What then was it that waked Epicurus from his sleepiness, and compelled him to write what he did write? What else was it than that which is the strongest thing in men, nature, which draws a man to her own will though he be unwilling and complaining? For since, she says, you think that there is no community among mankind, write this opinion and leave it for others, and break your sleep to do this, and by your own practice condemn your own opinions. Shall we then say that Orestes was agitated by the Erinyes (Furies) and roused from his deep sleep, and did not more savage Erinyes and Pains rouse Epicurus from his sleep and not allow him to rest, but compelled him to make known his own evils, as madness and wine did the Galli (the priests of Cybele)? So strong and invincible is man's nature, For how can a vine be moved not in the manner of a vine, but in the manner of an olive tree? or on the other hand how can an olive tree be moved not in the manner of an olive tree, but in the manner of a vine? It is impossible: it cannot be conceived. Neither then is it possible for a man completely to lose the movements (affects) of a man; and even those who are deprived of their genital members are not able to deprive themselves of man's desires.<sup>5</sup> Thus Epicurus also mutilated all the offices of a man, and of a father of a family, and of a citizen and of a friend, but he did not mutilate human desires, for he could not; not more than the lazy Academics can cast away or blind their own senses, though they have tried with all their might to do it. What a shame is this? when a man has received from nature measures and rules for the knowing of truth, and does not strive to add to these measures and rules and to improve<sup>6</sup> them, but just the contrary, endeavours to take away and destroy whatever enables us to discern the truth?

What say you philosopher? piety and sanctity, what do you think that they are? If you like, I will demonstrate that they are good things. Well, demonstrate it that our citizens may be turned and honour the deity and may no longer be negligent about things of the highest value. Have you then the demonstrations?—I have, and I am thankful.—Since then you are well pleased with them, hear the contrary: That there are no Gods, and, if there are, they take no care of men, nor is there any fellowship between us and them; and that this piety and sanctity which is talked of among most men is the lying of boasters and sophists, or certainly of legislators for the purpose of terrifying and checking wrong doers.<sup>7</sup>—Well done, philosopher, you have done something for our citizens, you have brought back all the young men to contempt of things divine.—What then, does not this satisfy you? Learn now, that justice is nothing, that modesty is folly, that a father is nothing, a son nothing.—Well done, philosopher, persist, persuade the young men, that we may have more with the same opinions as you and who say the same as you. From such principles as these have grown our well constituted states; by these was [Sparta](#) founded: Lycurgus fixed these opinions in the Spartans by his laws and education, that neither is the servile condition more base than honourable, nor the condition of free men more honourable than base, and that those who died at [Thermopylae](#)<sup>8</sup> died from these opinions; and

through what other opinions did the Athenians leave their city?<sup>9</sup> Then those who talk thus, marry and beget children, and employ themselves in public affairs and make themselves priests and interpreters. Of whom? of gods who do not exist: and they consult the Pythian priestess that they may hear lies, and they report the oracles to others. Monstrous impudence and imposture.

Man what are you doing?<sup>10</sup> are you refuting yourself every day; and will you not give up these frigid attempts? When you eat, where do you carry your hand to? to your mouth or to your eye? when you wash yourself, what do you go into? do you ever call a pot a dish, or a ladle a spit? If I were a slave of any of these men, even if I must be flayed by him daily, I would rack him. If he said, 'Boy, throw some olive oil into the bath,' I would take pickle sauce and pour it down on his head. What is this? he would say—An appearance was presented to me, I swear by your genius, which could not be distinguished from oil and was exactly like it—Here give me the barley-drink (tisane), he says—I would fill and carry him a dish of sharp sauce—Did I not ask for the barley drink? Yes, mister: this is the barley drink? Take it and smell; take it and taste. How do you know then if our senses deceive us?—If I had three or four fellow—slaves of the same opinion, I should force him to hang himself through passion or to change his mind. But now they mock us by using all the things which nature gives, and in words destroying them.

Grateful indeed are men and modest, who, if they do nothing else, are daily eating bread and yet are shameless enough to say, we do not know if there is a Demeter or her daughter Persephone or a Pluto;<sup>11</sup> not to mention that they are enjoying the night and the day, the seasons of the year, and the stars, and the sea and the land and the co—operation of mankind, and yet they are not moved in any degree by these things to turn their attention to them; but they only seek to belch out their little problem (matter for discussion), and when they have exercised their stomach to go off to the bath. But what they shall say, and about what things or to what persons, and what their hearers shall learn from this talk, they care not even in the least degree, nor do they care if any generous youth after hearing such talk should suffer any harm from it, nor after he has suffered harm should lose all the seeds of his generous nature; nor if we<sup>12</sup> should give an adulterer help towards being shameless in his acts; nor if a public speculator should lay hold of some cunning excuse from these doctrines; nor if another who neglects his parents should be confirmed in his audacity by this teaching.—What then in your opinion is good or bad? This or that?— Why then should a man say any more in reply to such persons as these, or give them any reason or listen to any reason from them, or try to convince them? By Zeus one might much sooner expect to make catamites change their mind than those who are become so deaf and blind to their own evils.<sup>13</sup>