

# Managing Expectations In The Study of Epicurus

Post by "Cassius" of May 8, 2020 at 10:36 AM

Here's an observation about a problem I see recurring over and over:

People who find out about Epicurus in general or our Epicurean forums in particular often start reading because they have heard something general with which they agree. They hear and immediately like things such as: "Epicurus rejected supernatural religion," or "Epicurus rejects the idea of life after death," or "Epicurus held that [pleasure is the guide of life](#)," or "Epicurus taught that the universe is made up of atoms and his views of nature were way ahead of his time," or "Epicurus taught that it is a good idea not to live beyond one's means, because our goal is to be happy whatever means are available to us."

They start reading about Epicurus because they identify with one or more of these general ideas, but over time as they find our more specifics, they sometimes lose interest because the specifics are not what they expect. In many cases their interest fades in disappointment because they think that just because Epicurus agrees with them on one or a couple of basic conclusions, they expect to find that Epicurus agreed with them on **every** conclusion that they themselves reach about how to live.

I think the problem here - and the error on **their** part, which is not a flaw in Epicurus - is that they fail to understand that the Epicurean view of the nature of the universe means that different people are inevitably going to have very different experiences and backgrounds. These different experiences and backgrounds are going to lead people to have different tastes and opinions about what they find pleasing. The result is totally normal, and to be expected: *not every Epicurean will reach the same conclusion on every issue in life.*

It seems to me it would help people manage expectations if we made a point of emphasizing this early in the process of discussing Epicurus. If we emphasize that from the beginning of our discussions, maybe that will lessen the impact of the "disappointment" that people frequently feel when they find some detail in Epicurus that doesn't match their own viewpoint, and they will realize that instead of being a **flaw**, this is a **feature** of Epicurean philosophy.

Here at this Epicureanfriends.com forum we've tried to address this with the "Not Neo-Epicurean But Epicurean" and the "Our Posting Policy" graphics, These are intended to steer people away from the day-to-day political issues where the issue and the conflict and the disappointment most clearly arise.

But I am thinking it would be good to find more ways to emphasize this issue fast and hard.

I get the impression that Epicurus himself had such thoughts when he wrote material like [PD10](#). What is [PD10](#) except an in-your-face warning to put aside your personal viewpoint about what

may be "worthy" or what may be "depraved" to you?

Quote

**10. 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.**

The point seems to be that people have a hard time accepting - and need to be taught clearly - that it really is true that Nature's only stop and go signal to each person is the pain and pleasure that ***the individual person*** feels - and yes, this includes the pain and pleasure of our friends and those we value, whose pain and pleasure are important to us as well.

Calculating out the implications of that is not easy to do, and is going to differ with people and with circumstances, but the ultimate point is that there is no single rule that applies to everyone, everywhere, and all the time, and the sooner we disabuse ourselves of that notion the less likely we are to pull back once we realize that this is true.

What are your thoughts about this, and if you agree, possible ways we could work on doing a better job of dealing with this?