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Post by "Cassius" of July 5, 2020 at 7:34 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

. The US Declaration of Independence states that there are "inalienable" rights of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Yes I agree, that formulation is certainly a problem. I don't think enough is known about the development of Jefferson's thought to know how much he was into Epicurus at the time he was involved in the Declaration, but I haven't tried to figure it out. The only way I could consider that reconcilable with Epicurus would be if he were referring to "inalienable" in the sense of the Epicurean/Lucretius doctrine of properties and qualities of bodies, as in the part of Book 1 of Lucretius where several examples are given of things like water being wet, or so forth, and it being impossible to remove the quality without destroying the nature of the thing.

I would definitely think that the common view that he means a set of rights installed and protected by a god or supernatural force is not something that can be squared with Epicurus.

[Quote from camotero](#)

So one thing I would add, although, like I said, perhaps is already there, is a conscious and disciplined effort to "catch" these concepts that we normally accept automatically, because of their ubiquitous nature, and the lack of awareness of almost everybody about them.

i very much agree that such an attitude of active thinking and active effort to root out false ideas seems definitely to have been a significant part of the ancient Epicurean attitude. I think that is what people think about in relating Epicurus to the skeptics, in that it is good to have a skeptical attitude toward claims which do not seem to be supported by evidence, but then people get carried away and need to remember that Epicurus does not allege that all knowledge is impossible, just that our conclusions need to be carefully checked and supported.

[Quote from Don](#)

People are neither good nor bad. Their actions are neither intrinsically good or bad. Have they harmed someone and gone against the social contract? If so, they deserve punishment. Have they done something "bad" but no one's come to harm. Then it doesn't matter. I can say I think their actions are ill-advised and won't lead to lasting pleasure for them. But, I don't think, I can call them "bad."

I agree with this, but I also know that some people think it is a "word game" to seem to be throwing out the words "good" and "bad" entirely, so I suppose the real point is that those words can be very useful IF they are properly understood to have a subjective basis rather than some kind of mystical supernatural objective nature.