

To What Extent Are The Ideas In The "We Hold These Truths To Be Self-Evident" Paragraph of the Declaration of Independence Consistent With Epicurean Philosophy?

Post by "Cassius" of April 15, 2018 at 10:27 AM

This is to pose a series of questions about one of the most famous passages of the American "Declaration of Independence." As discussion develops on one or more of these in particular we can split the discussion into separate threads, but to start here is a list of questions:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. "

1. What do we know about whether this paragraph was written entirely by Thomas Jefferson, or contains modifications from others?
2. Would an Epicurean agree that what follows in the paragraph after the first phrase are "self-evident?" What does "self-evident" mean?
3. Would an Epicurean agree that "all men are created equal." It is absolutely clear that all men are NOT created equal in every respect (health, sex, race, capabilities, preferences, etc.) It is also clear to an Epicurean that men are not "created" if that term implies a supernatural god. In what respect, if any, would an Epicurean say that "all men are created equal."
4. What does it mean to say "endowed by their Creator?" Would an Epicurean use this phrasing? If so, what would an Epicurean mean by "their Creator?"
5. What are "inalienable rights"? What is a "right"? How is a right "inalienable"?" It seems clear that this cannot be read superficially, as much of what we think of as "rights" are certainly taken from people all the time and thus are not "inalienable." In what way, if any, can this phrase be reconciled with Epicurean philosophy?
6. What does the phrase "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" mean in Epicurean terms?
7. "That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." This passage is perhaps easiest to reconcile given the Principle Doctrines on "justice." How could we elaborate on this in Epicurean

terms as to the meaning of "just powers" and "consent of the governed?"

8. "That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. " Again, this passage seems directly supported by the Principle Doctrines on justice. How would an Epicurean elaborate on the meaning of this passage?