

Where I'm At Philosophically (Questioning Objectivism)

Post by "Kyle" of November 3, 2019 at 10:33 PM

I need to find the time to analyze the ideas holding me back from seriously pursuing pleasure:

I'm still trying to work things out when it comes to my philosophy, I've been studying objectivism for a while but it has led me down a road where I feel like it's not the life I want to live. I need to think carefully because I think Epicurus might be right about how to truly live the best life, but I need time to also do university and do my interviews. Like, maybe I need to carefully analyze the questions I have, but right now it seems like a whole lot of questions and a whole lot to analyze that I need to find the right place where I can do this in an organized way.

I think Epicurus has a more intuitive approach to observing what your desires are, looking to your nature. I think we need a great level of open mindedness to discover what our nature desires, but after all this time I dont understand how Ayn Rands philosophy will point you there. Do I need reason to justify playing and enjoying my finite life? Shouldn't reason be instrumental to living the best life rather than reason for reason's sake.

I was in this discussion forum with people that were rationalists and objectivists for a long time, but I think it's kind of a nutty place where they have very strange ideas that just dont match up with my experience, definitely contradict epicureanism, and I almost cannot accept will lead to the best life.

The thing that really disturbed me which led me to leaving that place was when I was told by the leader that.... and this is a long story I need to explain that I'm forced to go to church with my zealot christian younger brother because my parents are very controlling, occassionally malicious, and irrational, and I talked about this in the discussion forum. And I was fed up with the sermon message they were talking about one day which was about "sexual immorality". The objectivist rationalist philosophy discussion group leader said "you dont understand the cultural battles, gays are hostile against the church. That pastor is supporting the church and therefore are defending civilization and is on the side of the good." I dont know if it's a coincidence I became sick for a few days after that. I know I wouldn't be able to argue against this guy because hes too clever. But why should I argue against this guy? Why am I going down this road, how does this lead to the life of true enjoyment?

Epicurus focused on the important things, like undermining any superstitions. I think undermining the disturbing psychological afflictions my religious upbringing brings me a tremendous physical peace. Why should I focus on anything Epicurus showed was vain?

It's late, I'll just post what I wrote. The key point is I need to have a relatively organized analysis of the reasons why I'm choosing to follow Epicurus and abandoning these other ideas. Reason should be instrumental to living my best life.

(There's still lots of good ideas from these non-Epicureans, like being honest when talking about philosophy and using abstractions to solve problems (But this should be instrumental to pleasant living)).

Am I (becoming) epicurean? <--- I didn't know where I should post this, you're free to move it Cassius, if you read this.

Post by "Cassius" of November 4, 2019 at 5:53 AM

Kyle - Prior to ten years ago I spent a lot of time reading Objectivist literature. However I never spent much time in the company of actual objectivists, as I found the more someone was "into" Rand, the more uncomfortable I became. At the moment I would start with two points:

1. Her "emotions are not tools of cognition" leads to rationalism and is very much opposite to Epicurus' canon, which includes "feeling" in a primary role, but not "reason."
2. In her epistemology, she focuses on measurement omission as the means for forming concepts. It seems to me that this is very similar to "sensation omission" and as you know, Epicurus holds sensation as the only way to reach reliable knowledge.

Both of these are just rough thoughts but indicate the depth of the divide. The real problem is not so much that these two statements may not have some technical merit, but that many of her followers seem to take statements like these very superficially and as a result tend toward being emotionless rationalists rather than actually pursuing pleasurable living. And of course that same can be applied to her "money speech" in AS and many other things.

In other venues, and over time perhaps even here, you will see some fans of Epicurus say dismissively that Rand is not worth discussing. However it is my view that much of the problem with Rand (not all) is useful for dealing with Aristotle and even Plato too. So this is a subject I think we should be happy to discuss, and in the future I might even set up a subforum dedicated to the subject. I personally think that a lot of good people go down a very wrong path by following Rand, but not for the reasons that the "Academic Epicureans" would have you believe. Discussing this coolly without undue hostility would be helpful to a lot of people who I think misdiagnose the problem with Rand, and even some who misdiagnose Epicurus.

Plus, as you say, *some* of her material is good, and I would even largely endorse it today, such as her "Philosophy - Who Needs It?" speech.

As you address in your post, Rand preaches happiness as the proper goal, but her version of it is much different than was Epicurus - although if you dig deep enough in her older essays you can find some decent discussion of pleasure and pain.

Please flesh out details you would like to discuss. Also, it would be helpful to know how much Rand you have read.

Post by "Garden Dweller" of November 4, 2019 at 8:56 AM

When dealing with controlling people, it is helpful to say what you really think to them without anger.

You probably know this, but arranging your life to gain independence and distance from unpleasant people will help you move to a better place. Clearly, people who want you to be unhappy should be avoided. But be strategic, building a stable and independent life takes time.

Post by "Joshua" of November 4, 2019 at 9:32 AM

Good morning, Kyle. And with apologies to Cassius—for I've never read Ayn Rand. (Life is full of these little blessings!)

But I do notice in a thousand unremarkable ways every day that the word *reason* is at once so universally lauded, and so vacuous, that it gives cover to every silly assumption and base instinct in the minds and hearts of men. *Reason* was with the French Catholics who erected a temple to God in the comely and well-proportioned Cathedral of Notre-Dame, and *reason* was on the lips of the Jacobins who drove the Catholics out of that esteemed pile and claimed it for atheism and themselves.

Reason was the English Parliament and King George III levying a tax on the American colonies to pay for their protection in the French and Indian War, and *reason* was the reason those same colonists colored their harbor with tea in reply.

Reason justifies the lifestyle of the wealthy businessman sitting in the church pew, whatever the words in red might say; and reason is why that man does not and cannot understand the

inner heart of the gay kid sitting next to him.

Well I'll tell you what—if hypocrisy is what they mean by *reason* (and it very generally is), and the status quo what they mean by *civilization* (and what else could it be?), then it has no lack of defenders; they don't need me, and the man in the pew has his reward already. As for my heart, it belongs to the kid next to him; the youth whose trembling soul remains unstultified by the sourness of his elders—the boy whose only crime is heavier breathing and a quickened pulse at the sight of a handsome classmate.

May he follow forever the promptings of his heart! When it needs correction, may he correct it with wisdom and an eye to the good of pleasure; not with shame and the fear of hellfire. May he find good friends, and be one. May he find a guide and support in himself, when others fail. And may he learn the proper use of reason—a tool, equal among other tools, and limited by nature.

The school of Epicurus is open to all. Man or woman, gay or straight, slave or free, native or foreign-born. You don't have to be a producer™, an ubermensch, or one of the elect. The road is broad and pleasant, and every step a pleasure in itself. Not many are found to have the courage to walk it.

Post by “Joshua” of November 4, 2019 at 9:58 AM

As for the compulsion of sitting in church, it brings to mind this passage from *Civil Disobedience*, on the night they locked him in jail.

Quote

In every threat and in every compliment there was a blunder; for they thought that my chief desire was to stand the other side of that stone wall. I could not but smile to see how industriously they locked the door on my meditations, which followed them out again without let or hindrance, and they were really all that was dangerous.

I suspect that you, likewise, are clever enough to use the time pleasantly and profitably 😊

I am 31, and end up in churches occasionally with my family when I go to visit them. As Garden Dweller suggests, you'll have to decide for yourself one day whether you want them in your life. For my part, I can unhesitatingly answer 'yes' to that question. With time and distance come perspective.

And you have time!

Post by “Cassius” of November 4, 2019 at 10:08 AM

Yes that reminds me that in my last few visits where I felt compelled to attend a church service (mostly funerals). found the time sitting in the pew was a welcome experience where I could just sit and think without distraction, because I was "forced" to do so. Kind of like sitting in the dental chair, which I also find kind of relaxing even though not totally pleasant!

Post by “Hiram” of November 4, 2019 at 10:14 AM

I recently finished [translating into Spanish](#) (with the help of a volunteer) a Letter to the Objectivists that appeared online some years ago. The original was here, and may resonate with some of what you've been going through:

<https://lucretiusfromafar.wordpress.com/>

Post by “Elayne” of November 4, 2019 at 7:53 PM

Kyle, as a "cradle atheist" raised in Alabama, I think you are on the right track. For a long time, I have been annoyed by the secular groups having a "Day of Reason" to counter the national day of prayer-- why not a Day of Evidence?

Epicurus was the first person I "met", through his work, who seemed on the same page with me about that. The evidence of our senses (and instrumental extensions) and our feelings are primary. Reason is a secondary tool.

I hope you will choose this philosophy! At least, try it out and see how it feels ☐☐.