

Classification of Epicurean Philosophy

Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of June 27, 2020 at 12:49 AM

Hello,

I’m a bit interested in knowing where Epicurean Philosophy falls in the more general classifications that exist in philosophy. My desire is to be able to perhaps later expand my exploration of philosophy further from epicurean philosophy while being able to stick to the same “camp”, so to speak. The reason for this is that so far what I’ve read I’m liking, so I’m trying to somewhat approximate to the essence of it, so as to be able to find relations to later philosophers that are in the same camp but perhaps not explicitly Epicurean, since, from what I read in Dewitt’s synoptic view, the influence of Epicurus has passed-on rather unacknowledged. I’m no philosopher nor I’m knowledgeable in the history of the subject so I’m throwing punches in the dark here; please bear that in mind as you read.

So... from a reddit post that seemed somewhat serious I gathered the following:

1. When it comes to ontology, there is a spectrum (I’m not assuming this is the whole spectrum) where you could put materialism on one side and idealism on the other. Assuming this is true, would you say Epicureanism falls within materialism and “Platonism” (does such a thing as Platonism exist? Would it be Stoicism instead?) falls within idealism?
2. When it comes to epistemology, there would be a spectrum where empiricism would be on one side and rationalism in the other. (The difference of the two, according to the author of the post, is that the former uses “a posteriori” justifications and the latter uses “a priori” justifications). This is more confusing for me, because I’d think that regarding to knowledge of ethics Epicureanism is empiric, but when it comes to physics knowledge, it seems to me that they were using quite a bit of this “rationalism”. So... where would you say Epicureanism falls within this “epistemological spectrum” (assuming that this is even a thing).

I ignore if there are others classifications that could be used for the different segments of a philosophical system, but if there are, please expand.

Thanks in advance!

Post by “Don” of June 27, 2020 at 9:19 AM

I'm certain others will respond, too, but I'll get the ball rolling. One classification that Epicureans get put into is hedonism or hedonistic philosophies. I think I remember that [Cassius](#) is reluctant to describe Epicurus this way, but most popular and academic perspectives put the school into this category. Elsewhere on the forum, we've been comparing and contrasting the Epicureans with the Cyrenaics, another contemporary hedonistic philosophy with the ancient Epicureans. [The hedonism Wikipedia article provides a solid survey with additional links](#). French philosopher Michel Onfray is a modern hedonistic philosopher.

Post by “Cassius” of June 27, 2020 at 9:27 AM

I bet several here will have good suggestions about this, particularly [Charles](#)

My first thoughts are

1 You are on the right track, with Epicurus stands in the materialist camp, and Plato and the Stoics are in the idealist camp, with Plato most firmly there.

2 Yes Epicurus is on the empiricist side, with important distinctions. I would definitely be sure to consult DeWitt on this (as on point one). The empiricists are said to neglect logic, which DeWitt will argue is not the case with Epicurus.

I agree that it is very useful to compare Epicurus to later figures, but I am obviously partial to Epicurus' mix/flavor on these things, and I don't think you are going to find much that resembles Epicurus' complete picture anywhere else.

Post by “Joshua” of June 29, 2020 at 1:52 PM

There are a few different ways to go about this. Here's an effort at concision; Epicurean Philosophy is a *practical* philosophy whose end is pleasure, rooted in a *theoretical* philosophy whose ground is materialism. Epicurus believed that both aspects of his philosophy were discoverable through an epistemology of sensation, feeling, and anticipation—an epistemology that was therefore not strictly empirical.

The Epicurean system attained to the best synthesis of practical and theoretical philosophy in the classical world, with every part of his system reinforcing the structure of the whole. His system was the first 'world-philosophy', a philosophy that spoke to the condition of every

human on Earth. Plato developed refined (even if absurd) metaphysical theories, and made a complete muddle of their practical relevance. Stoicism offered a rigid and attractively self-aggrandizing behavioral code, founded on an indistinct and indefinable metaphysic. Epicurus laid out a system that satisfied both.

And this, I think, is why DeWitt sees in Christian theology a pallid and shimmering reflection of Epicureanism. It was a world-philosophy, open to all; it answered, or tried to answer, to the philosophical needs of Man's total nature. Augustine's dream of a theology that was complete and unalterable, insofar as such a dream was ever realized, is still the most serious rival to our system.

What I'm really saying is that the important thing to understand about Epicurean philosophy is that it *is* a *system*. You will find other materialists, and you will find empiricists; Charles can put you on the trail of many notable and interesting hedonists, and many of them drew their inspiration from Epicurus and Lucretius.

But—if you dare!—go where the fighting is thickest. The intricate architecture of Christian theology is the best possible foil for the study of Epicurus, and important to study in it's own right.

Joshua

Post by “Godfrey” of June 29, 2020 at 3:00 PM

Christian theology is also, I think, extremely challenging for many of us as it provokes an almost visceral reaction based on our prior interaction with it and its involvement with contemporary politics.

[Joshua](#), your division into practical and theoretical is useful for considering Christian teachings as well. While the theory is for the most part fantastical, from time to time I find myself thinking about how religion in general is ubiquitous throughout history and how it must have practical benefits to its "practitioners" in order to be so sticky.