

Welcome Susan Hill!

Post by “Cassius” of September 26, 2020 at 7:39 AM

Hello and welcome to the forum @Susan Hill !

This is the place for students of Epicurus to coordinate their studies and work together to promote the philosophy of Epicurus. Please remember that all posting here is subject to our [Community Standards / Rules of the Forum](#) our [Not Neo-Epicurean, But Epicurean](#) and our [Posting Policy statements](#) and [associated posts](#).

Please understand that the leaders of this forum are well aware that many fans of Epicurus may have sincerely-held views of what Epicurus taught that are incompatible with the purposes and standards of this forum. This forum is dedicated exclusively to the study and support of people who are committed to classical Epicurean views. As a result, this forum is not for people who seek to mix and match some Epicurean views with positions that are inherently inconsistent with the core teachings of Epicurus.

All of us who are here have arrived at our respect for Epicurus after long journeys through other philosophies, and we do not demand of others what we were not able to do ourselves. Epicurean philosophy is very different from other viewpoints, and it takes time to understand how deep those differences really are. That's why we have membership levels here at the forum which allow for new participants to discuss and develop their own learning, but it's also why we have standards that will lead in some cases to arguments being limited, and even participants being removed, when the purposes of the community require it. Epicurean philosophy is not inherently democratic, or committed to unlimited free speech, or devoted to any other form of organization other than the pursuit by our community of happy living through the principles of Epicurean philosophy.

One way you can be most assured of your time here being productive is to tell us a little about yourself and personal your background in reading Epicurean texts. It would also be helpful if you could tell us how you found this forum, and any particular areas of interest that you have which would help us make sure that your questions and thoughts are addressed.

In that regard we have found over the years that there are a number of key texts and references which most all serious students of Epicurus will want to read and evaluate for themselves. Those include the following.

1. The Biography of Epicurus By Diogenes Laertius (Chapter 10). This includes all Epicurus' letters and the Authorized Doctrines. Supplement with the Vatican list of Sayings.
2. **"Epicurus And His Philosophy" - Norman DeWitt**

3. "On The Nature of Things"- Lucretius
4. Cicero's "On Ends" - Torquatus Section
5. Cicero's "On The Nature of the Gods" - Velleius Section
6. The Inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda - Martin Ferguson Smith translation
7. A Few Days In Athens" - Frances Wright
8. Lucian Core Texts on Epicurus: (1) Alexander the Oracle-Monger, (2) Hermotimus
9. Plato's [Philebus](#)
10. Philodemus "On Methods of Inference" (De Lacy version, including his appendix on relationship of Epicurean canon to Aristotle and other Greeks)
11. "The Greeks on Pleasure" -Gosling & Taylor Sections on Epicurus, especially on katastematic and kinetic pleasure.

It is by no means essential or required that you have read these texts before participating in the forum, but your understanding of Epicurus will be much enhanced the more of these you have read.

And time has also indicated to us that if you can find the time to read one book which will best explain [classical Epicurean philosophy](#), as opposed to most modern "eclectic" interpretations of Epicurus, that book is Norman DeWitt's ***Epicurus And His Philosophy***.

Welcome to the forum!

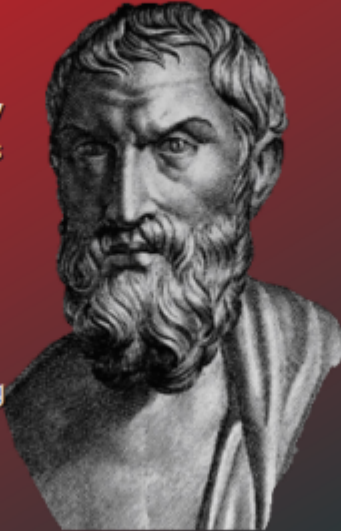
Not Neo-Epicurean, But Epicurean

1. Not "flourishing," "human potential," "self-actualization," or "meaningfulness," but happiness grounded in the feeling of pleasure.
2. Not "absence of pain" as a full statement of the goal of life, but "the Feelings are two, pleasure and pain" and "Pleasure is the beginning and the end of a happy life."
3. Not virtue for the sake of virtue, but virtue as instrumental for the attainment of pleasure.
4. Not "the greatest good for the greatest number," but "Every desire must be confronted with this question: What will happen to me if the object of my desire is accomplished and what if it is not?"
5. Not "humanism," "transhumanism," "individualism," "collectivism," "egoism," "altruism," "social progress," "Marxism," "democracy," "tyranny," or any "one size fits all" political ideal of any kind, but social structure based on friendship which "is formed and maintained by means of a community of life among those who have reached the fullness of pleasure."
6. Not "hard determinism," but "some things happen from necessity, some from chance, and others through our own choice."
7. Not "supernaturalism," but "materialism."
8. Not "supernatural gods," or "life after death," but confidence in a fully material universe and "for those men for whom wisdom is possible, and who do seek it, such men may truly live as gods."
9. Not only "short term hedonism," but "it is to continuous pleasures that I invite you."
10. Not "rationalism," but "all reason is dependent upon sensations."
11. Not fearful of death nor careless of losing life, but valuing life for the opportunity of pleasure it brings.

Our Posting Policy At EpicureanFriends.com:

"No Partisan Politics," "No Supernatural Religion," and "No Absolute Virtue"

This forum is dedicated to promoting the philosophy of Epicurus, and not to any partisan political positions whether "left," "right," or "center." The task of rediscovering Epicurean philosophy requires that such discussions be held elsewhere. Posts violating this rule are subject to removal.



Epicurean philosophy firmly rejects the viewpoint that there are any supernatural forces or absolute virtues or Platonic ideals of any kind. Argument which is based on supernatural claims, or "absolute" virtues or ideals of any kind, are in violation of this rule and subject to removal.

Post by "Cassius" of September 26, 2020 at 7:43 AM

As an extra incentive to welcome Susan Hill, I think her first comment (in another location) that came to our attention is worth repeating, because it is such good advice, spoken from apparent experience:

What about Epicurean philosophy interests you?

I have been mired down by intensely ascetic philosophies for decades... I tell you, they are a dead end!

Which gave me the opportunity to say:

Probably there are other recent additions who haven't introduced themselves - if that includes you, please say hello. And here's a special thank you for one of the comments we received "I have been mired down by intensely ascetic philosophies for decades... I tell you, they are a dead end!"

Some might say that Epicurean philosophy is not "intensely ascetic" but that it IS "moderately ascetic." Those who take the time to read Epicurus directly, and follow our discussions here,

won't fall for that argument, and they'll never accept asceticism as any part of the goal of life. Living frugally and simply can certainly have its time and place, when it is needed to lead to future pleasure, but remember Vatican Saying 63: "Frugality too has a limit, and the man who disregards it is like him who errs through excess."

That's because it is not frugality, simplicity, or virtue which constitute the end of life, and the end of life certainly isn't asceticism. Epicurus taught that "The feelings they say are two, pleasure and pain, which occur to every living creature, and the one is akin to nature and the other alien: by means of these two choice and avoidance are determined." He also taught "Strip mankind of sensation, and nothing remains; it follows that Nature herself is the judge of that which is in accordance with or contrary to nature. And what does Nature perceive or what does she judge of, beside pleasure and pain, to guide her actions of desire and of avoidance?"

Which leads to the conclusion: "For we recognize pleasure as the first good innate in us, and from pleasure we begin every act of choice and avoidance, and to pleasure we return again, using the feeling as the standard by which we judge every good."

Ascetic philosophies ARE a dead end!

Post by "Susan Hill" of September 26, 2020 at 6:13 PM

Thank you, Cassius. This is all very useful and I love that you have already anticipated many of my questions. My copy of DeWitt's book is ordered, and I already have a few of the others in my library that I have yet to read. I am well motivated to begin.

I might as well add my Facebook reply to your Facebook post, if it is appropriate. I was feeling a bit impassioned when I wrote it, but perhaps that can be forgiven:

"**Cassius Amicus**, thank you for your very kind and thoughtful welcome. I am a bit dismayed to admit that I have left Epicureanism as virtually the last philosophy on the planet for study and consideration. Why did I assume it would be "lightweight"? Why was I always drawn to severe, ascetic beliefs: Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Classical Vedanta and Yoga, Stoicism and Cynicism... And I was "all-in" too. I have a lot to divest myself of to go the Epicurean route; namely, the whole ideology that teaches that pleasure = desire = attachment = suffering/samsara = endless misery: Therefore nix pleasure at all costs. There is an awful lot of that out there, but if you actually fully imbibe it, and get good at rejecting natural pleasures, I don't think you end up with ananda (bliss), but a rather nasty condition called anhedonia. In other words, I'm going into detox. (I may have actually even enjoyed a little music this morning.) I have a lot of reading to do, but luckily, that is still a pleasure for me. I look forward to finding some respite, in the Garden!"

I am beginning to get a sense of how very different Epicureanism from other philosophies. It really doesn't fit into many of the usual categories and descriptors, does it? One thing I am keen to get a better handle on is how Epicureanism approaches questions regarding consciousness and identity/self. I am coming out of a deep-dive into Vedanta, Yoga and Samkhya, where the nature of consciousness, and its various states, is the foundation of the entire metaphysics and soteriology. To jump from that to "atoms and void" has me thinking - "oh ok - so atoms are Prakriti and the void is Brahman or Purusha..." Lol. Not exactly a good approach, I know, but consciousness has to fit in there somewhere, no? I guess I am going to be hard pressed to find a Vedantin who can clarify the differences for me. Epicurianism does not seem to be as simple as the basic materialist theories I am familiar with.

At any rate, I am sure you will be the first to agree that I should do some more reading before I jump in with these kind of questions. So I will get right to it!

Cheers,

Susan Hill

Post by “Joshua” of September 26, 2020 at 7:35 PM

Welcome, Susan! It seems like ages since the Bhagavat Gita and the Upanishads were part of my regular reading ☐☐.

I do come from a background of intense interest in Buddhism. That was—to borrow a term—in another life, so I don't know how helpful I'll be. I expect you will have things to teach us!

As a student of Vedanta, you are already trained to understand a few of the most important Epicurean conclusions about consciousness. The first is that human consciousness cannot reasonably be unique. The Śramaṇas of India understood this well; any theory of consciousness that attempts to explain the human mind must also account for the mind of the rat in the sewers. It won't do to say that we are special; Epicurus believed that we are *all* sprung from celestial seed. Our minds emerge spontaneously from indestructible matter. Since matter is thought to be infinite, the number of conscious beings is thought to be infinite as well.

The second conclusion we share with Vedanta is that other minds are worth studying as a healthful practice for our own minds. There are minds as far exceeding ours in capability as ours exceed other mammals. The gods, if such exist, must be fully natural—not so far unlike ourselves. And if they pass their days in deepest happiness, as Epicurus reasoned they must, then they are a fit subject for human contemplation. Life is a long struggle in the dark, said Lucretius; and yet with philosophy, we may learn to rival Zeus in happiness. We also benefit

from the honor we bestow on the wise.

There are many other comparisons to be made, and the disagreements between Epicurus and the schools of the East are broad as well as deep. But it is a promising position to start from!

Joshua

Post by “Godfrey” of September 26, 2020 at 7:40 PM

Welcome Susan!

[Quote from Susan Hill](#)

One thing I am keen to get a better handle on is how Epicureanism approaches questions regarding consciousness and identity/self. I am coming out of a deep-dive into Vedanta, Yoga and Samkhya, where the nature of consciousness, and its various states, is the foundation of the entire metaphysics and soteriology. To jump from that to "atoms and void" has me thinking - "oh ok - so atoms are Prakriti and the void is Brahman or Purusha..." Lol. Not exactly a good approach, I know, but consciousness has to fit in there somewhere, no? I guess I am going to be hard pressed to find a Vedantin who can clarify the differences for me. Epicurianism does not seem to be as simple as the basic materialist theories I am familiar with.

This is an excellent question and would make a good topic for a new thread. As you suggest it's probably not very fruitful to try to relate Epicureanism to Indian philosophy. As I understand it, there is a supernatural component to the Indian theories and Epicurus is quite clear that there is no supernatural. Once the supernatural is introduced, which is scientifically unverifiable, the door is opened to all sorts of confusion and mischief. I've read that atomism developed in both Greece and India, however in India they maintained the supernatural while in Greece they did not.

In Epicureanism atoms combine into compounds, and as compounds get more complex, properties such as life and consciousness emerge which were not a part of the lesser components. There isn't any implied hierarchy such as shown in your attachment: everything arises from combinations of atoms. I think this is in line with modern science even though our study of atomic physics is 2000 years more sophisticated than that of the ancient Greeks. If you haven't listened to the Lucretius podcast it might be worthwhile as there are a few episodes where they discuss atoms in ancient times vs today.

What other materialist theories are you familiar with? It would be interesting to know what they are and how they compare to EP.

Post by “Cassius” of September 26, 2020 at 7:45 PM

Susan I am happy to see that Joshua has already jumped in on your initial comment, [edit: Sorry I did not see Godfrey too!] and I am thinking that several others here will have intelligent things to say as well. I have to admit that my own knowledge of the eastern traditions is next to non-existent, so I will have to rely on them to draw the comparisons, and I will have to wait to comment mainly on the conclusion part of these discussions. I am also going to see if I can draw Holly Graves from the Facebook group into this discussion, as she has much the same background.

It's always interesting to hear about the path people take in getting to where they are so I look forward to anything you think would be of interest in these comparisons.

Post by “Charles” of September 27, 2020 at 5:30 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

I've read that atomism developed in both Greece and India, however in India they maintained the supernatural while in Greece they did not.

I've read into this topic before, as well as having mentioned this a few times on the podcast. [Kanada](#) was the first proponent of Atomism within India, and even founded his own [school](#) that would become one of the six orthodoxes of Vedic Philosophy. Here's a very brief summary of its materialism and atomism.

Quote

Physics is central to Kaṇāda's assertion that all that is knowable is based on motion. His ascribing centrality to physics in the understanding of the universe also follows from his invariance principles. For example, he says that the atom must be spherical since it should be the same in all dimensions. He asserts that all substances are composed of

four types of atoms, two of which have mass and two are massless.

...

Vaisheshika school is known for its insights in naturalism. It is a form of **atomism** in natural philosophy. It postulated that all objects in the physical universe are reducible to *paramāṇu* (atoms), and one's experiences are derived from the interplay of substance (a function of atoms, their number and their spatial arrangements), quality, activity, commonness, particularity and inherence. Everything was composed of atoms, qualities emerged from aggregates of atoms, but the aggregation and nature of these atoms was predetermined by cosmic forces. **Ajivika metaphysics** included a theory of atoms which was later adapted in Vaiśeṣika school.

However, something that I've also kept in the back of my mind, is the [Charvaka](#) school of thought (6th - 5th Century BCE). The atheistic & hedonist school that opposed the Vedas and the spiritual culture within India, as well as Buddhism. In some of the articles I've read, they're often compared or grouped with Epicurus (barring a few differences obviously).

<https://philolu.com/2019/03/14/the...cs-of-charvaka/>

<https://www.wisdomlib.org/hinduism/book/...d/doc79745.html>

Post by “Susan Hill” of September 27, 2020 at 7:29 AM

Thank you, Joshua. This is just the sort of thing I was looking for! Outstanding.

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

Epicurus believed that we are *all* sprung from celestial seed. Our minds emerge spontaneously from indestructible matter.

Here is an example of what I mean when I say that Epicureanism seems to be a bit different from garden- variety materialism (to address your question, Godfrey). My brother, for example, is devoted to a materialism/scientism that in no way allows for the existence of anything that is presently mysterious to science. But there are rather a lot of things that science can measure now that it once could not. Supernatural is simply defined as “(of a manifestation or event) attributed to some force beyond scientific understanding or the laws of nature.” Now Epicurus wrote of a lot of things that would fit that first definition, didn't he?: gods, visions, effluences..

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1702-welcome-susan-hill/>

And there was much more natural stuff that the science of his day did not understand, but he did not deem supernatural. Finally getting to a point where a supernatural event (or being!) can be described in natural terms does not radically change its nature or existence to me, unless you are talking about something wholly contrived like the tooth fairy.

Here is an interesting point in case. Even the void is more than “just void”:
<https://www.newscientist.com/article/219208...-send-messages/>

Space has structure and can contain information. That could explain a host of things that are presently deemed supernatural.

Getting back to Indian philosophy, the Gods are not even considered to be immortal in what I have been reading, e.g. the “Yoga Vasistha”, but of course, they do have reincarnation, like the rest of us. Even that would not be ruled out by Epicurean physics. (I know he does not accept any immortality of the soul). His description of the soul as super-subtle light atoms could be the subtle body of Samkhya that reincarnates and moves about like any other effluence. Sure, no bodily senses, but effluences do not have senses either. They still carry information.

But I’m going down the rabbit hole without a map here.. I have books to read and podcasts to listen to before I can discuss these things cogently.

Charles, thanks so much for the references to similar Indian schools of thought! As they will be using terminology (Sanskrit definitions) that I will be familiar with, this could really help me bridge the divide. I am also very interested in these parallels due to the work of Thomas McEvilley (“The Shape of Ancient Thought”), and others showing the extraordinary extent of cross-fertilization of Greek and Indian thought during the relevant time period. You simply cannot say that Epicureanism was born solely from Greek philosophy. It should not surprise me that Charles has already identified similarities for me.

Best regards,

Susan

Post by “Cassius” of September 27, 2020 at 7:41 AM

[Quote from Susan Hill](#)

My brother, for example, is devoted to a materialism/scientism that in no way allows for the existence of anything that is presently mysterious to science

That "in no way allows for the existence of anything that is presently mysterious to science" would certainly be a problem, given the practical reality that there are clearly many things that are presently mysterious to science.

A lot of Epicurean philosophy is devoted to exploring a proper approach to dealing with things that are currently unknown.

You obviously have a lot going on in your thinking 😊 and it's going to take time to deal with so many different aspects of things. Once you have time for enough reading I think you'll see why I recommend the DeWitt book so highly. He'll give you a good grounding on Epicurus without a lot of extraneous comparisons to other philosophies (other than the Platonic viewpoints to which Epicurus was reacting). That will be the quickest way to understand Epicurus on his own terms without filtering him too strongly through other paradigms and the sidetracks which that would entail. Once you do that you'll then be in a great position to circle back and decide how he stacks up against the eastern analysis.

Post by “Cassius” of September 27, 2020 at 8:35 AM

Susan just for what it's worth, we have a subforum entitled: [Epicurean Philosophy Vs. Buddhism](#) which would be a good place to raise specific issues on Buddhism / eastern views that would be of general interest over time.

I am not really pointing you there with the suggestion that you should focus your attention on that, because I would probably prefer that you didn't "focus your attention" in that direction. 😊 However given your great level of experience and your current context, feel free to start threads on any topic of comparison there that you like. That's what that subforum is for, and a lot of people do come into the study of Epicurus from the Buddhist / Eastern context, so it would be very useful to have threads that flesh out at least the basic issues for future reference.

Post by “Susan Hill” of September 27, 2020 at 10:29 AM

Thanks, Cassius. Yes, I will study Epicureanism as a distinct and self-sufficient philosophy first. Unfortunately, I am unlikely to receive DeWitt's book for a few weeks, so I don't want to say or ask too much until then. Thanks also for the sub-forum suggestion. I will check it out!

Susan

Post by "Martin" of September 27, 2020 at 11:22 AM

Welcome here too, Susan!