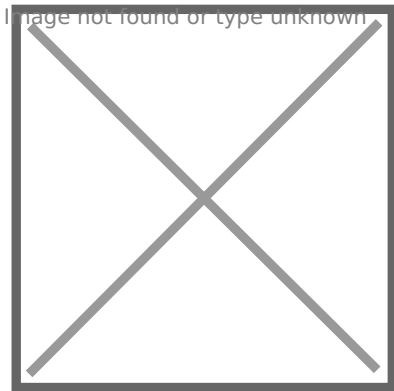


# Article: Ryan - "Nietzsche's Epicurean Irritability"

Post by "Cassius" of August 23, 2021 at 8:26 AM

I haven't had a chance to read this so I have no comment on the content yet but it certainly at the very least seems to bring together some worthwhile quotes.



[Nietzsche's Epicurean Irritability](#)

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche favourably compares the Epicureans' "subtle irritability" to the impassivity of the Stoics. He claims that this irritability—a...

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# Nietzsche's Epicurean Irritability

AAP Conference 2014

Thomas Ryan

This talk is about the figure of Epicurus in Nietzsche's *Gay Science*. Epicurus is first mentioned half way through the first book. Here Nietzsche acknowledges that his interpretation of Epicurus is a heterodox one. The claim of this paper is that understanding Nietzsche's eccentric reading of Epicurus points the way towards an understanding of Nietzsche's own philosophical project.

Epicureanism shared with the other Hellenistic school a therapeutic orientation. That is, it conceives of philosophy as a practice through which philosophers and their students might achieve individual health or flourishing. It is Epicurus' "wonderful insight," according to Nietzsche, that "to quieten the heart it is absolutely not necessary to have solved the ultimate and outermost theoretical questions".<sup>1</sup> That is, the task of philosophy to cultivate individual health need not involve the search for metaphysical truth. All that Epicurus asks of philosophy is to rid its practitioners of the pains and fears which impinge on a flourishing life.

Epicurus singles out two fears as particularly harmful to human happiness: fear of the gods and fear of death. Both of these fears arise from "a certain irrational perversity"<sup>2</sup>—belief in the opinions of the multitude regarding the gods and regarding death. Thus the task of Epicurean philosophy is to reform the minds of individuals affected by these erroneous beliefs, and in doing so free them from the harm wrought by irrational fears. In this sense Epicureanism adopts the ancient therapeutic model of philosophy aimed at treating the soul. Lucretius (c. 99–55 BCE) describes his poem *De Rerum Natura* in these terms, as using the sweetness of poetry to deliver his Epicurean balm, in the same way as, when physicians administer a bitter medicine, "they first touch the rims about the cups with the sweet yellow fluid of honey".<sup>3</sup>