

Further Thoughts On Science And Epicurean Philosophy

Post by “BrainToBeing” of January 10, 2024 at 9:02 AM

Admin Edit

Admin Edit! The title of this thread was inserted by Cassius when the first several posts below were moved to a new thread from their prior location in the "Welcome" thread for BrainToBeing. See post [#6](#) below. For a general introduction to the "Scientism" debate I suggest the article referenced in [this post from a nearby thread](#).

I need some help from you all on how to think about studying Epicurean philosophy.

The leaders in EpicureanFriends have devoted great time to the study of perspectives derived 2000 years ago. So, the question: How does this devotion lead you to life perspectives for today that you could not derive from similar effort to examining the world today?

This is not meant or intended to be a challenge. It is not that at all. Rather, it is a question about how the philosophical frameworks of two millennia ago are the same or different from today.

I'm listening to episode 200 of the podcasts. And, I've gotten "On The Nature of Things". And, I am ready to dive into The Letter to Menoeceus. But, before "going down the rabbit hole" I'm wondering if any of you can reflect on this issue of bringing "then" to "now". Thanks to any who wish to jump in. ([Joshua](#) You referenced the concept of such application in Episode 200).

When considering this it is interesting that a recurrent human behavior is to look for sages of long ago as frames of reference for today. Religions do this. Philosophies do this. Politics does this. It is an interesting generalization.

Anyway, thanks for any who can help me in this investigation.

Post by “Bryan” of January 10, 2024 at 9:33 AM

I'm passionate about physics, from Epicurus up to classical mechanics. However, I'm critical of the dominant interpretations in modern physics, which I believe are cynically promoted. This sentiment echoes my views on art: while I admire classical art, I find myself disenchanted with much of what is promoted as art today. To me, both modern physics and modern art seem to primarily exist to mock their classical predecessors. I reject that there is a scientific basis of some modern physics concepts, such as particles popping in and out of existence, the origin of the universe, or influence upon empty space, these are aligned with religious beliefs from the Talmud not with natural science. Their math is a self-referencing game and their experiments could more easily be interpreted. I seek a scientific understanding based upon empirical evidence -- Epicurus offers a tangible basis, unlike the promoted contemporary theories. I believe that a true understanding of physics supports a fulfilling life, but what is often presented as "physics" today appears to be more influenced by religious doctrine than scientific inquiry. This is sad and makes a mockery of many smart people who did not want to think religiously but were nevertheless corralled in that direction.

Einstein's theories will eventually be fully recognized as just a fashion of the elites, while the contributions of Epicurus will continue to endure.

Post by “BrainToBeing” of January 10, 2024 at 10:49 AM

[Bryan](#) Thanks Bryan. We would disagree on many things. Yet, that is fine.

Best to you.

Post by “Cassius” of January 10, 2024 at 11:35 AM

[Quote from BrainToBeing](#)

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BrainToBeing I completely accept that you do not intend this to be a "challenge." However I think the way you are conveying this question indicates something important about the way you are approaching the entire question. Of what necessary relevance is it to the question of whether a particular idea is correct whether it is 2000 years old or 2 minutes old. If you are being frustrated by the lack of connection on your questions and answers, I think the frustration stems in part from that: philosophy does not generally base its view of whether something is correct based on how long the idea has been around.

I grant you in clinical practice times change fast, and one day's scientist is often the next day's quack. But the general definition of "what is a quack" does not change by year.

It appears to me that you have done little reading so far into either the texts themselves or to the well-reasoned commentaries (DeWitt, primarily, in this context, though I would include Austin as well).

You seem to be evaluating solely on the basis of "what is the latest science" which is totally understandable for a clinician, but is not "philosophy."

If I am in a car accident and I need surgery for broken bones, then I want the best clinician with the latest medical information that I can find.

But if I am suffering from an existential crisis of anxiety over whether I am going to hell when I die or whether a supernatural god will punish me for being "evil" or whether there are ideal absolutes by which I should live, a "clinician" is going to be of no use whatsoever. Certainly at some times certain people struggle with such issues because they have biological or chemical issues, and a clinician is needed to bring their functioning ability back to "the norm." But in the general cases that we are dealing with, where bodily health issues are not in questions, a clinical approach is never going to answer the questions that we really want to know.

My strong advice is that rather than reading any of the letter or the more specific material, you get into the DeWitt book, and let him introduce you to the full spectrum of issues that Epicurus was addressing. DeWitt is exactly tuned toward addressing the "big picture" that you are looking for so you can accept or reject it.

Epicurus' starting point was that he wanted to understand how the world could have come into being from nothing, and he rejected the idea that his teachers - the "clinicians" of his day - taught him.

You may or may not personally profit from Epicurus' approach, and if you don't need it then I applaud you for being so unaffected by the deeper philosophical issues. But the clinical approach can't resolve these questions for the ordinary man on the street, and the general direction toward addressing them has to come through a philosophy that deals with issues of what "should be" (which Epicurus holds should be based on what "is"), and not on an arbitrary selection of a goal through a clinical approach that never gets to the heart of what "should be" in the first place.

I understand that there are all sorts of ways to frame questions of how to get from what "is" to what "ought to be" in our own lives. Epicurus gives us one coherent approach that we can accept and reject, but in Epicurus' case his opinions being 2000 years old are a feature - because they have stood the test of time - rather than a fault.

Post by “Martin” of January 10, 2024 at 12:28 PM

In my case it was the other way round. I did not decide to become an Epicurean but eventually found out that I was an Epicurean without knowing it:

Since adolescence, I explored many kinds of books for wisdom, especially plays and novels, and thought a lot on my own. Since ditching Christianity as a young adult, I read philosophical texts occasionally but without much learning from them at first. I developed my own ideas as I saw fit for the present and near future with acknowledgement of history and the epistemology of science in mind. Rather by chance, I read Marcus Aurelius' "Meditations" and found in there a lead to Epicurus for a personal issue on which I was undecided and which seemed not to have much to do with philosophy. This lead prompted me to read translations of Epicurus' extant texts. I discovered that what I had thought was my own eclectic mixture on how to understand the world and live in it was much more systematically and coherently included in Epicurus' philosophy. I had implicitly and unknowingly been an Epicurean for decades. E.g. I had developed hedonic calculus (without knowing that term at that time) as an adolescent on my own (or possibly just without recognizing from where I got the ideas for it) and had always used it to make major decisions since then.

After reading Epicurus' extant texts, I searched for discussion groups to dig deeper into Epicurus' philosophy and found and joined Cassius' groups on Facebook and here.

Post by “Cassius” of January 10, 2024 at 2:11 PM

These last several posts deserve a thread of their own, and I think the best place for this (and the thread about what things have changed in the last 2000 years) will be the "Epicurean Philosophy vs Scientism" subforum. So moving there now....

Post by “BrainToBeing” of January 10, 2024 at 5:31 PM

Thanks very much to you, [Cassius](#) and [Martin](#) . Very helpful.

For me these pursuits are primarily just interesting. I'm comfortable with who I am and where my path leads. And, it is not my intent to be a disruptive iconoclast. So, I'll get DeWitt's book and drop out until I have read it.

Best to you. The site you have built and moderate is excellent.

B to B

Post by “Cassius” of January 10, 2024 at 7:27 PM

[Quote from BrainToBeing](#)

And, it is not my intent to be a disruptive iconoclast.

I don't think that anyone here thinks you are a disruptive iconoclast. It's a pleasure and a privilege to communicate with professionals like yourself about your areas of expertise. You have already pointed up a series of important questions on which we need to be able to think through Epicurus' positions and better shape our own. If you are able to find the time to talk with us further after you read some of the core "philosophy" through DeWitt, I am sure your commentary would be even more beneficial to the forum than what you've already brought.

Post by “BrainToBeing” of January 10, 2024 at 9:28 PM

Thank you [Cassius](#) . Let me do some study and then I'll be back.

Best to you!

Post by “BrainToBeing” of January 11, 2024 at 8:38 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Of what necessary relevance is it to the question of whether a particular idea is correct whether it is 2000 years old or 2 minutes old.

At least to my way of thinking the issue is how people form their lives and actions around an idea. For example, based on beliefs extant at the time, two thousand years ago humans sacrificed other humans, and many animals, "to the gods". I think it is important that we have a different view now.

Certainly healthcare treatments have changed dramatically in the ensuing 2000 years, based on major changes in perspectives of causes for illness. As far as I know no one has objectively treated cancer, sepsis or Parkinson's disease effectively via praying to Sekhmet.

So, to my way of thinking, the ultimate issue is what we do. And, what we do depends upon our whole framework for understanding the world and our place in it. In this regard I think things have changed a lot in 2000 years. Thus, in relevance to these esteemed pages of EpicureanFriends, I think it is important to consider what we have learned philosophically in the last 2000 years.

You all, who have studied the early writings so diligently, are probably in the best position to address what we have learned, and what we haven't learned. Thus I have asked. Cheers.

Post by “Cassius” of January 11, 2024 at 8:47 AM

[Quote from BrainToBeing](#)

For example, based on beliefs extant at the time, two thousand years ago humans sacrificed other humans, and many animals, "to the gods". I think it is important that

we have a different view now.

Ah, there's an important distinction. NOT ALL humans two thousand years ago sacrificed other humans, only some of them did. And there are plenty of abuses going on today that people 2000 years ago could hardly have imagined. So it's not the time element alone, or even dominantly, that is the issue.

[Quote from BrainToBeing](#)

I think it is important to consider what we have learned philosophically in the last 2000 years.

Not many people are going to agree on what, if **anything** has been learned "philosophically" in the last 2000 years. Lots of ink has been spilled for sure, but has the conversation really progressed in substance since the Greco-Roman debates of 2000 years ago? I think a considerable number of people would argue that philosophy has *regressed* since that time. And that's the kind of question that needs to be addressed. Is spilling ink and chasing rabbits really progress showing that certain things have been learned? The big questions of life seem to remain the big questions of life from age to age.

As just to be clear, I think it is very helpful that you are posing these questions in the way you do. Not everyone is going to arrive at the same answers, but these are challenges that have to be considered and dealt with for any community to have confidence in its reason for being.

Post by "BrainToBeing" of January 11, 2024 at 11:25 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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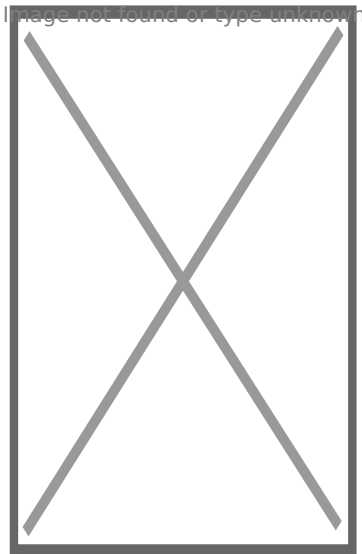
See, this is EXACTLY why I am here. You and colleagues are smart and educated. You can consider questions of these types. AND you bring a wealth of knowledge about what was written those many years ago. So, you and your colleagues are exactly the right people to consider "what have we learned" as a way of considering "where are we going".

I am learning good things from you and your colleagues! Were it not for your site, and the way you make these discussions available, I would not have spent any significant time on the classical philosophers. This would not be because I thought they had nothing to say. With emphasis, "THEY DO, STILL!" But, I would have followed Antoine de St. Exupery's observation, "More wisdom is latent in things as they are than in all the words [or ink] men use." HOWEVER, you and your colleagues make the investigation of these past writings relevant. So, thank you!

I'm doing my "homework". The most recent DeWitt is not currently available on Amazon; so, I've gotten a couple of others on Epicurus and Lucretius in the interim.

Cheers!

Post by "Don" of January 11, 2024 at 11:34 AM



[Epicurus And His Philosophy : Epicurus : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

Epicurus And His Philosophy
archive.org

Dewitt's book is available to read on Internet Archive.

Post by “Eikadistes” of January 11, 2024 at 11:40 AM

[Quote from BrainToBeing](#)

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So, the question: How does this devotion lead you to life perspectives for today that you could not derive from similar effort to examining the world today?

[...] it is a question about how the philosophical frameworks of two millennia ago are the same or different from today.

For me, the answer is theology.

Regarding *physics*, we are all (*in my not so humble opinion*) **already** Epicureans, whether we realize it or not. As long as we carry universal miniature computers in our pockets that triangulate our positions with respect to the curvature of spacetime, and as long as we are relying on technologies like MRIs to diagnose brain disease, then, without question, we have, as a culture, adopted *Indeterministic Atomism*.

Regarding *epistemology*, I make an argument in a paper published by the Society of Friends of Epicurus that suggests that (with our without Epicurus), we would still be navigating the waters of reality with raw sensations, with sensual impressions, and with a sense of feeling. Our scientific enterprise is fundamentally grounded in *Empiricism*:
<https://epicureandatabase.wordpress.com/2020/01/17/on-...leasure-wisdom/>

Regarding *ethics*, we might (culturally) sway between uncompromising declarations of moral purity and fleeting devotion to popular virtues, but, at the end of the day, whether it's national defense or just a consumer trying to live on a budget, we are pursuing the pleasant life. We might be influenced by Puritans, but even the Puritans had to submit to the natural will of Winter that required an ethics of *Consequentialism*.

Theology, however, was a chasm for me, and the teachings of Epicurus provided me with the tools I needed to cross that chasm (if you'll excuse the clunky metaphor). For most of my life, I was, first and foremost, a critic of Christianity; by extension, Abrahamic religion; and, specifically (as I came to find) a critic of the very unique proposition of an *immanent, benevolent, omnipotent, omniscient creator*. Overall, I identified as an *atheist*.

Through a study of Epicurean Philosophy, I came to acknowledge that the human impulse to practice piety is natural, and that the idealization of role models as deities is an equally natural practice that we observe in disconnected human societies. As a result, my position of *atheism* only really addresses the Judeo-Christian-Islamic god, but failed to engage the idea of non-Immanent, non-Creator (and other conceptions).

So, without Epicurus, I would still be a critical atheist that reduced anyone's expression of religiosity to a delusion of the mind, or an uneducated misunderstanding of psychology. Now, I accept that theism (when grounded in atomism) is a perfectly coherent and useful position.

Post by “BrainToBeing” of January 11, 2024 at 1:06 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

Dewitt's book is available to read on Internet Archive.

Thank you!! Because I can get it as PDF this also means I can highlight quotes for later consideration and/or review. Very helpful! Thanks again [Don](#)

Post by “BrainToBeing” of January 11, 2024 at 1:22 PM

[Quote from Nate](#)

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Thanks [Eikadistes](#) , very good entry!

So, indeed, "came to acknowledge that the human impulse to practice piety is natural." Yet, we can ask why it is natural. One possibility is that we do somehow sense a bigger sentience than our own at work. Possible, not proven.

There is another possibility. It could be that all religions and "the impulse to practice piety" are basically derivatives and metaphor of the parent-child relationship. It is proven neurobiology that our behavioral constructs operate, in broad overview, in the "onion" metaphor - layers built upon one another. Unquestionably we see that behavioral constructs formed in childhood ramify into adulthood. Some of this is the foundation of prejudice. Some of this is the foundation of personality styles. Some of this is the foundation for career choices. Some of this is the foundation of likes and dislikes.

One of our very earliest and most fundamental behaviors is to look for caregivers as the source of support and solace. A baby's first impulse is to cry - a behavior of no utility if there is no expectation that someone will listen. We grant caregivers priority in our choices and behaviors until about age 2, at which point a personalized "self" begins to advocate for authority.

So, this fundamental behavioral paradigm - seeking solace and support from a more powerful "other" - is built in. You may take it from there.

Cheers

Post by “Eggplant Wizard” of January 11, 2024 at 1:33 PM

[Quote from Nate](#)

[Quote from BrainToBeing](#)

[legend='Admin Edit','ad1d28'

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Display More

I'm happy to see that the religious aspect of Epicureanism is taken seriously on this forum, even if not everyone subscribes to it. It was clearly important to the classical Epicureans. I remember when I was on that Epicurean email list in the late 90's, Epicurean theology was dismissed by almost all the participants as a ruse to avoid persecution and attempts to talk seriously about it mostly ran into scorn.

Post by “Cassius” of January 11, 2024 at 2:29 PM

[Quote from Eggplant Wizard](#)

Epicurean theology was dismissed by almost all the participants as a ruse to avoid persecution and attempts to talk seriously about it mostly ran into scorn.

As long as I am administrator of this group that (attempts to talk seriously about Epicurean theology running into scorn) will not happen here! 😊 If anything gets quashed, it's going to be insistence that Epicurean theology was a cop-out, because that's an insult to Epicurus personally and that's not something that "friends of Epicurus" should stand by and accept. No doubt it will pop up now and then especially with newer people, but if a gentle reminder to cut it out isn't sufficient then stronger action will be taken. 😊

One thing we need to be able to agree on is that we are going to take seriously what the Epicureans discussed. We don't have to agree with all, but the forum isn't going to be a place for personal ridicule on theology or images or any other issue where we might disagree with the Epicureans. You can't understand what they were thinking as a whole until you take the parts seriously. They were doing the best they could, and they succeeded a surprising amount of the time. Even when they may have been in error, there is much to be learned from their thought process in getting to their position.

[Quote from Eggplant Wizard](#)

It was clearly important to the classical Epicureans.

It absolutely was, and by ridiculing they are foreclosing themselves from the benefits of understanding the full Epicurean point of view, agree with it or not.

Post by “Don” of January 11, 2024 at 2:45 PM

(raises hands in the air) *Testify*, Brother Cassius! Testify! Hallelujah! 😄

But on a more serious note, I also find Epicurean theology, piety, and practice an interesting topic. The point I always make is that Epicurus himself and the classical Epicureans made a correct understanding of the gods a primary point in multiple texts: The Letter to Menoikeus, [Principal Doctrines](#), Philodemus's On Piety, the first line of the Tetracharmakos, and so on. I, too, completely agree that the "Epicurus feigned piety to protect his skin" is an easy, lazy response to the question. The research can be a bit of a rabbit hole (as numerous threads on this forum attest!) and can be frustrating due to lack of textual sources and archeological evidence, but there's enough there to make for interesting discussions.

Post by “BrainToBeing” of January 11, 2024 at 4:10 PM

[Cassius](#) Very well said! Indeed, until someone has solid, objective proof of God or gods, it will be a matter of belief and opinion. This has certainly been obvious through the ages as endless versions of belief on the issue have come (and gone). Thus, in this erudite group it is entirely appropriate to keep the discussion open, with allowance for various points of view. And, conversely, anyone who opines that they know the answer to this existential issue will be called upon to prove it.

[Quote from Don](#)

"Epicurus feigned piety to protect his skin"

[Don](#) It would not be the first time, nor the last. Certainly, the posturing of Descartes in the first few pages of "Meditations on First Philosophy" clearly suggest he was seeking to avoid the fate of Galileo, only a few years prior.

Post by "BrainToBeing" of January 11, 2024 at 4:16 PM

One more thing, right at the beginning of DeWitt he says this about Epicurus: "The man himself was revered as an ethical father, a savior, and a god."

Think about that in the current context. It is an allusion to the whole topic of humans seeking to "deify" other humans. What motivation rests below that tendency? And, how does that bear on the larger discussion of piety? Both questions are worthy of discussion in the current context.

Post by "Don" of January 11, 2024 at 4:35 PM

[Quote from BrainToBeing](#)

Don It would not be the first time, nor the last. Certainly, the posturing of Descartes in the first few pages of "Meditations on First Philosophy" clearly suggest he was seeking to avoid the fate of Galileo, only a few years prior.

Oh, I don't doubt a sense of personal safety was a *part* of his decision. After all, that's one reason he taught on his own private property and not in the gymnasia or stoas. But I firmly believe Epicurus also got a great deal of pleasure, enjoyment, and satisfaction from

participating the religious rites of his city. For ease of access, here are my thoughts from my perusal of *On Piety*:

Thread

[Philodemus On Piety](#)

Check out what came in on interlibrary loan this afternoon! I'll share thoughts etc on this thread. Stay tuned... epicureanfriends.com/wcf/attachment/1550/



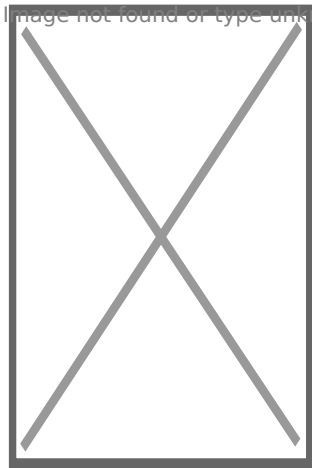
Don

December 10, 2020 at 5:14 PM

Post by “Don” of January 11, 2024 at 4:43 PM

As far as ritual or religious practices, Epicurus leaves money in his will for "the funeral offerings to my father, mother, and brothers." The word translated "funeral offerings" in τὰ ἐναγίσματα (ta enagismata) < enagisma. See:

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[Chapter IV. The ritual pattern](#)

1. The sacrificial rituals of Greek hero-cults This study has had two aims, first of all, to establish the sacrificial rituals of Greek hero-cults in the...

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Quote

1.4. Destruction sacrifices

12 Destruction sacrifices at which no dining took place, covered by the terms *holokautos* in the inscriptions and *enagizein*, *enagisma* and *enagismos* in the literary texts, are rare and cannot be considered as the regular kind of ritual in hero-cults. All the terms seem to cover the same kind of ritual, the destruction of the offerings, but they have different bearings on the character of the recipient. *Holokautos* was more neutral, being used for both heroes and gods, while *enagizein*, *enagisma* and *enagismos* are particular to hero-cults and the cult of the dead. Apart from referring to a destruction sacrifice, *enagizein*, *enagisma* and *enagismos* also mark the recipient as being dead and therefore impure in some sense, and distinguish him, or a side of him, from the gods, who are immortal and pure. In most cases, the destruction sacrifices to heroes were performed as separate rituals and not in connection with a *thysia*.

13 The *enagizein* sacrifices seem to have been aimed at highlighting the dead and impure character of the hero. The destruction of the offerings formed part of the cult of the dead, but it is doubtful to what extent they were performed with animal victims, since the sacrifice of animals had practically disappeared from the cult of the ordinary dead already in the Archaic period, partly as a result of the funerary legislation.

14 Partial and total destructions of the victims are also found in the cult of the gods and can sometimes be viewed as a result of the character of the recipient, but perhaps more clearly as a reaction to or as a reminiscence of a particularly pressing and difficult situation. Similarly, in hero-cults the destruction sacrifices are not only a reflection of the recipient's character, but may also be a response to the problems and stress of a particular situation or may be performed in order to avoid difficulties in the future. Seen from this angle, these rituals were used in the same manner as in the cult of the gods.

15 The evidence for the terms *enagizein*, *enagisma* and *enagismos*, considered to be standard terms for the sacrifices to heroes, is slight for sacrifices to heroes in the Archaic and Classical periods (no use at all is made of the terms in inscriptions before the late 2nd century BC, for example). More remarkable is the frequent use of the terms in the 1st to the 3rd centuries AD, particularly in the 2nd century AD and especially by Pausanias and Plutarch. The popularity of the terms during this period, evident also from the hapax *enagisterion* (attested in an inscription dating from c. AD 170), can be linked to the antiquarian tendencies of the Second Sophistic. *Enagizein* sacrifices seem to have been regarded as an old and venerable ritual, and the terms *enagizein*, *enagisma*, *enagismos* and *enagisterion* are predominantly used for heroes considered as being ancient, a tendency which may have originated in a desire to separate the old, traditional heroes of the epic and glorious past history from the more recently heroized, ordinary mortals of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. This link between heroes and *enagizein* may, in its turn, have been the reason for the almost mechanical use of *enagizein* in the scholia to explain and elucidate sacrifices to heroes in the Classical sources, whether or not these rituals contained any actions of the kind

usually covered by enagizein. It is also interesting to note that, in the 2nd century AD and later, enagizein began to be used for sacrifices to gods, though often to divinities connected with the sphere of death and the underworld, and for sacrifices differing from regular thysiai. In this late period, the term seems gradually to have taken on the meaning "to burn completely", no matter who was the recipient.

Post by "Godfrey" of January 11, 2024 at 6:21 PM

To digress, a reason to study Epicurus, in particular, is that he's something of the "missing link" of western philosophy. I was put off by Platonism, Aristotelianism and monotheism and looked for a time to the eastern philosophies for a more suitable conception of "the way things are". When I discovered that there was someone who based his philosophy on atomism over 2000 years ago, I was quite astounded.

In Epicurus I've found a gateway to many things, not least of which is a coherent, modern worldview. Studying the ancients is useful not only as a historical relic, but as the starting point of much of modern thought and a clearer understanding of how we as a society came to understand our place in the world. Without this basis I find it quite difficult, if not impossible, to make sense of the threads of philosophical discourse going on today.

Post by "BrainToBeing" of January 11, 2024 at 8:41 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

But I firmly believe Epicurus also got a great deal of pleasure, enjoyment, and satisfaction from participating the religious rites of his city.

[Don](#) You know much more about his preferences than I do. I would imagine that, in that era, religions were one center of social interactions - just as they are now. So, just as now, there may be participants who are there more for socialization than edification or "being saved". Certainly we don't want to take anything away from him (and couldn't). Yet, I do think we are trying not only to understand him but also how think about his conclusions in the context of today.

Overall, I'm happy to have people reach whatever conclusions regarding these spiritual topics that they like, as long as they allow the same for me. We're all just trying to figure out how to get through this game, in my view.

Post by “BrainToBeing” of January 17, 2024 at 8:21 AM

You all might find this of interest. It is a question I asked Poe, which uses ChatGPT3.5, regarding Epicurean and Stoic philosophies in the current era of brain knowledge. Poe provided a good answer, I think.

Question: Based on the perspectives we now have in the scientific era, which of the two philosophies, Epicurean and Stoic, is more consistent with scientific knowledge about brain biology and function?

Poe:

Both Epicurean and Stoic philosophies, as ancient schools of thought, predate our modern scientific understanding of brain biology and function. Therefore, it's important to note that neither philosophy was developed with knowledge of neuroscience or contemporary scientific concepts.

However, if we were to consider the compatibility of Epicurean and Stoic philosophy with our current scientific understanding, some aspects of Epicureanism seem to align more closely with scientific knowledge about brain biology and function. Epicurean philosophy's emphasis on seeking pleasure and avoiding pain can be seen as compatible with the brain's reward system, which is involved in the experience of pleasure and the motivation to pursue pleasurable experiences. Additionally, the recognition of emotions as natural signals related to pleasure and pain resonates with our understanding of the role of emotions in brain processes.

On the other hand, Stoic philosophy's emphasis on emotional detachment and the suppression of emotions may not align as directly with current scientific understanding. While it is true that the brain can regulate and modulate emotions, the Stoic goal of completely suppressing or eradicating emotions may not align with our understanding of the brain's natural functioning.

It's important to note that philosophical perspectives and scientific knowledge are distinct domains of inquiry. The ancient philosophies, including Epicureanism and Stoicism, offer insights into ethics, human nature, and the pursuit of a good life, which can still be valuable today. However, when it comes to explaining brain biology and function, the scientific method and empirical evidence are the primary tools we rely on.

Post by "DavidN" of January 26, 2024 at 10:30 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

To digress, a reason to study Epicurus, in particular, is that he's something of the "missing link" of western philosophy. I was put off by Platonism, Aristotelianism and monotheism and looked for a time to the eastern philosophies for a more suitable conception of "the way things are". When I discovered that there was someone who based his philosophy on atomism over 2000 years ago, I was quite astounded.

In Epicurus I've found a gateway to many things, not least of which is a coherent, modern worldview. Studying the ancients is useful not only as a historical relic, but as the starting point of much of modern thought and a clearer understanding of how we as a society came to understand our place in the world. Without this basis I find it quite difficult, if not impossible, to make sense of the threads of philosophical discourse going on today.

Have you read: Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity

[Catherine Wilson https://academic.oup.com/book/12521?login=false](https://academic.oup.com/book/12521?login=false)

What I pondered as I read about early scientists and philosophers taking what they liked from what remained of the epicurean body of work, was what did they leave behind? They would take the science and neglect the ethics. Epicureanism is a complete system and that is what I find is missing from the world today, to go back to the original question.

It may have been understandable for Descartes to want to play at Epicurean science without losing his Christianity, or his head. But this is no longer the case today, we are free to mix ethics and science and try to discover better ways of living. This is why I believe Epicureanism still has a lot to teach us and shouldn't simply be discarded as a relic. It is not only **what** they found that matters but **how** they came to their conclusions that matters, I think the Epicurean Canon has somethings over the way modern science is practiced along the lines of what Bryan said earlier in the thread.