

Epicurean Freedom. Enslavement by culture. The mob.

Post by “Harrington Andros” of April 19, 2018 at 12:42 PM

I listened to this and feel it's at least partly compatible with Epicurean views, on Freedom, Culture and The Mob.

Agreed?

<https://youtu.be/PBsA7S8jxfU>

Post by “Cassius” of April 19, 2018 at 1:30 PM

Alex I picked out a couple of themes. Was one or more of these what you refer to as compatible with Epicurean theory?

1. Freedom is important to animals and especially people.
2. But people can grow acclimated to control.
3. There are many ways that society conditions people to accept their submission to control.
4. Some individuals instinctively rebel against servitude.
5. Those who instinctively resist servitude often spend their time encouraging others to be free.

All of the ones I listed seem apparently true and therefore would be consistent with Epicurean theory, which does nothing if not observe what occurs and acknowledge it.

One thought going through my mind in all of these is that while there are some who reject control "instinctively" (and I bet most all of us "Epicureans" fit that mold) there is also a much larger group which accepts controls, grows accustomed to it, and I would dare say even finds it pleasurable. So as the video goes through listing different types of societies, it seems to me that all of those types can be described as pleasurable to at least some significant part of the population, while other parts find the same society oppressive.

That's why it has always seemed to me that the Epicurean principles of "justice" emphasize that arrangements are based on agreement rather than on absolute justice. If a majority (which has sufficient force) finds an arrangement pleasurable to them, they will naturally seek one

form, while the minority finds the same arrangement painful. Since there's no god and no vindicating central force, the people involved then have to personally measure their best judgment as to what is worth fighting for and what is not. No one can count on gods or ideas to vindicate them.

But that's probably not touching on your question. What part were you thinking about?

Post by “Harrington Andros” of April 19, 2018 at 7:55 PM

I don't really know where I'm going with this.

Just "thinking outloud".

It seems to me that Epicurus rejects all forms contrived restrictions excepts those that are not contrived directly by us, such as those that are Natural (physics, chemistry), and those that are part of our Nature (biological, social...).

It seems that he rejects those restrictions that vary from culture to culture, but warns us to beware of them so as not to end up having them take more of our freedoms too.

As self domesticated animals who have been selected by prior generations/cultures we continue to select those who conform most and also those who cheat while appearing to conform. So we will change the nature of people of future generations too.

Folks imagine this as the will of God, Kings, divinity, or as Fate, or as something else, but it seems pretty clear to me that we are doing this to ourselves, and don't have to accept where its taking us.

Yet even being aware of that... As the video says, we are not even aware of the freedoms that have been lost generation by generation, nor are we aware of how unable we'd be able to cope in a world where everyone was free of these contrived restrictions.

Some folks have struck out on their own isolating themselves from society and failed miserably, only to come back more grateful than ever.

Epicurus set up his home, school, near a major city, yet on his own private land. It seems the best of both worlds. Some freedoms while still being able to choose to play by society/culture when convenient.

Post by “Harrington Andros” of April 19, 2018 at 8:05 PM

This video seems to continue on the "same" topic.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARGczzoPASo>

Not that Epicureans deny death, or strive to be the hero...

Post by “Cassius” of April 19, 2018 at 8:14 PM

Yes I was thinking based in part on our past discussions that you were probably considering whether this is an example of the development of attitudes over time that might factor into anticipations. And I think I agree with that.

I am sure you and I share the same view that freedom is pleasurable and restrictions are painful, and so we would act from that basis to try to live in a society that honored those same views. Like you say a mix of private property where we can be "king of our own domain" plus the ability to easily mix with others (preferably those who are our friends who see things the much the same as we do).

But what I think Epicurus may also be saying is that not EVERYONE sees things that way, and some indeed find pleasure in conformity and even restrictions. If such people do exist (and I think they do - e.g. in Islam?) then what does that mean to us? I think it means as in [PD39](#) that we have to accept that some people not only aren't going to be compatible with us, but are actually going to be our enemies, from whom we have to protect ourselves.

So while of course we would prefer if everyone had our same thermometer of pleasure and pain, I think Epicurus would tell us that various people are "wired" very differently (just like cats and dogs are wired differently, and various breeds of cats are wired differently from others, just like breeds of dogs, etc)

And if this line of thinking is correct, this is pretty challenging in a modern world where the prime directive seems to be that everyone must get along no matter what degree of difference of opinion they have. Maybe the best example is the hardest: In the end can dedicated Islamists get along with dedicated secularists or people of other religions? I suspect the answer is no, and the best option is as in [PD39](#) - "...and where he finds even this impossible, he avoids all dealings, and, so far as is advantageous, excludes them from his life."

Post by “Cassius” of April 19, 2018 at 8:22 PM

I just saw the second video. For example in line with my prior thoughts, I see the slide: "it is the nonconformists who bring forth the new ideas, creations, and ways of living that produce a vibrant society."

That is EXACTLY the issue that is raised in the [HG Wells "Things to Come" that we discussed several months ago on the facebook group](#). In that movie, Passworthy (and in more extreme form, Theophilus) represents the often large number of people who want the world to "stop" and always say the same - they want "rest" rather than what we think of us pleasure.

But if THEY think of "rest" as their highest pleasure, are we to say that they are wrong? They are wrong TO US, yes! but are they wrong for themselves? I "think" the answer Epicurus would give is that they need to be very careful about their choice (as do we!) but that if indeed those people do find more "pleasure" in "rest" then FOR THEM that may be the choice they should pursue.

Post by “Harrington Andros” of April 19, 2018 at 8:36 PM

I like what you wrote. Or better said, I like how I feel, when I consider what your wrote, in support of [PD39](#). Considering that seems to wake me (the "divine" animal in me) up.



Post by “Cassius” of April 19, 2018 at 8:38 PM

I typed that before listening to all of the second video, and even now I haven't heard all of it, but now I hear "nonconformity is such an important ingredient in a life well lived."

Now that CLEARLY to me as a non-Epicurean ring. I have not listened further to how he is going to define it, but it certainly has a Platonic/Aristotelian/Stoic ring that isn't obviously based on pleasure. But let me listen further....

Post by “Harrington Andros” of April 19, 2018 at 8:41 PM

Have you bumped into Nietzsche's notion of "divine animal"? I never heard about it until I watched this, but it seems to match some of my personal, but not yet well developed notions, and seems to match Epicurus' rejection of consciousness/logic being among that animals weakest asset.

Epicurus says we can live like gods...

Epicurus points us to our natural faculties.

Sometimes I like play with the notion that my naturally selected body, soul (nervous system), emotions/instincts, and automatic parts of my brain are "The God" ("divine" animal) that protects me, looks out for me, guide me...give me life/zest.

I'm curious to explore what else Nietzsche says about the "divine animal" in us.

Post by “Harrington Andros” of April 19, 2018 at 8:43 PM

If you watch that second video to the end, I think you'll agree that it resolves. Not sure. I hope I'm not wasting your time, having you watch these videos. Don't feel obligated to watch them all. New to me does not mean new to you.

Post by “Cassius” of April 19, 2018 at 9:00 PM

Ok now I finished it. I suspect most everyone here (everyone who reads this) probably considers themselves a nonconformist. (I know I do!) But I don't think that the theory expressed in the video from Becker (which seems to be a call to "personal heroism" or "uniqueness" is really Epicurean. In fact the video even warns that non-conformity for the sake of non-conformity is circular and doesn't make sense. So the video to me clearly has this Platonic/Stoic sense that there is some "ideal" form of human character that we should all strive to attain.

But I don't think Epicurus describes life that way - certainly not that there is an absolute form of ideal - even of "uniqueness" to which we should (ironically, which is the position of the video) conform.

Instead we are born with a faculty of pleasure and pain that applies in all our mental and physical activities, and is partly genetic, partly conditioned, partly arising from our experience (and maybe other factors) but which all adds up to a sum in which we have our own perspective on what will make us happy (give us the most pleasure and least pain).

And since there are no absolutes, ideals, or supernatural gods to tell us what is "right" for us, we have to decide as best we can what to pursue, and we have to understand that others will act the same way.

These videos are definitely NOT a waste of time - they focus the question in a way that makes the issue sharp I think! This is definitely a major issue for all of us -- how do we define and apply what we learn from Epicurus? Do we really have to be "unique" in order to live the most pleasurable life? What is the life best lived? All those questions we struggle with all the time.

And as this thread continues in the future, someone will no doubt want to suggest that the story of Socrates and his forced suicide is directly relevant to this. As we know the Epicureans were not too fond of Socrates. I doubt that many of them would have endorsed his death the way it happened, but I can see them asking whether indeed there was not some justification for what happened to him. Do those who see their greatest pleasure in being unique really have the "right" to expect those who disagree with them to "put up with" their crusading non-conformity?

Post by "Cassius" of April 19, 2018 at 9:09 PM

[Quote from AlexanderRios](#)

I like what you wrote. Or better said, I like how I feel, when I consider what you wrote, in support of [PD39](#). Considering that seems to wake me (the "divine" animal in me) up.

Yep that is the way I see the issue too. In terms of waking up "the divine animal" to me there is nothing more effective than to consider that this short span of time is all we have to experience all the pleasure we'll ever experience. That's the antidote to the lethargy brought about by religion and the idea of eternal life -- religion is indeed the opiate of the people. At that's why it alternately amuses me and enrages me when I read the argument the Epicurean philosophy is all about retiring from the world and avoiding pain.

Short of Christianity and the havoc it has wreaked on the civilized world for 2000 years (and I am following Nietzsche / Antichrist here) I can't think of an idea more sweepingly perverse and "evil" than the suggestion that "avoiding pain" should be the sum total of life. If Christianity

ever loses its force and the forces of conformity can rely on it no longer, I would expect as major resurgence of the idea that "avoiding pain" is the goal of life -- and I suspect that explains the blessings given by Imperial Rome to Stoicism in the ancient world, and the endorsement given to modern Stoicism today by large parts of the secular "establishment" today.

Post by "Cassius" of May 7, 2018 at 3:03 PM



I piglet, but an Epicurean mascot ready to fight, [er](#) first told me about him and Freyr.

Post by "Hiram" of May 12, 2018 at 9:15 AM

[Quote from Harrington Andros](#)

I'm curious to explore what else Nietzsche says about the "divine animal" in us.

Not sure in detail, but N did elevate INSTINCT and VISCERAL, gut feelings above reason, and made them an important source of insight. I think this goes back to the Michel Onfray (and Cyrenaic) idea of philosophizing with / from our bodies, reconciled with nature, with our feet fully on the ground.

In other words, I think by this N was referring to the many ways in which a philosopher may usurp reason and replace it with other parts of our nature.

Post by "Cassius" of May 12, 2018 at 10:23 AM

Hiram I presume here you mean that Nietzsche was saying, as he complained against the Stoics, that it is wrong for philosophers to try to put "reason" or some other construct in the place of feeling? I think you're saying that but I was wondering about the use of "usurp reason" as maybe meant to be "usurp feeling"

[Quote from Hiram](#)

In other words, I think by this N was referring to the many ways in which a philosopher may usurp reason and replace it with other parts of our nature.

Post by "Hiram" of May 14, 2018 at 12:11 PM

usurp the supremacy of reason or logic (which is in most of philosophy celebrated as absolute monarch of people's philosophical values) and replace it with either nature or other aspects of our nature. I think N chose WILL (or will to power) as a supreme value. E chose the experience of pleasure. (Randians, Stoics, and Aristotelians chose reason.)