

What Would Epicurus Say To Someone Who Complains "The World Is Unjust / Life Isn't Fair"?

Post by "Cassius" of September 22, 2024 at 6:10 PM

It came to my attention today that there is another "Frequently Asked Ethical Question" to which we should have a thread presenting an answer in Epicurean terms. I will set up a FAQ question and link to this thread as well as to what develops into the most likely/consensus answer.

The Complaint/Question/Issue is generally stated in terms of "Is There No Justice In The World?" or "Life Isn't Fair!"

What would Epicurus say to such a person?

I think one reason we haven't seen that discussed much in the forum on the past is that most well-read Epicureans will immediately see the many issues with such a complaint, but it's a common concern about life in general, so let's see what we can do to formulate a general response.

Let's keep this thread in "General Discussion" for a while so that it gets attention and some responses, and we'll eventually move it to the Ethics forum.

Post by "Kyle" of September 26, 2024 at 10:37 AM

He might disagree with the premise and instead argue we should be grateful and that Nature makes it easy to acquire the good and avoid the bad if we pursue natural and necessary desires.

As long as we can achieve our basic needs, and we are free, we can be truly happy even without great wealth:

> The cry of the flesh is not to be hungry, thirsty, or cold; for he who is free of these and is confident of remain so might vie even with Zeus for happiness.

> Since the attainment of great wealth can scarcely be accomplished without slavery to crowds or to politicians, a free life cannot obtain much wealth; but such a life already possesses everything in unfailing supply. Should such a life happen to achieve great wealth, this too it can

share so as to gain the good will of one's neighbors.

He admonishes ungrateful attitudes or excessive desires:

> Nothing is enough to someone for whom what is enough is little.

> Don't spoil what you have by desiring what you don't have; but remember that what you now have was once among the things only hoped for.

This VS seems to argue that people who do unjust things suffer some consequences (so it's like there's some justice built in):

> Neither he who is always seeking material aid from his friends nor he who never considers such aid is a true friend; for one engages in petty trade, taking a favor instead of gratitude, and the other deprives himself of hope for the future.

Post by “Cassius” of September 26, 2024 at 10:47 AM

[Quote from Kyle](#)

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Does that mean that if someone came up to an Epicurean and said "The World isn't just!" or "Live is Unfair" that a proper response would be. "You're looking at it wrong and you shouldn't see it that way...."

What if the person says further:

- What you're saying doesn't change anything about fairness or justice!
- So in fact you are agreeing with me: The World ISN'T just and Life ISN'T fair!
- That's what you're telling me?

Post by “Kyle” of September 26, 2024 at 11:03 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4062-what-would-epicurus-say-to-someone-who-complains-the-world-is-unjust-life-isn-t/>

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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I remember this one video saying that Epicureans promoted the use of stigma as the natural way of enforcing justice:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mW3Tr6NPErg>

Maybe we can argue that it is our responsibility to enforce justice by stigma?

> Life ISN'T fair

Life and the world have no divine providence in Epicureanism, so justice is up to humans.

> There never was an absolute justice, but only an agreement made in reciprocal association in whatever localities now and again from time to time, providing against the infliction or suffering of harm.

However, we should be grateful to Nature for "making" life desirable/choice-worthy and such that the good is easy to get.

Post by "SillyApe" of September 26, 2024 at 11:05 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4062-what-would-epicurus-say-to-someone-who-complains-the-world-is-unjust-life-isn-t/>

Well, I am not exactly sure what Epicurus would say, but, in general, I think it is wise to remember that nature is not ruled by an intelligent force (like claimed by the Stoics or some religions) and that it is not intrinsically "fair" or "unfair", but yes, it just is as it is. In the end, it is up to us to adjust our behavior according to how things present themselves, so we can maximize our pleasure and minimize our pain over the long term.

Post by "Root304" of October 27, 2024 at 4:17 PM

My thoughts are that if you do not know the nature of Justice, the nature and History of the State and you do not know the methods of effective activism and are unwilling to attempt them; then railing about injustice is a sign for the need to integrate truths about reality via knowledge or therapeutic means. A seasoned activist is more precise and calculating and those who don't care or don't want to try are generally silent. The loudest voices for your own cause are usually the least effective and most likely to be waving a false flag.