

Epicurean Outreach Opportunity - Respond to Article on Spirituality

Post by “Kalosyni” of February 27, 2025 at 7:43 PM

Is there anyone who has adopted aspects of Epicurean philosophy into personal spiritual practices? If so, then you may want to respond to a request at the end of this article:

<https://www.npr.org/2025/02/27/nx-s1-5246286/curious-about-exploring-your-spirituality-ask-yourself-these-4-questions>

Quote

Your turn: What does your spiritual practice look like?

How do you practice or think about your spirituality? Is your spirituality tied to religion? Or are you building a spiritual life apart from religious faith?

Email lifekit@npr.org with the subject line "Spirituality" along with your full name, and we may feature your response on NPR.org.

The article itself talks about 4 ways to connect to spirituality:

Question 1: What does "something greater" mean to you? Question 2: Where do your spiritual beliefs come from? Question 3: What activities connect you to your spirituality? Question 4: What else can you do to strengthen your spiritual connection?

(Thinking maybe @Eikadistes or [Bryan](#) ?)

Post by “Bryan” of February 27, 2025 at 10:03 PM

We know the soul is composed of subtle atoms in our body -- and we have the ability to control the movement of those atoms. Most of the things that disturb us are self-generated. Even if

somebody smacks you in the face—after the initial pain is gone, all subsequent pain is self-generated by your memory of the smack, which you can control. You can choose to move past it and delight in the fact that your face no longer feels the pain of the smack.

Remember, the gods are eternal because they have a constantly flowing form (like a waterfall). If you smack a waterfall—or even throw a rock at it—it will just move past it.

Post by “Patrikios” of February 28, 2025 at 8:13 AM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

We know the soul is composed of subtle atoms in our body -- and we have the ability to control the movement of those atoms.

I thought that Epicurus used “soul” to refer to that which conveyed our thoughts to our body, muscles; which we know today as our nervous system. So, are our spiritual feelings innate Prolepsis of the gods, or just higher aspects our nervous system that we can attempt to control through breath work.

If my understanding of Epicurus view of the soul is incorrect, please explain.

Post by “Cassius” of February 28, 2025 at 8:53 AM

Let's get input from several people on this including Bryan but one preliminary comment I would make is that I read Lucretius (and therefore presumably Epicurus) as using words that are translated as "soul" and "mind" and "spirit" somewhat interchangeably, so I would be cautious about dividing them up more specifically without very clear text references.

[Quote from Patrikios](#)

So, are our spiritual feelings innate Prolepsis of the gods, or just higher aspects our nervous system that we can attempt to control through breath work.

So as to this question I tend to think that anything regarding consciousness (which would include words like nervous system and mind and soul and spirit, and the *processing* work of the

mind, including prolepses (which is related to images and how they over time shape our thoughts) is going to be generally considered to be a function of the soul/mind/spirit part of the body, but getting much more specific beyond that (especially "control through breath work") is going to be hard to do from the existing texts.

Bryan?

Post by “Kalosyni” of February 28, 2025 at 9:41 AM

Here is an excerpt from Lucretius, Book 3, Smith translation:

"The same method of argument teaches us that the mind and spirit have a material nature. For it is an observable fact that they impel the limbs, wrench the body from sleep, transform the countenance, and pilot and steer the whole person; and since we perceive that all these operations imply touch, and touch in its turn implies matter, are we not bound to acknowledge that the mind and spirit consist of material substance?"

Post by “Bryan” of February 28, 2025 at 12:01 PM

[Quote from Patrikios](#)

I thought that Epicurus used “soul” to refer to that which conveyed our thoughts to our body, muscles; which we know today as our nervous system.

Hello Patrikios! I hope all is well. Yes this is also my understanding.

We are all comfortable with the word Epíkouros uses here "Psychē." As we all know, this word, along with many others, has been used in a way that does not correspond to nature or reality. This can lead the "throwing the baby out with the bathwater" effect.

Half the population thinks "there is no soul" and the other half knows they have a soul and "it is immortal" -- Epíkouros' way is to preserve the word, but to explain it in physically-based and non-supernatural terms.

Epíkouros emphasizes that we can control our thoughts and therefore are responsible for our own movements and behaviour (*in contrast, for example, to Dēmókritos, who viewed our apparent self-generated movement to be transcending nature and therefore determined that it must be an illusion.*)

Quote from Cassius

so I would be cautious about dividing them up more specifically

Yes, anyone familiar with Plato should develop a fatigue for specific definition-based divisions, and this was the case for Epíkouros. There is a limit to how specific we can be -- which is baked into the system right from the start regarding the soul...

Epíkouros says the soul has thermal (hot & fast), pneumatic (cold & slow) aspects, as well as a mixture of these two -- giving the aerial (moderate) characteristics:

"The soul is a subtle body, spread out across the whole aggregate, most closely resembling cool wind ["pneumatic"] that has a certain mixture of heat ["thermal"], indeed, in one way, it is closely resembling the one, and in another way, [it is closely resembling] the other." (D.L. 10.63a)

But the labeling stops there, as the third aspect remains unnamed:

"The third part exists, having acquired great variety in subtleness even compared to those [thermal and pneumatic elements] themselves - and because of this, [the third part is] more harmonious also with the remaining aggregate." (63b)

[1] Thermal Element	● τό Θερμόν	Calor, Vapor
[2] Pneumatic Element	● τό Πνευματικόν	Ventus, Aura
[1 & 2] Aerial Mix	● τό Ἀερώδες	Aer
[3] Unnamed Element	○ τό Ἄκατονόμαστον	Nominis Experts

Epíkouros was adamant that all incorrect ideas come from the addition of thought (not from sensation). If I think I see water at a distance in a desert -- it may be water or it may be a mirage, but I know I must use what I sense (in this case what I see) as a starting point for further inference.

The prólēpsis is "the idea" you sense in your mind before you "manipulate" that idea in your mind by thinking. This "idea" is really an immediate sensation. The connection between the

word "water" and your immediate mental image of water is direct and automatic -- it exists in your mind before active consideration. It is this basic "pre-thought" sense that is the proleptic sense.