

What would Epicurus have thought of going to the moon?

Post by “ReiWolfWoman” of April 10, 2026 at 11:36 PM

I didn't know where else to post this, so if Cassius or Anyone wants to delete and redirect me I'd welcome it...

What do you think Epicurus would have thought of going to the moon? Would it be extraneous to friendship and community and pleasure, and therefore a search for an unnecessary (and natural or unnatural) goal? Or would he see it as a search for connection, expanding community, and a necessary pleasure of some kind for either an individual or their community?



Discuss. Thank you.

Post by “Cassius” of April 11, 2026 at 6:22 AM

This is a fine place for this question and thank you for posting it. I may designate it so it appears in an Ethics section as well.

I expect some highly perceptive answers, and I think the issue is important enough that I don't want anyone to hold back what they really think regardless of what anyone else who posts in this thread says.

And it might help too if those who post consider the question in terms of both (1) What would Epicurus himself have thought? and (2) What do I (the poster) think?

Further, I hope the responses won't limit themselves to "the moon" and thereby short-circuit the heart of the question. I doubt ReiWolfWoman is trying to parse the difference between going to the Moon vs going to Mars vs the entire topic of space exploration.

Should be an interesting discussion.

Post by “Eikadistes” of April 11, 2026 at 10:34 AM

[Quote from ReiWolfWoman](#)

Would it be extraneous to friendship and community and pleasure, and therefore a search for an unnecessary (and natural or unnatural) goal?

[Not at all.](#)



Post by “Cassius” of April 11, 2026 at 5:54 PM

OK other than Eikadistes no one is rushing to answer, so I'll start a preliminary response that will be far too short.

[Quote from ReiWolfWoman](#)

What do you think Epicurus would have thought of going to the moon? Would it be extraneous to friendship and community and pleasure, and therefore a search for an unnecessary (and natural or unnatural) goal? Or would he see it as a search for connection, expanding community, and a necessary pleasure of some kind for either an individual or their community?

As with all options in life, I think Epicurus would advise evaluating the specifics as it applied to him personally and not take things too abstractly.

"Going to the moon" could mean the 1969 version where the technology is in its infancy and you're very strongly taking your life in your hands with major possibility of death and not coming home. Or it could mean a 2050 version where the trip may well be routine and doable in great safety and of no more concern than a short vacation to the mountains.

Then there's the "who." Are we talking about an Epicurus at 30 years old who was in the course of building philosophical school who he thought was of extreme importance not only to himself but to others? Or are we talking about a 70 year old Epicurus with most of his life's work behind him and much less time to lose if he didn't make it back?

Those are two specific circumstances I think he would advise considering -- but I suspect that's not the answer many people with conventional views of Epicurus will expect.

They'll expect "Epicurus valued bodily pleasure and safety and tranquility above all, and it's certainly not NECESSARY to go to the moon, nor is it likely to be a totally tranquil experience, so he'd never do it. You're totally ignoring what everyone says about Epicurean philosophy to say that he'd ever consider it under any circumstances!"

That's not the answer I'd give ReiWolfWoman, and I hazard to guess that most others here would not say that either.

And thus you've early in your time at EpicureanFriends.com discovered that this forum was not set up to support conventional views of Epicurus that place in him boxes like "tranquility above all."

And not only was it not set up to support such views, it's pretty fair to say that it was set up to campaign against them as vigorously as possible. 😊

And the more you look around here at the forum and see the discussions, the more I think you'll see what that is!

Post by "Godfrey" of April 12, 2026 at 12:35 AM

There's also the issue of natural philosophy as well as the anachronistic nature of the situation proposed. Epicurus' life predated so much of our contemporary knowledge, although his thinking in many ways laid the groundwork for it. If he was presented in his day with the opportunity to go to the moon, might the intellectual pleasure of exploring a piece of the sky override the potential dangers involved?

Further, if somehow he turned up in our time with the opportunity to go to the moon, what would he make of the world we live in, and how would going to the moon compare to the cacophonous conglomeration of stimuli in which we spend our days?

I may be getting too far afield though. @Eikadistes answer is probably the most direct and convincing response 👍

Post by “wbernys” of April 12, 2026 at 2:03 AM

[Quote from ReiWolfWoman](#)

What do you think Epicurus would have thought of going to the moon?

Personally think he would consider it freaking awesome. It's important to remember one of Diogenes Laertius sayings about the Epicurean wise man, which people who like to imagine Epicurus as ascetic always love to ignore.

"He will care more than other men for public spectacles." (Bailey)

Something as cool as going to moon would surely qualify. We love those spectacles more than others because we truly delight in all pleasures more than other men.

Post by “wbernys” of April 12, 2026 at 2:25 AM

Plutarch says much the same. Albeit out of his ignorance and desire to slander Epicurus he doesn't understand how one can enjoy spectacles so much but not spend their life obsessed with nonsense questions with no relevance.

[U20]

Plutarch, That Epicurus actually makes a pleasant life impossible, 13, p. 1095C: The absurdity of what Epicurus says! On the one hand, he declares in his Problems that the Sage is a lover of spectacles and yields to none in the enjoyment of theatrical recitals and shows; but on the other, he allows no place, even over wine, for questions about music and the inquires of critics and scholars and actually advises a cultivated monarch to put up with recitals of stratagems and with vulgar buffooneries at his drinking parties sooner than with the discussion of problems in music and poetry

Post by “Cassius” of April 12, 2026 at 6:06 AM

One thing I'd add is that if we go by the list in the [principal doctrines](#), only the concept of there being no supernatural gods comes before the doctrine that "you only live once." (And even the

absence of supernatural gods is directly related to living only once and for a short period.)

In my first answer I focused on everyone having different personal tastes and preferences in life. We have a limited amount of time to pursue what we find to be most pleasurable, and I don't see how it makes sense to do anything other than pursue our greatest pleasures in as intelligent a manner as we can.

All that is to say that some people doubtless have zero interest in flying into space. If they have no desire to do that and find no pleasure in it, then of course they won't choose to do so. Far be it for me to tell them that they are wrong about their feelings - everyone has to make those decisions for themselves.

But for me, and I see this compelled by *life is short and then it's over*, I am drawn to the conclusion that I need to use my time as productively as possible to do things that bring me the greatest pleasure. For me, "tranquility" in the sense of detachment from all emotion -- which is what some people seem to think that "absence of pain" means - is not my goal.

To me, writers who focus on talking about "absence of pain" do not see that Epicurus was using that term as the exact equivalent of the word "pleasure." They are ignoring the very logical reasons why he did so, and the very detailed explanation of those reasons found in Cicero and Diogenes Laertius.

So philosophically I think Epicurus would say people who think going into space would bring them pleasure than pain under their own circumstances should do it. Those who think it would bring more pain to them than pleasure should not do it.

But in my own case I apply that rule this way: I know that knowledge and new experiences are not necessarily pleasurable in themselves. It makes no sense to pursue knowledge or experiences which do not lead to greater pleasure. But if I could do so safely -- and at some point that will be possible - I can think of few if any experiences that would bring more pleasure than space travel.

Post by “Patrikios” of April 13, 2026 at 6:45 PM

[Quote from ReiWolfWoman](#)

What do you think Epicurus would have thought of going to the moon?

Epicurus taught us to study Nature, day & night. How else can a human on earth study the nature of the moon, without going there in order to verify the assumptions made from the

observations of our senses here on earth.

In his Letter to Pythocles, Epicurus wrote in a way that allowed (encouraged?) deeper study of the celestial phenomena, looking for natural explanations, not based on divine gods.

Quote

We will then complete our writing and grant all you ask. Many others besides you will find these reasonings useful, and especially those who have but recently made acquaintance with the true story of nature and **those who are attached to pursuits which go deeper than any part of ordinary education.**

...

For in the study of nature we must not conform to empty assumptions and arbitrary laws, but follow the promptings of the facts; for our life has no need now of unreason and false opinion; our one need is untroubled existence

Post by “ReiWolfWoman” of April 19, 2026 at 10:56 AM

You have all collectively answered this question quite in depth and contemplatively. Would he also consider the financial cost to the government a wise use of its money? Does that depend on the possibility for that money to actually bring Epicurean pleasure to other citizens and people? Or would it's probable use for something else make space travel more beneficial?

Post by “Joshua” of April 19, 2026 at 12:17 PM

That's a somewhat difficult question. Ancient Rome is usually credited with the first invention of what we now call public welfare, which for them was the grain dole; the 'bread' in 'bread and circuses'. In Greece, citizens that did not own land and thus could not support themselves were in the best case sent away to found a colony. In the worst case they were sold into slavery to settle their debts.

State coffers in antiquity were generally lavished on land and naval defense, on temples and palaces, on public festivals, or on grand engineering projects. Herodotus credits the Samians with three such public projects; the tunnel of Eupalinos, the man-made breakwaters that

circumscribed the harbor at what is now called Pythagoreio, and the Temple of Hera, which was then the largest in the Greek world.

Everything about currency, taxation, and public expenditure has changed transformatively since then.

The problem is further compounded by the argument made in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that investment in the space program also boosted development in adjacent fields like satellite communication and navigation, in rocketry for wartime applications, and in the advancements in materials science and computer science which we all rely on everyday.

These are all issues that can be placed by modern individuals under an Epicurean lens, but which Epicurus himself would not have been well-equipped to discuss himself. When Lucian narrates a space voyage in his *True Story*, it's a farcical fantasy written to satirize the absurd travelogues that were being written by his contemporaries.

That is perhaps not the answer you were looking for!

Post by "Cassius" of April 19, 2026 at 3:15 PM

[Quote from ReiWolfWoman](#)

You have all collectively answered this question quite in depth and contemplatively. Would he also consider the financial cost to the government a wise use of its money? Does that depend on the possibility for that money to actually bring Epicurean pleasure to other citizens and people? Or would it's probable use for something else make space travel more beneficial?

As Joshua indicated the question of what an Epicurean would consider is a wide one. There is no "universal Epicurean" who would follow a single analysis, and when you extrapolate out to a government and taxation and use of tax dollars you're incorporating huge numbers of contextual presumptions.

Probably the presumption that's driving the question is the consideration of "other people" and what is of benefit to them.

Here the conversation usually turns to the general concensus that Epicurean philosophy is not Benthamite Utilitarianism. The idea that there is a "greatest good for the greatest number" might be something an individual Epicurean would choose to adopt, but it's not something that Epicurus discusses as called for by his philosophy.

Epicurus reasons from a point of view of pleasure of the individual, and to the individual's friends because the friends are of value to the individual. How far out that circle of concern extends is going to be contextual. Clearly it can be very wide - Diogenes of Oinoanda specifically mentions strangers and future citizens - but I would say that Epicurus would emphasize the contextuality of it all, as there is no universal duty to humanity in general as an abstraction. Epicurus deals with real people in real situations and categorial imperatives or idealism separated from reality is very far from the way he looks at things.

Post by “ReiWolfWoman” of April 20, 2026 at 1:12 PM

Excellent points. I guess it is merely conjecture. We can glean what he valued for himself and his friends, which includes both spectacle and smaller pleasures and needs, but a cost-benefit analysis he would advise a ruler to perform, or that he made for himself and his friends, is difficult to decipher. He did value ethical action, not for itself but as a method of experiencing pleasure and good and diminishing pain, so I do see an argument for both public works and spectacle in what I've read so far. But you seem to be saying that weighing one public work/spectacle against another isn't clear.

Post by “Cassius” of April 20, 2026 at 1:16 PM

[Quote from ReiWolfWoman](#)

But you seem to be saying that weighing one public work/spectacle against another isn't clear.

Rather than saying not clear I would say it is always contextually relative and the answer for any individual situation is going to require evaluation of all the facts of that situation. So I would see this as an example where the hypothetical question require a close examination of the details of a given situation.

Post by “Godfrey” of April 20, 2026 at 2:33 PM

And that given situation always includes the personal pleasure/pain of the person doing the evaluating. The internal situation of this individual consists of a variety of factors, and these may change over time or in relation to external circumstances.

Personal responsibility isn't for the faint of heart.

Post by “Eikadistes” of April 20, 2026 at 2:39 PM

[Quote from ReiWolfWoman](#)

We can glean what he valued for himself and his friends [...] but a cost-benefit analysis he would advise a ruler to perform

This is one of the primary differences in the flavors of ancient Epicurean Philosophy versus contemporary Utilitarianism, both being hedonistic, but with different emphases on the happiness of an association of friends versus the collective happiness of the masses. We'll probably find tremendous overlap with both, since the flavor of Epicurean hedonism understands that one's own happiness depends upon the cultivation of friendship and long-term security in society. To my mind, both Hérmakhos and Diogénes of Oinóanda (at least) convey the importance of contributing to a stable society. Observing peaceful relations and acting justly are fundamental to Epicurean ethics.

Post by “Cassius” of April 20, 2026 at 4:19 PM

[Quote from Eikadistes](#)

This is one of the primary differences in the flavors of ancient Epicurean Philosophy versus contemporary Utilitarianism, both being hedonistic, but with different emphases on the happiness of an association of friends versus the collective happiness of the masses

And I would not hesitate to say that this is both (1) an example of regression in philosophy over 2000 years and (2) why I would be cautious about endorsing Bentham or applying the label of "hedonism" to Epicurus overbroadly. Epicurus was firm that there is no supernatural basis for considering everyone the equivalent of a brother and sister, or reason to ignore that in reality many people hate each other. No one wins any points in heaven or anywhere else for getting

themselves killed in the name of abstract notions of the brotherhood of all men. Rather, just as almost happened to the Epicurean in Lucian's Alexander story, it is very easy to get oneself killed unnecessarily if you ignore the realities of your context. In the meantime while we work for better contexts it pays to pay attention to the reality of how far your circle of friends really extends.