

# Epicurus vs Schopenhauer - Orientation Discussion

Post by "Cassius" of June 8, 2026 at 6:02 PM

The topic of Schopenhauer is of some interest in comparison with Epicurus. Clearly Schopenhauer had some things to say of which Epicurus would approve, but it is arguable that Schopenhauer said much more of which Epicurus would disapprove. Our forum is targeted to those who are not professional philosophers, so to kick off the discussion I found two basic videos which I viewed and found to be extremely informative. Of course everyone should ask "Are they accurate?" so to the extent group members are familiar with these issues please comment if you think the videos are inaccurate. I found them extremely helpful, and presuming they are true, overwhelmingly clear about many basic differences between Epicurus and Schopenhauer, starting with basic assessments of the value of human life.

This first video is focused exclusively on Schopenhauer, and the narrator speaks such good German that it would be a pity to find out that it's not accurate. As far as I can tell, it's balanced and right on point. I'll state this caveat about both videos in this post: This is not an Anti-Schopenhauer forum, and our purpose here is not to condemn Schopenhauer but to use the information we learn in better understanding Epicurus:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R50MI4VXtOI>

After watching this first issues the good parts and the bad parts are pretty clear. The next video expands on these issues by explaining Nietzsche's criticisms of Schopenhauer. This is not a Nietzsche forum and our purpose here is not to become Nietzscheans - only to take from Nietzsche what we find supportive of our understanding of Epicurus. I find it starkly revealing compelling, but let us know in the thread if you think it's inaccurate:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYtMZDgl\\_NA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYtMZDgl_NA)

I'm glad this topic has come up because in the space of these two relatively short videos I think we find a dramatic illustration of many of the issues we all have to decide in how we interpret Epicurus. To repeat here, our purpose in this forum is not to become experts on other philosophies, but to use the controversies they explore to deepen our understanding of Epicurus.

And in the case of these two videos here, I find that they *tremendously* deepen my understanding of numerous very key issues that were already inherent in what Epicurus was teaching.

## Post by “Raphael Raul” of June 8, 2026 at 9:21 PM

Hello, Cassius, I came upon this thread you just posted. Schopenhauer is a philosopher who intrigues me with his main idea of the blind force of "The Will", a force that is outside of the phenomenal world of matter, a noumenal realm outside of our understanding. I actually brought him up in the Sunday meeting about six weeks ago. Yes, there are a few ideas in Schopenhauer that align with Epicureanism, although certainly not the one I mentioned above. I will view the video and leave a comment at some point...

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## Post by “Cassius” of June 8, 2026 at 9:45 PM

Thanks Raphael.

### [Quote from Raphael Raul](#)

Schopenhauer is a philosopher who intrigues me with his main idea of the blind force of "The Will", a force that is outside of the phenomenal world of matter, a noumenal realm outside of our understanding.

What you mentioned is featured in the videos - especially in the second one where Nietzsche identifies this as a variation of Platonic idealism or contention that there is a "true world" or "real world" beyond this one, and to that extent it's hard to see that as compatible in any way with the Epicurean view.

What has confused me for so long is that apparently Nietzsche started out a big fan of Schopenhauer but then reversed his position by the end of his life. In long years past I did not read much of Nietzsche other than "Thus Spake Zarathustra." At that time other than a few bits here and there that stood on their own, I hardly understood a thing he was saying. I had no clue whether the "last man" was supposed to be good or bad!

To the extent that the second video is correct lots if not all of the dispute comes down to the dispute as to whether we should affirm THIS world and THIS life as of supreme value to us, or go with Schopenhauer and see this life as a sickness or disease. It would seem that Nietzsche saw that "disease" point of view as a thread going all the way back at least to Socrates and Plato, continuing to today and leading to nihilism. I think I would pretty strongly share that view, but I would of course exempt Epicurus from that criticism. I would say that it is clear that Epicurus affirms this life and shares most of Nietzsche's attitude about making the most of this life as the only one we have. I have never much cared for the terminology of "will to power,"

but I can see parallels between that and Epicurus' extended view of the nature of "pleasure."

I think you will find those videos to be very well done. It's unfortunate that the second one contains some low-key advertising but I think it has the more valuable content of the two because of the way it frames the issues.

If anyone thinks they have time for only one of the two videos I would strongly suggest the second one on the Nietzsche criticisms. The strong parallels between Nietzsche's criticisms of Socrates and Plato will jump out at you as very similar to what most of us see Epicurus doing. The second video is helpful to us on its own, even without considering its relationship to Schopenhauer.

A LOT of issues come down to one's basic attitude toward life: Should we affirm life or deny life? I think the answer is clear but these videos help define the question by showing how two philosophers can disagree so starkly.

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### **Post by "Raphael Raul" of June 8, 2026 at 10:31 PM**

Also, I would like to add that, as you know, Schopenhauer had a great influence on Sigmund Freud through the idea of "The Will," which, in turn, led to Freud's discovery of the unconscious forces beneath consciousness. So, in a way, Freud somewhat confirmed the existence of an unseen force that compels our actions, which psychotherapy tries to unravel from a patient. As you mentioned, Schopenhauer influenced Nietzsche, even though he departed from him by affirming life rather than denying it. And Schopenhauer had a great influence on a whole list of artists, including Richard Wagner and Thomas Mann.

...I will watch the videos tonight with my usual hot chocolate with Irish cream....have a good night.

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### **Post by "Elli" of June 11, 2026 at 3:08 PM**

Warm greetings to all epicurean friends 😊

I would like to add my own small Greek contribution to this discussion, since we are speaking about Epicurus and a philosophy that blossomed on Greek soil and continues to illuminate minds to this day. The relationship between Epicurus and Schopenhauer becomes much clearer when viewed through Nietzsche, who acts both as a bridge and as a boundary. Epicurus and

Nietzsche, despite their differences, meet in a profound affirmation of life, of this world, of the body, and of the present moment. Schopenhauer, by contrast, places the center of reality in a blind, noumenal Will outside the world of experience, a move that both Epicurus and Nietzsche would see as a retreat from life rather than an embrace of it. Both agree that the world we live in is the only world we have, that meaning is not hidden behind things but found within them, that suffering is a natural part of existence rather than a metaphysical curse, and that wisdom is not an escape from life but the art of living it. Epicurus expresses this through pleasure as the natural guide and the removal of fear, while Nietzsche expresses it through amor fati that is, the love for this one and only life that has been given to us, and through the creative affirmation of existence. Different vocabulary, same orientation: life is to be affirmed, not denied.

Schopenhauer, on the other hand, sees the world as fundamentally painful, life as a disease, and morality as renunciation. This stance stands in direct opposition to Epicurean teaching, according to which pleasure is natural, pain is manageable, fear is unnecessary, and life is pleasant only when it contains prudence, beauty, and justice; if any of these is missing, life cannot be pleasant. And here lies the crucial difference: Epicurus never enters the dilemma “to live or not to live.” For the wise person, life is not a burden and death is not an evil; the issue is not quantity but quality, not “more” but “more pleasant.” As he writes in the Letter to Menoeceus, *the wise person neither despises life nor fears not living, for life is no burden to him and not living is no evil*. The care of living well and dying well is one and the same, and anyone who claims that “it would be better never to have been born” either does not truly believe it -- for if he did, he would already have left life -- or is joking about matters that do not admit of jokes. This clarity, this absence of tragic posturing, this simplicity of truth is what makes Epicurus so different from Schopenhauer.

Nietzsche initially admired Schopenhauer, just as he admired Wagner, but later broke away from both when he realized that each, in his own way, continued the Platonic-Socratic tradition of devaluing this world and seeking a “true” world behind appearances. Epicurus had already dismantled this Platonic illusion two millennia earlier, insisting that there is no world beyond this one and that wisdom lies in living well here and now !

And perhaps here lies an even deeper difference that is rarely discussed: the figure of the mother in the life of the philosopher. Epicurus is the only one of the three who left us a letter to his mother -a letter so balanced, so gentle, so beautifully composed, precisely because their relationship was like that from the beginning. There was no trauma, no conflict, no darkness that needed to be transformed into a philosophical system. Instead, there was stability, warmth, and clarity, and this is why Epicurus’ philosophy is serene, grounded, and free from existential drama. Schopenhauer and Nietzsche carry within them the shadow of a difficult maternal presence; Epicurus carries the light of a mother who did not wound him. And this, simple as it may seem, changes one’s entire stance toward life. 😊

## Post by “Cassius” of June 11, 2026 at 4:13 PM

Thank you for taking the time to write that Elli!

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## Post by “Martin” of June 11, 2026 at 8:59 PM

Quote

Epicurus is the only one of the three who I left us a letter to his mother

Letters of Schopenhauer to his mother still exist (but they are reportedly not nice).

[Die Schopenhauers: Der Familien-Briefwechsel von Adele, Arthur, Heinrich Floris und Johanna Schopenhauer : Lütkehaus, Ludger: Amazon.de: Books](#)

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## Post by “Elli” of June 12, 2026 at 7:59 AM

Dear friend Martin hi! 😊 Thanks for your comment.

What I meant is not that Schopenhauer left no letters to his mother, but that Epicurus is the only one of the three - Epicurus, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche - who left us a letter *of that tone, that emotional quality, and that human clarity*. Schopenhauer's letters to his mother certainly exist, but they are famously tense, cold, and full of conflict. None of them resemble the letter we have from Epicurus. ❤️

Lets' see again the letter of Epicurus to His Mother (Diogenes of Oenoanda fr. 125-126)

“...you must think carefully and with certainty about these matters. For indeed, the images (in dreams) of things not present to our sight, when they reach the soul, fill it with the greatest fear. But if you examine the whole issue attentively, you will understand that these images appear entirely the same - whether of things absent or present. For since they are not perceived by touch but by the mind, they possess the same power with regard to what is not present as they do to what is present. Therefore, mother, do not let these things frighten you. You must not consider your dreams about me as ominous. On the contrary, think that day by day, as I acquire something good, I advance more and more toward happiness. For not small nor fruitless are the things that make our condition resemble that of the gods and show that

mortality does not make us inferior to the incorruptible and blessed nature. For as long as we live, we rejoice in the same way as the gods... ..equally so, if it perceives diminution. But if it no longer has sensation, how could it be diminished? Think of me, mother, as surrounded by such blessings, always happy; and take pride in what I do. And, for Zeus' sake, show greater restraint with the money you constantly send me. I do not want you to lack anything so that I may have more; better that I lack and you do not. Besides, I live comfortably in every respect, thanks to my friends and to the money my father continually sends me. Recently, in fact, he sent me nine minas through Cleon. Therefore none of you should worry about me, but rather support one another..."

The above letter of Epicurus to his mother is one of those texts you do not simply read...you *hear* it. You hear the tone of his voice, the calmness, the tenderness, the absence of any trace of irony or severity. Here, he does not speak as a philosopher, but as a son. His mother is anxious, troubled by dreams that frighten her, sending him money not out of duty, but out of that primordial maternal need to be present, to protect, to support. And Epicurus does not reject her, does not scold her, does not push her away. He speaks to her in a way only someone raised in emotional safety can speak: with clarity, with serenity, with that quiet strength that does not need to raise its voice to be heard.

He explains to her that the images of the mind, whether of things present or absent, have the same power, and that she must not let her dreams terrify her. This is not philosophical instruction; it is emotional regulation. It is the adult son who can contain his mother's fear without being swallowed by it. It is the mark of a secure bond, a bond not built on guilt, fear, or dependency, but on a deep, steady, human presence. And when he asks her to be more sparing with the money she sends him, he does not do so out of pride or self-sufficiency. He does it because he has internalized a maternal figure he does not need to protect from himself, but rather to relieve from her excessive generosity. It is the moment when care becomes mutual, when love matures and is no longer one-sided.

And at the end, when he says: "Think of me as surrounded by blessings and be proud of what I do," we see that he is not asking for validation. He is asking for recognition, the most mature form of connection between mother and son. In this small letter, it becomes clear that Epicurus' philosophy was not born from trauma but from safety. It is not a defense against life; it is the natural continuation of a childhood in which life was not an enemy. This is why his philosophy is serene, earthly, human: the philosophy of a man who grew up in light.

And here lies the answer to why women flourished in his Garden. This should not surprise us. Epicurus carried within him a maternal figure who was warm, steady, non-guilt-inducing, and non-threatening. A man raised in such a way does not fear women, does not belittle them, does not idealize them, does not exclude them. That is why in the Garden women were equals, participated in teaching, lived alongside men, had a voice, a role and a presence. The Garden was the first philosophical space in antiquity where women truly flourished. Because only a man who does not fear his mother, does not fear women, does not fear the body, does not fear the life itself.

The mother is the first mirror of the child. Through her gaze he learns whether the world is habitable or hostile, whether life is a gift or a threat, whether existence is joy or burden. And before a son even meets his father, he meets him through her: through the way she speaks to him, the way she thinks of him, the way she carries him within herself. If the mother does not poison, does not seek revenge, does not demand alliances, then the son can see both parents as human beings and not as opposing camps. And then he learns something few people ever learn in life: that love does not require perfection, it requires presence and mutual care. It requires being there, not being flawless. It requires truth, not roles. It requires people with feelings, not statues.

And when parents, even separated, remain united in their role, when they do not poison one another in the child's mind, when they do not ask the child to become judge or ally, then the son receives the rare gift of loving both without guilt, without fear, without division. He gains the freedom to see both the good and the flawed - because no one is perfect- without needing to choose sides. He gains the ability to love human beings, not ideals. And this is the foundation of a healthy soul.

If Epicurus is the example of light, other philosophers show how the childhood relationship with the mother can become shadow, wound, or void.

- Socrates carried the hardness of a mother who worked endlessly as a midwife, in poverty and without tenderness; and his philosophy became an exercise in death.
- Plato grew up in the coldness of an aristocratic mother who demanded perfection; and his philosophy became an escape from the world.
- Aristotle grew up orphaned, without a maternal figure to internalize; and his philosophy became the logical organization of a world that never embraced him.
- Schopenhauer grew up with a mother who rejected him; and his philosophy became suffering.
- Nietzsche grew up in suffocating religious austerity; and his philosophy became a cry of transcendence.
- Kant grew up in moralistic coldness; and his philosophy became duty without warmth.

And then, within this panorama, Epicurus shines as the exception. His philosophy is not defense, not reaction, not wound. It is the natural continuation of a childhood in which life was not an enemy. It is the thought of a man who grew up in pleasure —and offered pleasure. That is why women flourished only in the Garden. Because only there was a man who had learned from childhood that life is not a threat, but a GREAT gift. And only someone who learned from his mother clarity and presence could teach others that eudaemonia is not a theory, it is a way of living. 😊