

Why was Epicurus condemned to the sixth circle of hell in Dante's Divine Comedy?

Post by “Hiram” of January 7, 2019 at 10:55 AM

https://www.reddit.com/r/Epicureanism...ixth_circle_of/

Post by “Matt” of January 7, 2019 at 11:22 AM

It is clear, in my opinion, that Epicurus was condemned entirely due to his position on a non-providential deity.

I don't even think his hedonism was enough to cause such a condemnation, since even the Biblical narrative (especially the Hebrew Bible) endorsed material pleasure (within the scope of the Law). After all, the Israelites sought the land of Milk and Honey to increase and multiply in.

That does sound pretty pleasant.

It was the fact that his position on the gods flew in the face of a providential and active God. The one thing that is required in being a Jew or Christian, is to believe in that specific deity. This position could never be accepted by any theist that believed in a deity that had a purpose for life. Thus, he was condemned by Jewish and Christian commentators as one who has committed an unpardonable sin with his doctrine.

However....

Epicurus did not live in the time of Jesus. No Christian should condemn or judge him as though he is damned....they can judge his philosophy, but the man himself (and the state of his soul) accordingly would be off limits. As ALL people should be. Dante was without compassion and well out of his lane to prejudge.

Post by “Cassius” of January 7, 2019 at 11:39 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/665-why-was-epicurus-condemned-to-the-sixth-circle-of-hell-in-dante-s-divine-comedy/>

Ok I guess to be rigorous i have to say I disagree with LD's post because of the "entirely due to" clause! 😊

Definitely the denial of providence was huge, but I think the denial of an afterlife probably was at least as practical a reason for Epicurus to be condemned by religion, at least by the "priestly caste" part of religion, which uses punishment/reward in the afterlife as stick / carrot.

I've always wanted to read Dante but never found the time. I remember DeWitt referring to the punishment as more than just being in the sixth circle, but also including something about souls being confined in their coffins with their dead bodies (?)

Post by “Matt” of January 7, 2019 at 11:51 AM

I would probably avoid Dante entirely! A trip into the mind of a masochist.

I think I summed up my position solely on the idea that a providential deity is the bare minimum for belief within Jewish and Christian thought. For even the Sadducees, who did not believe in an afterlife, believed at the very minimum that the God of Moses and the Law was a providential one.

But obviously as we move away from the bare minimum, the paths diverge further as we approach a disbelief in the afterlife, miracles etc.

But ultimately Dante was a man following the perceptions of the times. His Inferno has painted a picture of Hell that has unfortunately endured. Albeit, far from the Biblical account. Placing anyone in Hell is beyond any Christian's authority IMO.

Post by “Eikadistes” of August 16, 2025 at 10:10 PM

Speak of the devil: <https://www.twentiers.com/commedia/>