

## EPICURUS AND HIS THEORIES

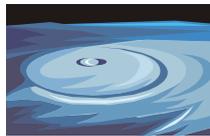
Epicurus was a Greek philosopher who was born on the 4<sup>th</sup> February 341 BCE (BC). He died in 270 BCE. (BCE means Before Common Era – it's the same as BC.) Epicurus was the founder of a school of philosophy known as Epicureanism.

For Epicurus, the one thing he said we should all strive for is a happy, tranquil life of peace and freedom, and an absence of pain. He said that we could all attain this by living a self-sufficient life, surrounded by friends.

He said that pleasure and pain are the measures of what is good and evil.

Death is the end of the body and soul and should, therefore, not be feared; the gods do not reward or punish humans.

The universe is infinite and eternal.



Events in the world are based on the motions and interactions of atoms moving in empty space. (Yes, believe it or not, they actually had a basic idea of particle physics and quantum physics!)



**The School** Epicurus' school was based in the garden of his house. People just called it 'The Garden'. His school was the first of the Greek schools to allow women and slaves to attend.

A sign on the gate said, 'Stranger, here you will do well to tarry; here our highest good is pleasure.' Epicurus always said that friendship was an important ingredient to happiness, and the school was more like a community of friends. He said that the minimization of harm to oneself and others is the way to maximize happiness. "It is impossible to live a pleasant life without living wisely and well and justly, agreeing neither to harm or be harmed."

*(Do you think Epicurus was right about our friends? How important are your friends to you? Do you think he was right about not harming ourselves and others? How might you harm yourself? Do you think this idea might affect the way you treat people? Why/why not?)*



Epicurus was one of the first Greeks to break from the god-fearing and god-worshipping tradition. He said the gods, (and, remember, the Greeks had many gods), do not punish evil and reward goodness. He said that the gods really don't concern themselves about humans.

"It is not the man who denies the gods worshipped by the multitude, who is *impious*, but he who affirms of the gods what the multitude believes about them." *(Discuss with your teacher and class what this means. What does 'impious' mean? Use a thesaurus.)*

Epicurus said that, when we die, we don't know about it, so we can't suffer once it happens. "When a man dies, he does not feel the pain of death because he no longer is and therefore feels nothing."

He said that we could achieve a state of tranquillity that was free from the fear of death and punishment by the gods. When we do not suffer pain and fear, (physical and mental), we are no longer in need of pleasure, and we enter a 'perfect mental peace'.

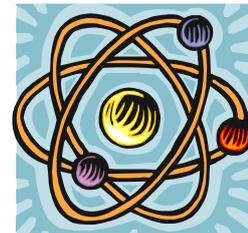
The Epicurean epitaph:

I was not; I was; I am not; I do not care.

*(What do you think of that? Discuss it with your teacher and friends. What is an epitaph? What does the Epicurean epitaph mean?)*

**Science:** Epicurus is an important person in science and experiments because he said that nothing should be believed, except one that has been tested through direct observation and logical deduction. He had many ideas about nature and physics which were way before his time.

Epicurus believed that the world was made up of indivisible little bits of matter (atoms), flying through empty space. Everything that happens is because of atoms colliding and rebounding and becoming entangled with each other. (This is particle physics! How did he know this at the time he was alive? Incredible!)



He said that atoms can swerve in a random motion. (Quantum physics! How did he know?!)

Epicurus argued that the universe must be unlimited in size. If it was limited in size, Epicurus said, you would be able to go to the end of it and stick your fist out. Where your fist stuck out would be the new 'limit' of the universe. Of course, you could go on doing this.



*(What do you think? Do you think the universe has an end - a 'jam jar universe' - or that there is no end? Of course, we live on a planet with limits, so it is difficult for us to imagine anywhere without limits.)*

If the universe is unlimited, then Epicurus believed that there must also be an unlimited number of atoms and an unlimited amount of space for them to move around in.

Epicurus thought that atoms had a natural movement which was downward. He said that, "all things travel downward - even though there is no bottom to the universe."

*(How do we know that he was wrong about this one? Explain why things do fall.)*

Epicurus said: "All things in the world are atoms, linked temporarily in constant motion. Understanding science, i.e. how nature works, can overcome superstition and irrational fear."



*(‘Walking under a ladder brings bad luck’ – Maths can disprove this superstition. You could walk under 1000 ladders and nothing will happen. You might walk under one ladder and a pot of paint might fall on your head. This is PROBABILITY. Find out how probability works.)*

*(‘Bats can get tangled in your hair when they fly in the dark’. We now know that bats have a very sophisticated sonar system that allows them to avoid thin twigs in pitch darkness. Not much chance of them flying into your thick head, is there?)*

*Can you think of any more superstitions or irrational fears that can be disproved by science or maths?)*

It seems that Epicurus realised that natural evolution had occurred, from the beginning of the world to the emergence of human society. (How did he work that out? We didn't really know about it until Darwin wrote about it.) Epicurus explained why such things like teeth were designed in a particular way to do a particular job by evolution, and not by a god designing them.



*(Do you agree with Epicurus and Darwin on evolution or not? Why/why not?)*

One of the things that Epicurus wanted to do was to get rid of the old myths by explaining that natural things happened in the world for natural reasons, and not because they were the work of the gods. He said that terrible weather, lightning, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions happened because of natural scientific causes, and not because the gods were angry with us.



*(Do you agree with Epicurus on this one or not? Why/why not?)*

Some scholars think that Epicurus' ideas of 'gods' are just in the mind of humans, who imagine that their lives are simply ideas of the perfect way to live.

*(What do you think of that?)*

Epicurus said that all of our knowledge comes from our senses. He says that we can trust our senses when we use them properly. Sensations give us information about the outside world. They don't make judgements for us, but just 'tell it like it is'. We must make our own judgements based upon what they tell us.

I saw a sign recently that said: 'We can only see with open eyes. We can only hear with open ears. We can only learn with an open mind.' Thanks to whoever designed the poster sign.

*(What do you think the sign is trying to tell us?)*

**Quotes:** Here are a few quotes from the great man himself. *(Read them one by one and discuss what you think Epicurus meant by them.)*

It is not so much our friends' help that helps us, as the confidence of their help.

Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not; remember that what you now have was once among the things you only hoped for.

You don't develop courage by being happy in your relationships every day. You develop it by surviving difficult times and challenging adversity.



Nothing is enough for the man to whom enough is too little.

If God listened to the prayers of men, all men would quickly have perished: for they are forever praying for evil against one another.

If thou wilt make a man happy, add not unto his riches but take away from his desires.

Not what we have, but what we enjoy, constitutes our abundance.

Of all the things which wisdom provides to make us entirely happy, much the greatest is the possession of friendship.

The greater the difficulty, the more the glory in surmounting it.

It is folly for a man to pray to the gods for that which he has the power to obtain by himself.



It is impossible to live a pleasant life without living wisely and well and justly. And it is impossible to live wisely and well and justly without living a pleasant life.

*(Now go to the next page and look at the ideas in each of the quotes. Do you think they are good advice to someone like you? Which ones will you follow?)*



Say, "I can," more often than, "I can't."

See problems as challenges.

Choose positive-thinking friends.



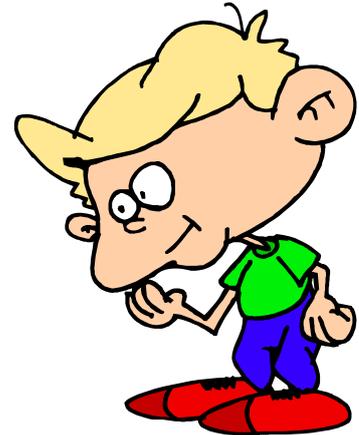
Find good in any situation.



Think happy thoughts.



Stop worrying, start enjoying.



Expect good things to happen.



Live a healthy lifestyle.



Look upon yourself as a winner.

Give yourself a pat on the back.



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