

Paper 2
Plotinus and Epicurus
HUM 200

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Plotinus and Epicurus have different view on how to live a life. To Plotinus, ideas are the goal, and some ideas are better than others. To Epicurus, things can only be judged in relation to how they are perceived.

Epicurus has a selectively hedonist view on life. He discusses this in his letter to Menoeceus. In that letter, he says “the end of all our actions is to be free from pain and fear.” His is goal then, a life filled with pleasures and free from pain, but is he asking for a life of drinking, feasts and women? No. Epicurus calls us to “not choose every pleasure”, but to pass up a pleasure if waiting will lead to better pleasure. He also teaches to pass over pleasures if they result in pain in the end.

Plotinus has an absolutist view. Good things are perfect things, with “infinite the glory.” Critically, Plotinus has Beauty is “not merely resident [as an attribute or addition] in some beautiful object.” Unlike Epicurus, (flawed) human perception is not a factor into whether an object is good or evil.

One of the things central to both writers is discussion of the Gods. Epicurus claims that God is “s a living being immortal and blessed, according to the notion of a god indicated by the common sense of mankind.” God is not a complicated model of perfection, it is the God in the vision of the everyman. Plotinus shows less of a belief in gods and more of a belief in their literary utility as the example of and ideal.

A strange belief of Epicurus is his view on death. Since he finds value in the pursuit of pleasurable sensations and the avoidance of pain, death (the cessation of both) is neither good nor bad. Death lies outside of his morality system, and therefore, is neither a goal or a terror. This constrasts with Plotinus’s view

that introspection and intellectual thought are the right actions in life. If you were to die, and cease all thought, you would be unable to follow the gods. For Plotinus, therefore, death is a terror.

It is interesting to consider the previous two points in relation to each other. Epicurus both claims God is a living being, and also claims that after you die, you cease to feel at all. This is not the heaven or hell promised christians, or even the River Styx promised from the pantheon. Both authors have the same religious view on death, even though one claims that the gods live as common sense would have them: following the myths.

Both writers have views on the proper way to lead a life, although the fundamentally disagree on the direction. Plotius hopes for a inward, intellectual ideal, where Epicurus values things only on their ability to cause pleasure and avoid pain. Both continue to have a following in the direction of people today, and will continue to inspire people's action into the future.