

Thoughts and Discussion on Organizing Epicurean Community

Post by “Pacatus” of September 16, 2022 at 5:04 PM

I re-read what is here, and I’m not sure what the point is. Why is some further organization/organizing needed? Or wanted? How organized is the Garden supposed to be (e.g., to meet modern needs)?

Some random first thoughts, and perhaps hard questions that might influence, in part, what kind of further organizing/outreach you want to do – and for what purpose (recognizing my admitted ignorance):

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Do you just want to attract more people? How “catholic” are you willing to be to attract people who might not find their way here now? Versus keeping (and insisting on) a more pure understanding of Epicureanism?

Is part of your aim to compete with Crespo’s group, or others? Or to help people who may not end up actually becoming “members” – or may just hang out to absorb whatever teaching they can and that feeds them? Are you looking to expand the Garden only to potential “true believers” (True Epicureans™). Or to broaden the appeal to those who might never go there? (I hasten to add that neither is, from my view, invalid.)

How will you reach busy people in a hyper-texting world, who may not want to delve further into the original texts or scholarly discussion? Do you want to? (I remind myself that doing philosophy in Epicurus’ sense was living a way of life based on certain therapeutic tenets, not necessarily continuing intellectual exploration.)

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A possible analogy: When Arrian wanted to expand the reach of Epictetus’ Stoic teachings, he did not call upon everyone to read the extensive Discourses (even in chewable chunks); he compiled the Enchiridion as an epitome. The Enchiridion is a very popular book. I’m sure many people allow it to inform their lives, and read maybe a little more about Stoicism or neo-Stoicism – but not much else. Bite-size daily meditation books are also popular (there are even AA meditation books for agnostics and atheists to practice “one day at a time”).

Epicurus produced his epitome, and we have some good translations (and Cassius’ “Elemental Epicureanism”), but even that may not be sufficiently accessible to the busy modern reader. There are the PD and Vatican Sayings, bite-size enough for sure: but I note how much discussion takes place on here on questions of translation and interpretation. So anything like

the Enchiridion (combining various sources) would need to be put into easy modern English that the reader can interpret (and re-interpret) as needed according to their own life needs. [A foundational assumption here is that Epicureanism is a sound – if not the soundest – way to meet such needs. I agree.]

At bottom, this is a good place that people find their way to now – and that may really be sufficient. Further outreach involves advertising. My suggestion would be to publish something like the Enchiridion or a daily meditation book that is a) non-argumentative (vis-à-vis other philosophies or religions), b) easy to absorb in small bites, c) is inviting but not insistent on any further study/participation, and d) presents the Garden as a safe place, not a strict creedal “church” (you guys already do a good job on that score here ☐ – or I wouldn’t be here at all).

I want to note that even allowing a broadly “catholic” membership does not mean, cannot mean, allowing disruptive argument from, say, neo-Epicureans who want to insist on their own way. Some disagreement is fine, but not disruption – that destroys the Garden itself.

Also, unlike Kalosyni, I notice that I have used the second-person plural here; in retrospect there are two reasons: 1) based on my personal history, I always avoid declaring “membership” and 2) I’m not convinced that what is here, as it is (and how people get here), is not good enough.

My bias is: I wish I had an Epicurean Enchiridion. I basically use the Vatican Sayings (selected randomly) and a Taoist daily meditation book. But it would take, I think, at least a year of diligent writing/editing to produce.

I may have misunderstood this whole thing. If so, sincere apologies ...