

Epicureanism as the spiritual essence or 'religion' of an entire community

Post by “Cassius” of October 4, 2023 at 9:00 AM

Some targeted comments:

[Quote from Don](#)

While I remain unconvinced and skeptical of much of these alleged connections among Epicureanism, Judaism, and Christianity, I also don't see why it should be important other than for historical curiosity. It's not as if we who find value in Epicurus's philosophy will suddenly see the light, so to speak, and convert to Christian or Jewish practice.

I agree with Don that the interest is not at all something that should motivate us to be more embracing of Christianity or Judaism, any more than those cults embrace Epicurus. But this is one of those areas where people differ, and I would include myself in the list of those who was so indoctrinated into Christianity at an early age that it remains fascinating, even later in life, to explore the parallels. And as a manner of exploring the learning about Epicurus, these parallels are going to be of interest to many, and probably a majority, of people who investigate Epicurus, as they provide familiar landmarks during the exploration.

[Quote from Don](#)

I would quibble with the formulation "living your life to the fullest," although I realize that's a popular way of phrasing it. From my perspective, Epicurus's philosophy is about experiencing the available pleasure at every moment of our lives, every moment of our existence.

I see nothing contradictory between those two sentences, but the twist probably comes with the word "available." I don't think Don suggests that you just sit and wait to see what pleasure falls in your lap, but unless you make clear that it is indeed appropriate to go out and seek pleasure, then many people will misunderstand this as a Buddhist-sounding call to retreat inward.

[Quote from Don](#)

"Living life to the fullest" sounds too much like the skydiving, popular culture "carpe diem" "fear of missing out" "you only live once" idea. While those experiences may be part of Epicurus's philosophy, it's not the primary message.

This is where the contradiction comes in. I do think "you only live once" when properly understood is Epicurean, and I do think it is pretty much the primary message.

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

When the ancient Epicureans rejected luxury they automatically and unambiguously rejected political ambition since you didn't get to have the one without the other. If you oppose luxury you have to embrace minimalism and if you are skeptical toward political ambitions you have to embrace the modesty of a life with limited public exposure within the confines of a small community of friends.

Now here I have to part with Peter somewhat. I don't think the Epicureans reject luxury and embrace minimalism per se, and I think that is a huge mistake of modern Epicureans to imply that minimalism should be the norm. I think the message is that you cultivate your surroundings and adapt to circumstances. You work the fields in the summer and feast in the fall. You intelligently embrace luxury where it can be enjoyed without pain that outweighs the benefits of it. You savor the little that you may have when luxury is not available, but you never aim at either minimalism or luxury as ends in themselves. There is no other word that describes the end of life given by Nature other than "Pleasure."

As to pleasure being the only description of the end: (*"Strip mankind of sensation, and nothing remains; it follows that Nature herself is the judge of that which is in accordance with or contrary to nature. What does Nature perceive or what does she judge of, beside pleasure and pain, to guide her actions of desire and of avoidance?"*)

As to not targeting minimalism or luxury: ([130] *Yet by a scale of comparison and by the consideration of advantages and disadvantages we must form our judgment on all these matters. For the good on certain occasions we treat as bad, and conversely the bad as good. And again independence of desire we think a great good — not that we may at all times enjoy but a few things, but that, if we do not possess many, we may enjoy the few in the genuine persuasion that those have the sweetest pleasure in luxury who least need it, and that all that is natural is easy to be obtained, but that which is superfluous is hard. And so plain savours bring us a pleasure equal to a luxurious diet, when all the pain due to want is removed; and bread and water produce the highest pleasure, when one who needs them puts them to his lips. [131] To grow accustomed therefore to simple and not luxurious diet gives us health to the full, and makes a man alert for the needful employments of life, and when after long intervals we approach luxuries disposes us better towards them, and fits us to be fearless of fortune.*)