

Epicurean Perspectives on Cultural Conflict

Post by “Daniel” of March 28, 2019 at 11:08 AM

Today there are two prevalent ways of studying moral values. One posits that these can be rationally verified and established: values will be universally valid, and once errors are cleared away it will be a matter merely of distinguishing between right and wrong, good and evil. The alternative way considers that since all values are relative and therefore equivalent, nothing sensible or interesting may be said about them.

There is, however, a third approach. This is genealogical and shows the human, social, philosophical, and religious breeding ground of a certain doctrine: inquires as to the origin of certain ideas; of which type of man they are expression; what it is they reflect—and to where they lead. Any world view is inescapably linked to a particular outlook on man, the world, and history; and, in its turn, it depends on the mental constitution—itsself anchored at a biological level—of the particular people by whom it was created.

This third approach, I claim, is more congruent with Epicurean epistemology, based on the very best evidence one can find, even while admitting that this evidence may be limited and incomplete and subject to revision.

And, of course, it inevitably involves generalizations. Generalization allows humans and animals to recognize the similarities in knowledge acquired in one circumstance, allowing for transfer of knowledge onto new situations. Anecdotal evidence, that is, evidence collected in a casual or informal manner and relying heavily or entirely on personal testimony (“I have a friend who is X”) has very limited value.

So, coming back to our original point of disputation, pray tell me, Oscar, 1/in which Islamic society you think you would gladly live as an Epicurean; and 2/why you have not moved there yet.

By the way, someone who used to idealize the Islamic world over the Judeo-Christian one was Uncle Adolf and it didn't work out so well for anybody. I can also use the Reductio ad Hitlerum, you see 😊

I'm not partial to any of the Abrahamic cults. “The Darkening Age” by Catherine Nixey is a good place to start if one wants to understand what a clash of civilizations the encounter of Athens and Jerusalem ignited.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Darkening_Age

And I don't need to remind you what happened to Spinoza when he started reading Epicurean philosophy...

Judeo-Christianity, the West, has spent the last 500 years trying to become Epicurean or 'modern' (remember "The Swerve"?). Islam has not, and that is the difference.