

Epicurean Philosophy Vs. Humanism

Post by "Cassius" of November 20, 2023 at 2:02 PM

I think your observations are spot on, Titus. If we were to try to really put our fingers on the issue, I think it would be that "Humanism" is essentially Platonic-Aristotelian-Stoic in presuming that there is an ideal form of "the good" somewhere which they can identify and then conform to. And that's where Epicurus takes the fundamentally different position that no such thing exists, and that instead nature gives us only the feelings of pleasure and pain from which to determine what to choose and what to avoid.

Humanists certainly want to be "happy" too, but they have a fundamentally different view of the universe and think that they can identify a single "good" to which they can (and everyone should) conform. Ultimately I don't think the philosophy issue is any more complicated than that.

But on the social level there is an inbuilt absolutism in Platonism - Aristotelianism - Stoicism - Humanism which, when the chips are down, would not make them friendly to Epicurean perspectives.

Most of us are lucky enough to live at a time and place where we can pick and choose our friends and go our own way relatively easily. However I don't think that will remain the case forever. The tensions of the world that we won't discuss due to the politics rule have placed "censorship" issues front and center, and pressures that may be used today for purposes we find agreeable can very easily grow into pressures that can be used against anyone who dissents from the "party line."

And I think one deduction you can make about Epicurean philosophy is that it attracts people who do not adhere to party lines and encourages their independence..

Is that a fatal flaw that doomed organized Epicureanism in the ancient world and dooms to always be like herding cats in the shadows? I don't think so. I think we can reinforce the non political center of the philosophy and form a non political team that can survive even in the face of organized censorship from the opposing schools.

It's probable that certain tactics we associate with opponents of Epicurus, such as organized meetings and support structures, will be needed. But Epicurus built into the philosophy an inherent bias against radical skepticism and radical reductionism, and I think those enable us to find a common ground of core viewpoints that can bring a group of people together at least as well as Humanism or other social organizations.