

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

Post by “Eggplant Wizard” of January 18, 2024 at 11:18 AM

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

Has anybody ever experimented with the idea of Epicureanism as a formal spiritual identity capable of defining entire communities? What would Epicureanism look like if it wasn't merely a brotherhood of friends discussing philosophy but was also a sort of quasi religious worldview with its own intricate rituals, symbols and ceremonies covering every aspect of life?

Like I talked about at length in another thread, I think if Epicureanism had persisted through late antiquity, it could easily have developed overtly "religious" tendencies rivaling the theurgic neoplatonism of Iamblichus, Emperor Julian, Proclus, etc. This is because Epicurean piety already had certain concepts that anticipated the theurgists: understanding that the gods do not exhibit favor or wrath toward mortals, but that mortals' own attitudes toward them can engender good or bad effects; that the gods are not pleased by sacrifice but that this benefits the worshiper by drawing them closer to the gods; that popular religious rites are in fact appropriate expressions of piety; that only a purified mind can receive accurate impressions from the gods. And while the theurgists' gods, unlike the Epicureans' gods, did actively govern the world, they did so in a detached, effortless way, like the sun shining. If one takes seriously the idea that the [Epicurean gods](#) are constantly emitting a stream of subtle images that reach earth, then it could easily be inferred that these images are all-pervasive and that various means can be sought to perceive, channel, or embody them.

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Still, it would be possible to imagine Epicureanism as a sort of atheistic 'religion' in the same sense that for example Confucianism or the Church of Satan founded by Anton LaVey may be branded as such.

As an aside, I would argue that, apart from a few exceptions like Xunzi, the Confucian tradition is theistic. I suspect the presentation of Confucianism as an atheistic or secular ethical system has chiefly to do with a) modern proponents wishing to appeal to post-enlightenment westerners; b) Jesuits and other westerners with an interest in presenting the Confucian rites as devoid of objectionable religious content.

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

What would a 'holy book' of Epicureanism look like and what would it contain other than the letters of Epicurus and the poem of Lucretius?

That's basically what remains to us but we also know that the letters, PD's, etc are all epitomes aimed at beginners and that the full works of Epicurus and his successors were huge, and probably had a lot of subtle and complex material. We are unfortunately left with a stunted tradition. As it is, it demands elaboration and commentary; with elaboration and commentary comes differing interpretations and disagreements.

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To what extent can the views and advice of brilliant therapists or educators like John Gottman, Gigi Engle or Dan Buettner be thought of as Epicurean and admitted in some form in the 'scriptures' and literature of Epicureanism? How would an Epicurean society raise and educate its kids? Since school is so horrendously boring, tedious and unpleasant to children (school is also the only place other than prison where people are quite likely to be bullied and tortured) how would an Epicurean society deal with the problem of educating the new generation? Given that modern Western hyper-liberalism presents society and individuals with many obvious problems that are impossible to deny today what laws, customs and institutions would hypothetical Epicurean lawmakers create to avoid them?

I'm not a doctrinaire Fourierist by any stretch but I do think Fourier was on to something in proposing communities driven by pleasure and free association rather than coercion and hierarchy. I would say school is tedious and unpleasant because our society is tedious and unpleasant.