

Epicurean Views On Hierarchy In Social Structures

Post by "Cassius" of March 13, 2024 at 12:06 PM

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

You see, Epicureanism has an egalitarian ethos and a tendency to want to opt out of mainstream culture (traits that it shares with early Christianity and some egalitarian movements in the modern era) but it also shows little interest in fighting or provoking same mainstream culture.

Perhaps I should be sure we are on the same page as to "egalitarian" -- (Affirming, promoting, or characterized by belief in equal political, economic, social, and civil rights for all people.) I grant you that Epicureanism is interpreted that way today, but I do not take for granted that the early Epicureans interpreted it that way. They were no doubt happy to welcome new friends, but this does not ring of open arms to "all people" regardless of their views and actions: "The man who has best ordered the element of disquiet arising from external circumstances has made those things that he could akin to himself, and the rest at least not alien; but with all to which he could not do even this, he has refrained from mixing, and has expelled from his life all which it was of advantage to treat thus."

And as for not showing much interest in "fighting" the mainstream culture, I suppose that too depends on the definition of "fight," but i interpret most of Epicurus' views as a very strong rejection of the "mainstream culture" of the time.

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

why the Epicureans never experimented with things like common ownership of wealth even though the acquisition of wealth and luxuries runs contrary to a marked preference for minimalism.

Again I think this is the way Epicurus is interpreted but I do not think that a rigorous interpretation of Epicurus truly results in a "marked preference for minimalism." [VS63](#). Frugality too has a limit, and the man who disregards it is like him who errs through excess. And Epicurus' statement that common ownership of property is not a good idea also seems consistent with [PD39](#) that we have a strong preference for friends over wide-open obligations.

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To illustrate how strong the Epicurean tendency for minimalism was consider the cause of Epicurus' death. His kidney disease likely came about as a result of an extremely

low-fat diet.

OK aside from that being very speculative, I don't believe that the evidence supports Epicurus eating an extremely low-fat diet. Yes there are statements about bread and water and cheese but those are more likely to be philosophical statements of the importance of self-reliance than his standard diet. Epicurus' will shows him to have been affluent and I would expect his personal diet reflected at least a middle-class lifestyle. I see no reason to think that the Roman Epicureans, who had access to the sources we don't have, interpreted him as calling for an extreme eating pattern.