

Why Does Stoicism Seem to Be More Popular Than Epicureanism, Especially In England?

Post by "Cassius" of May 11, 2019 at 11:28 AM

[Poster1](#): Looking at the growth of Modern Stoicism compared to Epicureanism. There is Stoic week, quite a lot of books, very active Facebook communities, podcasts etc and even a Stoic meet up group in Manchester UK where I live. Does anybody have any opinion why the same hasn't happened with Epicureanism? Do you think that will change in the near future? And how that could be achieved?

Many thanks x

Poster2 - It requires a physical effort and cost to remove oneself from society and to find friends willing to do the same. To most people, that is impractical at best and culty at worst.

Also - the true asceticism and discipline required is probably beyond most hedonic moderns.

Ep1 - Why are you associating removing yourself from society and being ascetic with Epicurean philosophy? Epicurus participated in public religious rites and attended plays with enjoyment. He held feasts in his Garden.

The discipline needed is only to avoid actions that bring more pain than pleasure, which is actually pretty easy once you understand it and enjoy it in action. Net pleasure is very motivating and an easy habit to acquire.

It is mainly false beliefs that stand in the way-- false ideas that there is something wrong with a life of pleasure.

I live according to Epicurean principles. I do not isolate myself. I started a meetup to promote Epicurean living. So far what I have found is that people resist the philosophy not because it is hard but because they cannot let go of indoctrination into illusory ideals, like thinking there is inherent value in asceticism. The atheists here tend to be secular Buddhists or humanists.

Poster A2: I think that stoicism is more popular because it is a passive posture, and a martyr posture, both things have a very close relation with catholic religions, where the more you endure suffering the more close you are to god, and were you will be saved by someone else but not by yourself.

Poster MK:

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/938-why-does-stoicism-seem-to-be-more-popular-than-epicureanism-especially-in-englan/?postID=3186#post3186>

Stoicism has benefitted from backing from the field of psychology.

CBT appeals to Stoic practises like premeditatio malorum, view from above perspective re-alignment, reaction control, etc.

It has made Stoic ideas more attractive and academically viable.

Many modern exponents refer recurrently to “evidence-based” results for the efficacy of these coping strategies.

The buzz built surrounding Stoicism in therapeutic praxis has been capitalised on to organise such events as Stoic week, Stoicon, so on.

Epicurean thought is a bit more niche. Rather ironically given that it was considered to be too populist in antiquity.

Christianity likely contributes as well.

Virtues (conceived of as improbable standards of conduct), ascetic and meditation practises, fatalism.

It's all rather a snug fit for post-Christian societies of formerly Roman Catholic/High Church varieties.

It's again, if differently, psychological after all.

It is easiest to make a transition away from something, if it's to what is similar still.

Most people don't like admitting what they've believed all their life and what their culture has grown up around is completely wrong and risible.

They instinctively want to keep as much as possible. Stoicism allows a lot of Christianity to come with it.

That's only the English-speaking side of the story though.

Epicureans in Greece do hold conferences, meet together, print publications, etc.

Epicurean teachings historically always succeeded organically at all events.

Epicurus himself set his face against the Academy and Lyceum. Of which our contemporary teaching institutions are pale, conscious, imitations.

I expect Epicurus wouldn't be best pleased at universities arranging events on his behalf.

Friends in a garden with cheese was his sort of conference or meet-up.

As for podcasts, communities and the rest. Who can say why really?

This group and several members are quite active.

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But I suppose the prevalence in academia of Stoic/Stoic'ed up claims and ideas makes it inevitable.

Podcasts, blogs, meme/FB communities are precisely the sort of thing students/salaried academics do.

Poster DR:

The truth is that Stoicism has benefitted substantially from scientific backing in the form of research on CBT whereas Epicureanism has been hampered by the fact that it seems much more at odds with current psychological research on emotional wellbeing.

Poster E1: Having seen CBT work wonders for a family member with severe OCD and social anxiety-- learning that the discomfort of their fear will not injure them by practicing exposure in graded doses-- I see no conflict between CBT and EP. They learn the difference between false fears and reality. They are not taught to lose fear of truly dangerous things but to overcome false fear of harmless things.

Epicurus used a form of CBT, by having his students replace their unfounded fears with reality through memorization of his doctrines and meditation/study of reality.

His reminder that severe pain is short and other pain is bearable is meant to lessen fear of the future. CBT does this same thing by demonstrating this truth in action. The agoraphobic person gradually experiences that they don't die of fear from going outside their home-- that it becomes bearable and then eventually goes away!

Epicurus also notes that sometimes we will chose to experience pain for greater pleasure-- which is consistent with the difficulty in early CBT that leads to freedom from false fears and a constricted life. The goal of CBT is not to live enduring fear-- it is to reduce and then eliminate false fear.

Poster MH: We're still here! Most people have a hard time accepting oblivion upon death. Especially if they feel cheated by life and want a reboot! But if you accept your mortality and can become self-sufficient Epicureanism can provide a content life. Thomas Jefferson believed so.

Cassius: Let me restate Antonio and Martin but be more blunt.

Stoicism is a repackaging of commonplace religion and humanist positions on the place of individuals in the universe and the goal of "being a good person" -- which is (as Martin says) "a snug fit" for people of conventional religious and moral beliefs.

Epicurean philosophy is a radical rejection of the implications of religion in all its forms, from the rejection of supernatural gods to the rejection of life after death.

Which all means that Stoicism allows for the easy continuation of fantastic and preposterous religious and moral idealism in all its many forms. Stoicism is particularly in harmony with prevailing ethics and morality in areas where English is the dominant language, as the original post indicates. There is something in the water, especially in the mother country, which has made cultivation of endurance of pain through the "stiff upper lip" approach somehow an element of pride, rather than of the shame it should be.

The only major quibble I have with Martin's summary is that while I agree that Epicurus would be displeased with the events that modern universities arrange in his name, it would not be because he preferred gardens and cheese.

The reason would be, as Martin says, because "Epicurus himself set his face against the Academy and Lyceum. Of which our contemporary teaching institutions are pale, conscious, imitations."

I would go much further. Epicurus set his face not only against the Academy and the Lyceum, but also against the conventional idealism and morality that they spawn, of which much of decadent English society (applicable to the USA too) is but a pale conscious imitation.

Cassius: Especially for England, a land where the determinism that Epicurus detested flowers, I would add to the list: "Are you confirmed in the viewpoint that individuals are largely personally responsible for the outcomes of their decisions on how to live their lives?"