

Article - David Sedley - 1988 - "Epicurean Anti-Reductionism"

Post by "Cassius" of March 27, 2026 at 4:58 PM

These are very relevant points Dave and I think about them all the time. Here's my current view.

[Quote from DaveT](#)

On the other hand I see progress away from the monarchical God and church appointed governments of the last 250 years. No longer do we accept conquest in the name of god's command to subjugate the earth.

I don't think I am violating the no-politics rule by observing that the world is on the brink of WW3 and I would say that a major reason is that most of the world is still in the grip of religious and philosophical absolutism of the very kind that Epicurus was fighting against.

[Quote from DaveT](#)

I think there is something to be said about a focus on the secular adaptation of Epicurean principles that have made their way into common society, into academia and medicine as well as government policies even though those principles are not often recognized as Epicurean.

Unfortunately here too I am convinced that the darker side of this overwhelms the brighter. The "secular adaptation of Epicurean principles" is largely a bastardization of what Epicurus actually taught, and is in fact being used to suppress any reemergence of his actual teachings. I'll paraphrase someone I don't particularly admire and say that the most "common secular adaptations of Epicurean principles" - by which I mean the elevation the pursuit of immediate pleasure as a tranquilizer against deeper understanding of philosophical issues which undermine the word today as they did in 300 BC - are as much the opiate of the people as any religion.

[Quote from DaveT](#)

Most PEW polling shows the decline of popular participation in religious organizations.

I think you're talking about our "first world" situation primarily in the USA. Disturbingly even here I understand the evidence shows a resurgence in religious interest, particularly Catholicism, and of course I am not seeing that as a positive development. It's interesting to

consider that in Catholicism we see preserved many of the same Platonic/Stoic positions that were incorporated directly into it. The early Catholic "church fathers" understood Epicurus to be strong opposition. I do think that a lot of the turmoil in organized religion presents an opportunity for the re-emergence of a true Epicureanism, but that re-emergence isn't going to be accomplished by a superficial understanding of Epicurus as a neo-Stoic / neo-Buddhist / Humanist who is running from philosophical and social engagement to live a minimalist / ascetic life.

[Quote from DaveT](#)

On your point of searching for a way to deal with newer people, I'm guessing you mean newer to the Forum. I've heard that the way to engage with others is to ask those people, who they are in real life, why they joined, what their goals are at the Forum, and perhaps when they might have the time to participate. I think those questions can be asked tactfully, not just to new people, but perhaps they might become a part of an annual discussion among the membership.

I largely agree with you here but there is a danger that I also constantly consider:

Until people understand what Epicurus was really all about, they are tempted to focus only on the surface ethical questions such as how to experience more pleasure than pain under a conventional outlook of focusing only on stimulative pleasure. There are also those who come here fully convinced that the goal of life is "tranquility" and the last thing they want to do is to face uncomfortable deeper questions. Posts from such people give us an excellent opportunity to educate them about the full meaning of the texts, but too much emphasis on "momentary pleasures" and "relief from anxiety" without understand that "relief from anxiety" does not mean a "zero state," but pleasure in the full and true meaning of the word, is difficult to deal with given existing resources.

We need more people actively writing about Epicurus from a more educated and deeper perspective, so I think the priority has to be "educating the educators" so we can better address exactly what you are talking about with people who are just beginning to read Epicurus.