

Dead Reddit / The "Isms" Thread

Post by "Joshua" of December 8, 2019 at 11:45 PM

Excellent topic, Nate! He is of course using "cult" as a Classicist here, free of its modern sinister connotations.

To my mind there are two questions here. *Could the Epicurean system of thought have developed independent of Epicurus?* I should think the answer to that—at least in broad strokes—would be, "Of course!" Already in Greece, prior to Epicurus, there was atomism (Democritus), indeterminism (Aristotle), hedonism (Aristippus), and cosmic pluralism (Anaximander). There's no "secret sauce"; most of what Epicurus taught is self-evident, or else arrived at through very simple argumentation. He was merely, as DeWitt writes elsewhere, "the first to survey the whole field"; and to synthesize from it a universal world-philosophy.

And, *is there any value for the student of a system in giving honor to the founder?* Again I should answer "yes"; indeed that is Epicurus' own position, given in the Vatican Sayings;

"Honoring a sage is itself a great good to the one who honors." VS 32

But I think that position is another we could have arrived at without him. There is pleasure in the honest emotion of gratitude, if nothing else; and there is fellowship in belonging to a "school". With the Epicureans in particular, we are told that they called him *Soter* (saviour), carved him in statuary, and bore his likeness on signet rings. If Lucretius and Diogenes had not felt this kind of devotion, the fragments surviving from the Epicurean tradition would be paltry indeed.

This begins to look like two interconnected paths to the same summit; analytical thinkers like Polyenus and Thomas Jefferson would be happy to throw themselves into the work of studying the system. Passionate missionaries like Diogenes of Oenoanda and Frances Wright, into studying the man who wrought it. And in Lucretius, the two streams blend into something like perfection.

But here's an important point; with a religion like Christianity, devotion is the main thing and good practice is insufficient. In the system devised by Epicurus, practice is the essential key. Devotion is useful primarily for sustaining interest and emotional engagement in the practice.