

Happy Twentieth of December, 2019

Post by "Cassius" of December 21, 2019 at 9:58 AM

Yes I very much agree with Elayne's post. If we start off in studying Epicurus with the idea that Epicurus reached absolute conclusions about how to live, based on decisionmaking about pleasure leading to the same conclusions for all, then we are off on the wrong track at the beginning, and the sooner we get off that track the better.

Long before anyone can decide "how" to live they have to make fundamental decisions about the nature of the universe and the nature of humans, including decisions about the existence of a supernatural, about a life after death, and about how to relate abstractions and ideas (the workings of the human mind) to the senses and the other operations of the body.

If Epicurus had concluded that supernatural gods existed, and that those gods offered to opportunity for an eternal life of "happiness" after death, then he would have been the first to embrace the implications of that conclusion and pursued some form of religion as the key to proper living. It is only because his commitment to "the truth" was so strong that he rejected the anesthesia-like pleasure of fantasizing about gods and afterlives and a single way of life for everyone.

We live in a world where it takes the strength of will of an Epicurus to be willing to stand against the 'universal truths" that are forced on us by peer pressure, and increasingly by force of law. Many people who can read this over the internet are already under the force of law to believe or not believe certain viewpoints. And that means that there is a strong temptation for us to incorporate and hold as a part of Epicurean philosophy points of view that Epicurus himself would never have imagined, and would likely feel disgust a being associated with.

Some of us are not going to be able to stand up to that temptation, and are going to look for common ground between Epicurus and modern attitudes at the expense of fidelity to what Epicurus and the Epicureans actually taught and stood for. And some of us are going to stand more strongly for the classical Epicurean approach and decide not to incorporate those accommodations.

As I see it that means at least two things are going to happen:

(1) We are going to see "interest groups" or simple divisions formed, with people of particular persuasions forming their own Epicurean groups. Although Robert Hanrott's pages are not "groups," he is an example of someone who writes as much or more about "politics" than about Epicurean philosophy, and as a result people who agree with him can work in common with his approach, or other approaches that are similar. I would expect other "interest groups" to form in the future as well, with other political approaches.

(2) I personally am committed to seeing this forum remain dedicated to core Epicurean philosophy, and that will mean (as Elayne says) making clear that it is open to anyone of any political persuasion who wants to learn about the core philosophy, and that it will be not be limited only those whose politics are left, center, or right. We've maintained a very cooperative spirit here in the past and I hope we will continue to do so, but it will also be necessary to be frank about issues that divide us.

As far as I am concerned there is **no** political issue so important that someone holding it cannot at the same time be included within the study of Epicurean philosophy so long as those issues are kept separate and not allowed to be harmful to the goal of Epicurean philosophy. Epicurus did not provide a list of political positions which are "approved" and a list that is "not approved" - and I strongly believe the reason he did not is because the philosophy does not support such absolute political judgments. Everyone is going to have their own personal opinions about such issues, but if they attempt to make a particular position a requirement, or a particular position an absolute bar, then that shows me that they are placing some "ism" or abstract idea above a proper understanding of what Epicurus really taught.

No doubt other unexpected developments will occur, but the bottom line is that it will be for the best for us to sharpen our views on issues even when they reveal divisions and the need for separate "teams" or activities or whatever. It will be for the best if we all advocate our positions as clearly and as strongly as we can, and then we take steps to pursue those positions, together where possible, separately where necessary. And that's the point I made in the first paragraph - there is no single "political" destination called for in Epicurean philosophy, and that means no single "group" or "project" can ever be considered the last word in Epicurean philosophy.