

Scientism, Atheism, And The Admissibility Of Spiritual Experience

Post by "Cassius" of November 2, 2020 at 8:19 AM

I just noticed something additional I want to add to the mix.

Our other and similar thread was entitled "Reverence and Awe in Epicurean Philosophy." I think the words "reverence" and "awe" are fairly self-explanatory and not subject to too much likelihood of confusion. They convey "feelings" or "emotions" which do not presume anything about what is causing them.

The title of this thread however is "Scientism, Atheism, And The Admissibility Of Spiritual Experience." To some extent each of those terms is more subject to confusion.

While I think I have a decent idea, the term "scientism" does not have a clear meaning in my mind. I'll exhibit my tendency to hubris by saying that if it isn't clear to me, it is likely not clear to many others and therefore dangerous to use in common conversation without further definition.

"Atheism" is someone more clear for common conversation, but as discussed here before, in Epicurean terms it is a more ambiguous term. However we've covered that a lot recently so I doubt that ambiguity will retard this discussion.

"Spiritual evidence" however is a term, even more so than "scientism," that I don't think has a consensus meaning. I think it is a term that implies something significantly more, to most people, than "reverence" and "awe." I hardly know even where to begin to define it - it could start with something as minimal as "a firm conviction of the existence" but extend all the way up to "God promised to me and my descendants that we are his chosen people and that he will destroy our enemies and make us master of the world."

My reading of the Epicurean texts is that Epicurus held that the evidence, however we break it down, supports "a firm conviction of the existence" but that anything beyond that is speculation which cannot be verified and therefore has to be treated with the greatest care.

I am reading in this thread many things being stated with considerable conviction, but I am presently still of the mindset that there is nothing that we necessarily have to read in Epicurus' position that is necessarily disproven by modern science. The criticisms I am reading are of positions that I do not believe are necessarily entailed in the texts. I understand why they are being suggested, but I think the texts can be read in multiple ways, and I choose to read them in a way that does not require them being labeled "wrong" in this department.

So for that reason I don't see how any contention that "Epicurus was wrong about XXX" or conversely that "Epicurus' position supports YYY" can be held as established without first being more clear both about what we are contending Epicurus' position was, and what we are seeking to prove or disprove. The Epicurean texts are full of general warnings and denunciations of supernatural religion, so I do not believe that any reading of particular passages should be read as contradictory without compelling reasons to do so, which I am personally still not seeing.

So to repeat the main point of this post, I find the term "spiritual experiences" without further definition to be an obstacle to further clarity here.