

Epicureanism as the spiritual essence or 'religion' of an entire community

Post by “Peter Konstans” of September 29, 2023 at 4:14 PM

Has anybody ever experimented with the idea of Epicureanism as a formal spiritual identity capable of defining entire communities? What would Epicureanism look like if it wasn't merely a brotherhood of friends discussing philosophy but was also a sort of quasi religious worldview with its own intricate rituals, symbols and ceremonies covering every aspect of life? Could Epicureanism ever assume a form where it would be able to successfully compete with well-established religious traditions for the hearts and minds of huge numbers of people? I'm aware that Epicureanism did in fact manage to attract a significant following in antiquity but it failed to compete successfully with other traditions and had largely disappeared even before Christianity found its way in the Roman imperial courts. Of course Epicureanism could not possibly be a religion in the traditional sense since it rightly rejects the notion of divine beings or forces playing any role in human affairs. Still, it would be possible to imagine Epicureanism as a sort of atheistic 'religion' in the same sense that for example Confucianism or the Church of Satan founded by Anton LaVey may be branded as such. What would a 'holy book' of Epicureanism look like and what would it contain other than the letters of Epicurus and the poem of Lucretius? To what extent can the views and advice of brilliant therapists or educators like John Gottman, Gigi Engle or Dan Buettner be thought of as Epicurean and admitted in some form in the 'scriptures' and literature of Epicureanism? How would an Epicurean society raise and educate its kids? Since school is so horrendously boring, tedious and unpleasant to children (school is also the only place other than prison where people are quite likely to be bullied and tortured) how would an Epicurean society deal with the problem of educating the new generation? Given that modern Western hyper-liberalism presents society and individuals with many obvious problems that are impossible to deny today what laws, customs and institutions would hypothetical Epicurean lawmakers create to avoid them?

Post by “Cassius” of September 29, 2023 at 5:07 PM

Lots of great questions and i am sure that you will get some interesting responses. I don't think anyone has had any success in forming an intentionally-Epicurean community in modern times, but it's a topic that is frequently talked about, and I agree with you that it is doable. Now that we have the internet to bring together people who would not normally have been able to find

each other in the past, things like this become more possible.

Probably you would need a "leader" to ultimately make decisions on most of the issues you raise, but over time I would think that groups who share similar viewpoints would be able to pull something together. It's a big hurdle though -- as you will see here, even where we make a strong effort to keep things within defined boundaries there are many different opinions as to what is essential and what is not. I expect that there's no substitute for time and effort and it will not be soon, but it will be possible, for a critical mass of people who see things similarly to make plans on closer association. All the issues you raised have to be addressed first, and there will be lots of differing opinions on most of them.

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 29, 2023 at 7:38 PM

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

To what extent can the views and advice of brilliant therapists or educators like John Gottman, Gigi Engle or Dan Buettner be thought of as Epicurean and admitted in some form in the 'scriptures' and literature of Epicureanism?

The writings of Epicurus can be seen as guides to wisdom, and much of what he wrote was lost. We read and study the extant remains as helpful hints for how to live a joyous life. Since here on this forum we are not eclectic, then John Gottman and others would not be added to scriptures.

Epicurus presents a theory of living, and then it is up to each person to bring that theory into practical life. There is a small section on this forum for Epicurean lifestyle questions, and it moves beyond theory with the intention to ground it in the frame work of the Epicurean world-view.

Modern knowledge and psychology has uncovered new ways to understand the world and life that is much more advanced as compared to when Epicurus was alive. I see modern psychology as fitting into the Epicurean world-view when they meet the criteria of the philosophy of Epicurus - how to make good choices, how to understand death, and the place of pleasure and pain in life, etc. If modern psychology leads to pleasure and the happiness of the soul, as a subjective experience for each individual, then each individual can choose to apply that for themselves. The theory of Epicurus remains as the frame or backbone.

Because Epicureanism is an open system of thinking, it is difficult for me to see it as a "religion". Religion often seems to require stiff and absolute thinking or the use of attitudes such as "must", "should", and "have to" which is not the best way to live. So for myself the

word "philosophy" works best.

Post by “Peter Konstans” of September 29, 2023 at 8:38 PM

Hey Nate. I am aware of Hiram Crispo but the reason I am here and not on his page is that I feel he's identifying Epicureanism too closely with mainstream left-wing politics and consequently with what Catherine Liu calls PMC virtue. I don't feel comfortable with this. Although I'm not formally involved in any political movement - and never will - my preferred politics personally is Marxist-Leninism-Trotskyism (I am a WSWWS reader) which is firmly opposed to what we identify as the modern pseudo-left who we regard as only serving the class interests of the professional managerial class. In any case I don't mix up my political preferences with my Epicureanism. I think a more orthodox and authentic stance from the point of view of Epicureanism would be to maintain absolute political neutrality as well as a rather cynical view on the nature of politics akin to that of the ancient Sophists or Hobbes and which was still preserved in old-style Marxism. The notion of a clean and civilized politics that animates most supporters of modern pseudo-leftist movements is in my view incompatible with the spirit of ancient Epicureanism. It is rather an idealistic and platonic notion and one that got Seneca killed. I gotta go hit the sack. I'll address more issues tomorrow.

Post by “Cassius” of September 29, 2023 at 9:13 PM

It would be best to take the remainder of any discussion of specific politics to private conversation so that we don't have to start talking about our no-politics rule. That having been said, you've put your finger Peter on the reason for our rule on the subject. It's all a very complicated subject, but one aspect of it that I think is clear is that our community project is better off keeping clear of the subject and leaving it entirely to our participants' private lives. Anyone smart enough to be attracted to Epicurus is going to be opinionated on lots of topics, including politics. The calculation that we have made here, and that has served us well, is that we can accomplish more and get more out of our work if we focus on what unifies us and stay away from subjects that others can do as a group much better than we can.

We're hoping to interview soon a professor who has written that the ancient Epicureans weren't nearly as non-political as they are now regarded to be, but no matter where one comes down on that issue I am confident that we here at the EpicureanFriends.com forum are always going to work to stay together on the core work even at the expense of conducting interesting political

discussions elsewhere.

Post by “Peter Konstans” of September 30, 2023 at 4:48 AM

I think it's fair to think of ancient Epicureans as de facto atheists the way Plutarch thought of them. The acceptance of the existence of the gods whether honestly or pretentiously was useful in a social context where atheism were discriminated against and associated with a significant degree of social exclusion. Today we often use the term 'social exclusion' lightly and synonymously with 'unfairness' and everybody feels brave enough to 'fight' social discrimination in all its forms but in a pre-modern agrarian society social exclusion meant your very survival was at stake. Why would someone not want to participate in the sacrifices and share in the meat? In the early modern era the Catholic Church tended to regard the beliefs of deists as little more than a damage control cover for atheism and they were basically right. Today deism has essentially disappeared because no damage control is necessary.

Post by “Cassius” of September 30, 2023 at 6:28 AM

Peter what you wrote about de facto atheism gives your thoughts on part of the question, but maybe does not address whether you think Epicurus was serious about life elsewhere in the universe and whether he was serious that there are (or that we should think there are) blessed and imperishable beings who should (for our own benefit at the very least) be thought of as examples of the best way to live. It's interesting how people take different positions on that. What are your thoughts on that aspect?

Post by “Peter Konstans” of September 30, 2023 at 8:30 AM

I do believe that Epicurus was serious about the existence of perfect gods. I suspect that he embraced this form of philosophical polytheism in order to separate his own position from that of other hedonists who embraced anti-social attitudes and transgressionism (there is a definitely a link between Theodorus the Atheist for example and the philosophical positions of Marquis de Sade) or other schools like the Sophists. The Sophists who were the main villains in the Platonic corpus taught that the Gods were exclusively human creations. Epicurus' strategy

was to disarm the gods completely but preserve their existence as blissful cosmic deities in order to show that a pleasurable life is possible all while respecting and preserving the social norms which were firmly associated with popular religion. Epicurus was definitely not very sympathetic to youthful counter-culture-style hedonism (recall that letter where he in a non-judgemental manner advises a youth to check his urges) and believed that social norms (like chastity in this case) do provide some useful and beneficial services to society. But he also observed that they easily acquired an oppressive and harmful character so he wanted to disarm the gods since they were habitually used to justify oppression and exploitation. Magicians and oracles for example fleeced poor uneducated people out of their money while sexual slavery was dressed up as sacred slavery and brothels as temples to Venus. In Greek 'sacred slavery' (hierodouleia) still means prostitution. In later centuries some Epicureans disagreed with Epicurus' position on the gods and simply saw them as immaterial fictions. This is in the modern context a far more defensible position. In any case Epicurus can be called a functional atheist since the gods were denied any agency in human affairs. In antiquity people sacrificed in the expectation that they receive a reward. If you affirmed that this practice is useless you were essentially an atheist as far as people in antiquity were concerned.

Post by “Cassius” of September 30, 2023 at 5:47 PM

Peter I understand that there are Greek Epicureans who have been much more successful than elsewhere in having live seminars and meetings. Have you had the opportunity to associate with any of that and do you have any thoughts on their efforts?

Post by “Root304” of September 30, 2023 at 7:42 PM

[Quote from Nate](#)

That is a great question for members of this forum whom are parents. Many of whom are raising and educating their children from an Epicurean perspective without any overwhelming challenges besides simply being parents struggling with the normal challenges of raising children. One difference, among others, would be that we would not raise young members of an Epicurean society to entertain the possibility of idealistic myths, like an afterlife.

If anyone would like to philosophize about Epicurean parenting, start a thread or PM me! Maybe I'll start a thread about it if there is any interest, as I would like to expound and contest that last statement in the quote. 😊

Post by “Godfrey” of September 30, 2023 at 8:24 PM

Interesting. Are you saying that you would raise young members to entertain the possibility of idealistic myths such as an afterlife? I'm curious to hear your reasoning in this regard.

Post by “Don” of September 30, 2023 at 8:40 PM

Post

[Epicurean Parenting](#)

Should be an interesting discussion.... proceed 😊



Don

September 30, 2023 at 8:39 PM

Epicurean Parenting thread created... 😊

@Root304 : please feel free to "expound and contest" in that thread 😊

Post by “Peter Konstans” of October 1, 2023 at 4:26 AM

Hi Cassius! I have not had any opportunity to associate with them because as far as I know these are based in Athens and Salonica which are the first and second most populous cities respectively and I live in a sparsely populated rural community. They are small obscure groups, I wouldn't call them successful at this stage but they are better than nothing. For the average Greek the name 'Epicurus' means only an academic rank (assistant professor) since epikouros literally means 'the one who rushes to help'. Most have never heard of the ancient sage.

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3359-epicureanism-as-the-spiritual-essence-or-religion-of-an-entire-community/>

Concerning the issue of parenting I support natural hygiene (see Ingrid Bauer) and John Holt's unschooling approach.

Post by “Peter Konstans” of October 1, 2023 at 5:29 AM

Godfrey. Of course

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Interesting. Are you saying that you would raise young members to entertain the possibility of idealistic myths such as an afterlife? I'm curious to hear your reasoning in this regard.

Of course not. But remember that ancient Epicureanism did resemble an ancient mystery religion or what we would today call a cult. There were Epicureans who carried images of Epicurus with them and referred to him as a god even though they didn't think of him as an immortal being. Calling a human you venerate a god is not possible today but in the world of antiquity it was something you could easily do. Today we are compelled to draw inspiration from our modern environment and modern religions. For example we can have people recite the tetrapharmakos in the original in the same way Muslims are required to recite the shahada in Arabic upon conversion and we could also require them to undergo foreskin restoration if they were circumcised at birth. This would symbolize our rejection of Abrahamism as well as our devotion to pleasure since the foreskin is actually an organ with important sexual functions. Remember that in Greek antiquity the body was considered literally holy and any deliberate mutilation of it was an abomination. There should also be rituals and feasts that an outsider would recognize as religious, not just mere celebrations. An Epicurean wedding for example should not just involve an exchange of vows and a party. It should have a character that resembles a religious ritual. This is intended to give Epicureanism a strong communal identity so that it can successfully compete with well-established religious traditions. Most common people crave a strong identity that gives their life meaning and structure. Maybe that's not true for you or me but for most people it is and any spiritual movement that wants to have any hope of escaping the fringes of society must provide that. This need is precisely why people are so prone to becoming 'polarized' and partisan fanatics. Political ideologies are at least partly religious movements. However the adherents of 'political religions' (see the current ideological struggles between woke and anti-woke people) have a high degree of neuroticism that admittedly tends to exceed that of most traditionally religious people. That suggests to me that political religions suck at being religious and giving people the comfort, security and meaning they require. They provide at best half-assed versions of those things. Traditional religions in contrast, particularly the Abrahamic - have shown themselves to be highly competent in

providing this. So my vision for Epicureanism is to give it a form that allows us to tell people: 'this is your holy literature, these are your rituals, these are your norms and codes of conduct, these are your symbols, dress and accessoires, these are your mores and customs, you don't owe tolerance to anyone who opposes your views, have a nice life'. Remember that Christianity did copy something from Epicureanism. Spreading your creed in the form of epistles and the early Christian vision of an 'agapetic community' were definitely inspired by Epicureanism which in the earliest days of Christianity boasted a significant following in the areas of Judea where Greek had been widely adopted.

Post by “Don” of October 1, 2023 at 6:46 AM

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

Remember that Christianity did copy something from Epicureanism. Spreading your creed in the form of epistles and the early Christian vision of an 'agapetic community' were definitely inspired by Epicureanism

I'm skeptical of attributing Paul's and other early Church fathers' use of epistolography to an Epicurean source. There was a robust tradition of letter writing throughout the ancient world, including in Hebrew and Aramaic as well as Greek and Latin. It was even used as a literary form. The letters of Seneca to Lucilius, Ovid's Heroides, Cicero's and Pliny's voluminous letters, and so on are examples of this tradition.

See also:

[Ancient Epistolography Network - School of Arts, Languages and Cultures - The University of Manchester](#)

[Letters and Communities: Studies in the Socio-Political Dimensions of Ancient Epistolography - Bryn Mawr Classical Review](#)

I also remain skeptical of attributing the early Christian agapetic community to Epicurus's influence as well. From my perspective, there are any number of models the early Christians could have looked to, including Essenes, mystery cults, etc.

Epicurus's philosophy was antithetical to Christian beliefs. Dr. Bart Ehrman recently posted an essay to his blog contrasting Epicurus and Paul. I'll respect his pay wall and not repost the full essay here ([He donates all proceeds from the blog to worthy charities in his local area.](#)) However, this is his conclusion:

"In short: for Paul true life meant living the life of the crucified victim. For Epicurus it meant living anything but the life of a crucified victim. Two billion people in the world today consider themselves devotees of Paul, but many (most?) of them actually agree with Epicurus."

Within that context, I find it hard to square that with Paul and other early Christians adopting Epicurean structures, strategies, and tactics. ****Maybe**** to counter the popularity of the philosophy? However, there were so many other similar structures, strategies, and tactics to draw from, I find it unnecessary to attribute Christian ones to Epicurean sources.

Post by "Titus" of October 2, 2023 at 9:26 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

Epicurus's philosophy was antithetical to Christian beliefs. Dr. Bart Ehrman recently posted an essay to his blog contrasting Epicurus and Paul.

I would not overestimate the influence of Epicurean philosophy on the emergence of Christianity. Nevertheless, there still seem to be some good points, especially DeWitt's reception of the letters of St. Paul. He suggests Paul did at least resemble some Epicurean doctrine, transforming it to make it suitable to his own standards. DeWitt is extraordinary, because he investigates the writings of St. Paul under the light of Epicureanism. He offers new translations and new ways of how to interpret. But there the journey ends, because the data basis is still weak and there aren't any findings/illuminations concerning a new theology of Paul, that could trigger further study (and suit theologians pushing new agendas).

[Quote from Cassius](#)

We're hoping to interview soon a professor who has written that the ancient Epicureans weren't nearly as non-political as they are now regarded to be, but no matter where one comes down on that issue I am confident that we here at the EpicureanFriends.com forum are always going to work to stay together on the core work even at the expense of conducting interesting political discussions elsewhere.

I really appreciate your comment. Epicurus states in the [Principal Doctrines](#), that justice and therefore politics, are relative and bound to time and place. Taking the title of this thread seriously ("Epicureanism as the spiritual essence or 'religion' of an entire community") it not necessarily means to stay away from, but to stay above things that rise and fall throughout the ages. What does persist instead - what does have ultimate reality - is the mechanism which

nature provides to living things. This should be at the center of our study.

Post by “Don” of October 2, 2023 at 9:37 AM

[Quote from Titus](#)

DeWitt is extraordinary, because he investigates the writings of St. Paul under the light of Epicureanism. He offers new translations and new ways of how to interpret.

I'll need to go back and read some of Dewitt's writings on this topic at some point, but I remain skeptical. His use of reading Paul with an Epicurean filter and coming up with "new translations" has struck me in too many instances as proof texting or seeing what he wants to see instead of what's there. I agree with Dewitt is extraordinary, but I'm not convinced of his assertions in many of these Christian areas.

Post by “Titus” of October 2, 2023 at 10:05 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

His use of reading Paul with an Epicurean filter and coming up with "new translations" has struck me in too many instances as proof texting or seeing what he wants to see instead of what's there.

I know your'e opinion on him and I would also be cautious. I see this rather as inspirational intellectual food while sitting in a cosy chair next to a fireplace. But DeWitt also makes a good move in suggesting other translators are seeing what they want to see instead of what's there



Post by “Peter Konstans” of October 2, 2023 at 4:55 PM

The term 'early Christianity' is just a convenient anachronism that maybe we should avoid altogether. It was a merely a sect of Second Temple Judaism for a long time (according to some scholars it still hadn't completed the process of transformation into a totally distinct religion as late as the 4th century) so the question is if Judaism in a broad sense had a fruitful interaction with Epicureanism. According to the virtual Jewish library this was in fact the case. I quote the following from its article on Epicureanism.

'Agreements, however, both in content and literary form, between rabbinism and Epicureanism are striking: study for its own sake (Vatican fragment 45 and [Avot 6:1](#)); removal of doubt (*Life* 121b, *Doctr.* 22 and [Avot 1:16](#)); mortality and urgency (Vat. fr. 10 and [Avot 2:15](#)); acquisition of a companion (*To Menoecus*, end, and [Avot 1:6](#)); diet of bread and water (Bailey, fr. 37 and [Avot 6:4](#)); satisfaction with one's lot (Bailey, fr. 69-70 and [Avot 4:1](#)); and avoidance of public office (Bailey, fr. 85-87; Vat. fr. 58; *Doctr.* 7 and [Avot 1:10-11](#); 2:3; etc.). Epicurus anticipated Judaism's denial of astral divinity and rule. With the general rise of the lower classes he accorded human dignity even to the prostitute, an evaluation continued in the Midrash (*Sif. Num. 78*; *Gen. R. 85:8*) and the Gospels (Matt. 1:3; 5, etc.). In Hellenism and Christianity, too, denunciation of Epicurus together with partial adoption of his ethics is frequent. The centrality of the sage in post-Socratic ethics and rhetoric facilitated such developments.'

Are we in agreement that Epicureanism was the first major cult that spread its message chiefly through the medium of epistolography and the first major school that envisioned a community of equals and friends without the mediations of political authority? Are we also in agreement that Epicureanism was highly successful in that period? If we agree on both then we must agree that it's at least quite likely that efforts were made on the part of Jewish movements to copy aspects of it. Successful movements never seem to fail getting imitated in some respects by their enemies for tactical reasons. The early medieval Byzantine heresies against the veneration of images (iconomachy) were likely a reaction to the massive success of the new Islamic religion and an attempt to imitate its strong emphasis on strict monotheism and opposition to idolatry. Such theological tendencies in the Byzantine east were of course not entirely novel but the vigorous appearance of Islam suddenly gave them a prominence they didn't have before. On the other hand, Islam copied the entire tradition of Orthodox chanting and phenomena such as the success of Byzantium against the Persians and the inroads of Christianity into the Arab pagan world must have promoted the growth of a new Abrahamic movement there.

Successful movements also have an uncanny ability to swiftly abandon elements that they were previously closely associated with if it suits them. Christianity became a religion entirely distinct from Judaism only when anti-Semitism established strong roots in it. The process that led there was started when the Jews became so hated in the eastern Mediterranean after their failed revolts which had left entire communities of Greco-Roman gentiles massacred that Christians had to adapt by distancing themselves from their Jewish origins and accelerating the process of assimilating pagan traditions into their faith.

Post by “Don” of October 2, 2023 at 7:31 PM

I'll do my best to respond in more depth later; however, for now I'll simply say that I am not impressed with the parallel citations in the excerpt from the virtual Jewish library. They seem to have only a surface similarity with each other (Epicurean vs Jewish) at most for the majority, and some seem to have less than that. At best for any similarities, I'd posit a case of convergent evolution with no necessary connection for the most part.

I find it hard to accept that a religion that uses Epicurus's name as a designation for an apostate or skeptic is looking to the same philosophy for inspiration:

apikoros From Hebrew סוּרוּקִיפָא ('epikóros, “heretic”), from Ancient Greek Ἐπίκουρος (Epíkouros, “Epicurus”), but later associated with Aramaic אַרְבָּךְ (’aḇḇāk, “to abandon”).

Post by “Don” of October 2, 2023 at 11:33 PM

For comparison, here is a selection of the citations in full from the excerpt above:

1. study for its own sake

(NOTE: From my reading of the extant texts, Epicurus does not advocate study "for its own sake." One studies the texts and nature to alleviate ignorance, fear, anxiety about death and gods, etc. There is always a practical application of study. For example: "Hence, since such a course is of service to all who take up natural science, I, who devote to the subject my continuous energy and reap the calm enjoyment of a life like this" (Epicurus, Letter to Herodotus)

Vatican fragment 45

The study of what is natural produces not braggarts nor windbags nor those who show off the culture that most people fight about, but those who are fearless and self-reliant and who value their own good qualities rather than the good things that have come to them from external circumstances.

Avot 6:1

The sages taught in the language of the Mishnah. Blessed be He who chose them and their teaching. Rabbi Meir said: Whoever occupies himself with the Torah for its own sake, merits

many things; not only that but he is worth the whole world. He is called beloved friend; one that loves God; one that loves humankind; one that gladdens God; one that gladdens humankind. And the Torah clothes him in humility and reverence, and equips him to be righteous, pious, upright and trustworthy; it keeps him far from sin, and brings him near to merit. And people benefit from his counsel, sound knowledge, understanding and strength, as it is said, "Counsel is mine and sound wisdom; I am understanding, strength is mine" (Proverbs 8:14). And it bestows upon him royalty, dominion, and acuteness in judgment. To him are revealed the secrets of the Torah, and he is made as an ever-flowing spring, and like a stream that never ceases. And he becomes modest, long-suffering and forgiving of insult. And it magnifies him and exalts him over everything.

2. acquisition of a companion

Letter To Menoecus, end

Meditate day and night then on this and similar things by yourself as well as together with those like yourself.

Avot 1:6

Yose ben Yochanan (a man) of Jerusalem used to say: Let thy house be wide open, and let the poor be members of thy household. Engage not in too much conversation with women. They said this with regard to one's own wife, how much more [does the rule apply] with regard to another man's wife. From here the Sages said: as long as a man engages in too much conversation with women, he causes evil to himself, he neglects the study of the Torah, and in the end he will inherit gehinnom.

3. diet of bread and water

Bailey, fr. 37

I am thrilled with pleasure in the body, when I live on bread and water, and I spit upon luxurious pleasures not for their own sake, but because of the inconveniences that follow them.

(NOTE: I've also addressed the "bread and water" issue in my translation to the letter to Menoikeus. Epicurus doesn't call us to have a life of "privation"... See Avot 6:4 below)

Avot 6:4

Such is the way [of a life] of Torah: you shall eat bread with salt, and rationed water shall you drink; you shall sleep on the ground, your life will be one of privation, and in Torah shall you labor. If you do this, "Happy shall you be and it shall be good for you" (Psalms 128:2): "Happy shall you be" in this world, "and it shall be good for you" in the world to come.

4. avoidance of public office

NOTE: We're fairly familiar with the "avoidance of public office" trope in current and former discussions here on the forum. A number of papers shared here have called that idea into question with respect to the ancient Epicureans.

Avot 1:10-11

Shimon ben Shetach used to say: be thorough in the interrogation of witnesses, and be careful with your words, lest from them they learn to lie.

Shemaiah and Abtalion received [the oral tradition] from them. Shemaiah used to say: love work, hate acting the superior, and do not attempt to draw near to the ruling authority.

Those four will do to illustrate my point. The citations have the most superficial similarities. The Epicurean "bread and water" sentiment especially has nothing to do with the living a life of privation. They could all be the result of convergent evolution. The statement "Agreements, however, both in content and literary form, between rabbinism and Epicureanism" does not deliver on its claim to be "striking." Your assertion that the Jewish movements (which it appears you're including Christianity under that name) copied aspects of Epicurus's philosophy doesn't seem to be substantiated by what I've seen

[Quote from Peter Konstans \(with numbers added\)](#)

Are we in agreement that (1) Epicureanism was the first major cult that spread its message chiefly through the medium of epistolography and (2) the first major school that envisioned a community of equals and friends without the mediations of political authority?

Unfortunately, I don't think we're in agreement on those two points. "Spreading its message chiefly through the medium of epistolography" doesn't strike me as quite accurate. One issue is that Epicurus *had* to communicate with his far-flung communities by letter during his lifetime. That was the means of communication, both for him and for Paul. They used similar media in similar circumstances. That doesn't mean Paul was inspired by Epicurus. I'm not sure how many letters we have from Epicurus's successors. It seems from the lists and extant texts, especially from Philodemus, that the Epicureans were much more interested in writing treatises than letters. Epicurus seems to have written as many treatises/books as letters, especially considering *On Nature* is 37 books itself.

On point 2, I'm not sure what you mean by "without the mediations of political authority." I wanted to also ask when you refer to the "community of equals and friends" are you referring to Epicurus's inclusion of women and enslaved people in his community, or the relative equality of students (of all kinds) in the Garden? Because I get from some of the texts that there was a definite hierarchy of teachers and students within the Garden for purposes of Epicurean education while they also thought of themselves as friends in time of need (and at other times as well).

I agree that Epicureanism was a potent, vital, active school of philosophy in the ancient world with communities from France (Gaul) to as far away as the area of modern Turkey in Oenoanda. But I maintain that similar strategies does not require inspiration or copying. Superficial similarities can simply be that religions and philosophies came up with similar solutions to similar problems.

Post by “Cassius” of October 3, 2023 at 1:36 AM

Thank you for taking the time to pull together those sources! I find the first one as to "study for its own sake" particularly interesting.

Post by “Peter Konstans” of October 3, 2023 at 7:31 AM

This is a very interesting discussion and there is much to discuss here. For now I will focus on the claim that Epicureanism is about 'living your life to the fullest instead of being a victim on the cross'. This ignores the fact that 'living your life to the fullest' was not the easiest thing to do in antiquity. Epicurus taught that what is good is easy to attain in stark contrast to moralists who always tend to exalt what is hard. In antiquity indulging yourself in luxuries and being socio-economically privileged was basically the same thing. You guys must have noticed this trend where exposure of the masses to infotainment that the likes of Mary Beard peddle has made people so infatuated with the Roman Empire that they report thinking of it every day. Vaclav Smil, a zero-nonsense scholar who has studied the economy of antiquity would use hard numbers to remind those people that the material circumstances of the period that the majority had to endure (even free people, not just slaves) actually resembled those of the very poorest countries in today's third world. Acquiring privilege in such an environment didn't mean going to college and becoming a successful businessman but seeking political patronage and inevitably getting involved in nasty political conflicts which easily turned lethal. Things could not have been more different today. We can afford to indulge in all sorts of luxuries and excesses like fine dining and drugs without acquiring high social status. And unlike us Epicurus flourished in violent times where there was not much room for our jokes. Today we demonstrate on the streets and congratulate ourselves for 'fighting' valorously and even teenagers are taken seriously as social reformers and visionaries. When the ancient Epicureans rejected luxury they automatically and unambiguously rejected political ambition since you didn't get to have the one without the other. If you oppose luxury you have to embrace minimalism and if you are skeptical toward political ambitions you have to embrace the

modesty of a life with limited public exposure within the confines of a small community of friends. Epicurus argued that this is the key to the happy life and this is not an abstract ideal. There is in fact ample empirical evidence showing he was correct. That's how we observe people in the so called 'blue zones' living. That's how Daniel Everett who spent many years with the Amazonian Piraha and was left with no doubt that they are the 'happiest people in the world' also observed them living. These groups tend to be both strict minimalists and sensuous hedonists and no contradiction is involved. While being minimalist, they are still far more sensuous than the typical person in our societies could fathom and they do not shy away from alcohol or carnal play at all. But being a sensuous hedonist doesn't exclusively have to involve eating, drinking and sexing. David Buettner describes a happy family in Singapore where a woman kisses the hand of her husband every morning. Superficially that seems like a deplorable expression of submission but it's rather a highly sensual gesture that Epicurus would have approved as a manifestation of legitimate hedonism serving to please her husband and remind them both every day of the tender commitment binding them together. John Gottman reports how a therapist advised an unhappy couple to arrange a mud fight in the garden. They were shocked to hear that and thought the therapist was an idiot but they tried it out, they had a blast and it saved their marriage. So something like a mud fight or a hand kiss can also be legitimate expressions of hedonism that are not on our pleasure radar because our radar is not a very advanced model. So Epicurus was well aware that the full spectrum of hedonism contained more than just indulging yourself in drinking bouts and the like and urged people to pay attention to the full spectrum. That's one of the reasons why his definition of pleasure was misunderstood as idiosyncratic. He tried to convince people of simple pleasures that were as of yet unknown to them and to which they couldn't relate. Now I would like to say something about the 'victims'. In the protestant world there is no monastic tradition but here where I live it still survives and even non-believers admire the anachorites' genuine commitment to their faith. It would never cross my mind to put a Nietzschean mask on and call Christian monks 'life-denying victims'. These people lead lives that they obviously enjoy sincerely and deeply. They talk in a manner that radiates mental stability, tranquility and confidence, all rare qualities that Epicurus would have liked. They also have qualities that Epicurus would have hated like torturing themselves with arduous physical trials (like hauling heavy loads of timber across mountains and enduring extreme fasting) in the pursuit of receiving the grace of holiness (glorification aka doxasmos) by God. But there is no doubt that they enjoy what they do and when asked they affirm unreservedly that their life is a life of pleasure, not of sacrifice. And they are aware that there is a huge difference between them and ordinary Christians who are steeped in genuine spiritual misery. They tell us that the religious motivations of ordinary Christians are as worldly and indifferent to the love of Christ as those that motivated the pagan masses in antiquity and they are in fact quite right. Ordinary Christians pray and go to church so that God likes them and blesses them with a happy life. They want their businesses to stay afloat, they want to enjoy a good income and be shielded from poverty, they want their bodies to be shielded from sickness and decay and they want their brood to have a good education, a good job and a good partner so that they can feel proud in the envious eyes of society. And when all is said and done they want a cozy afterlife. It's exactly those kind of stupid attitudes

and fixations with all their unpleasant behavioral complexes and neuroses that Epicurus sought to banish. There is here an actual affinity between unorthodox elements in Judaism (from where Christianity emerged) and Epicureanism. They are both goaded by similar revulsions, intentions and motivations. Both wanted to empower man and bring him closer to a blissful divine-like state. But they went about this differently. Epicureanism sought to banish the gods from human life completely and elevate man to a blissful status by training him to be a proper and dedicated hedonist. Radical Judaism sought to limit God to his role as a judge who will only reveal himself in the apocalypse. Until then they wanted to focus on training people to use all their energy to secure god's grace in order to receive a favorable judgement and become divine beings themselves when the day of judgement comes. Interestingly, Epicurus was also thought of as a sort of judge personally monitoring your progress as a hedonist. The advice 'do everything as if Epicurus is watching' is parallel with 'do everything as if God is watching'.

Post by “Cassius” of October 3, 2023 at 8:27 AM

Peter I want to say as an aside that it is going to take some time for me to read and follow what you just wrote. Sometimes I am finding what you write agreeable to me, sometimes less so, but I can say with confidence that your contributions are very stimulating and I appreciate the time you are taking in making them.

Post by “Godfrey” of October 3, 2023 at 4:16 PM

[Peter Konstans](#) , it would be extremely helpful if you would break up your writing into proper paragraphs. With all due respect, I can't even read what you just posted: it just comes across as an overwhelming stream of words.

In the interest of respecting the ideas that you're expressing, please consider giving some time to formatting your posts in such a way as to maximize what could prove to be a very interesting discussion.

Thanks! Godfrey

Post by “Peter Konstans” of October 4, 2023 at 4:06 AM

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3359-epicureanism-as-the-spiritual-essence-or-religion-of-an-entire-community/>

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

[Peter Konstans](#) , it would be extremely helpful if you would break up your writing into proper paragraphs. With all due respect, I can't even read what you just posted: it just comes across as an overwhelming stream of words.

In the interest of respecting the ideas that you're expressing, please consider giving some time to formatting your posts in such a way as to maximize what could prove to be a very interesting discussion.

Thanks! Godfrey

I will try to separate the materials into paragraphs to ease the reading process for the eye. But I cannot ease the process for the mind. The logical coherence of the argument is there and the English is syntactically correct. The only thing I could suggest that might help somebody get used to this particular 'dense' style of writing is to learn German and read German books. If you are interested in ancient philosophy and the humanities in general German-language scholarship in those areas is simply the finest in the world. I have studied that language in university and teach it for a living. In non-spoken German subordinate clauses are often woven together almost endlessly in a manner that English tends to avoid even in books dealing with complex issues. One could train the mind in pretty much the same way by mastering Latin or Ancient Greek but German is obviously far more useful and easier to acquire.

Post by “Peter Konstans” of October 4, 2023 at 8:22 AM

What did I mean when I said something like 'the Epicureans were the first cult to try to imagine an ideal community without political mediations'? It simply means that Epicureanism was only one of several schools that dreamed of a better social co-existence between humans. But the other schools had strong political flavors whereas Epicureanism didn't.

Here we find another affinity with radical Judaism and to illustrate that we can use an example from what Jesus himself (who was in reality merely the leader of one of many unorthodox Judaist sects of that time) allegedly did.

According to the gospels when Jesus encountered a Roman centurion he was friendly to him and congratulated him because he saw that the centurion's wisdom exceeded that of the children of Israel. Jesus didn't tell him 'you are a filthy pig and you need to get away from the holy country of Israel' which is what an orthodox Jewish priest would have done. He didn't tell him that being a soldier is evil and that he should get another job as the modern Nietzschean

caricatures of Christianity would imagine Jesus doing.

Elsewhere in the gospels Jesus says 'give unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar and give unto God what belongs to God'. So it's clear that Jesus was apolitical and also not a moralist in the traditional sense. He didn't care that you weren't a Jew. He didn't care about your private life being pure, he didn't care what worldly regime existed in his time. The only thing he cared about was to bring everybody into salvation. Just as Epicurus was called a 'soter' (savior) so did Jesus understand himself as a savior. And Jesus was interested in saving everybody who wanted to be saved, not just the Jews and not just the virtuous people. So here we observe an implicit denigration of popular virtue in Christianity. Jesus spends much time in the gospels condemning the hypocrisy of orthodox Jews precisely because he is not impressed by popular virtue.

Jesus was also clearly a pacifist even though he lived in a country under foreign occupation. Epicureanism also has this aspect. Remember the anecdote where an Epicurean demonstrates to Pyrrhus of Epirus that his conquests are just a folly and that harming people is the wrong way to pleasure.

So summing up radical Judaism was apolitical (the only state that mattered was the kingdom of heaven) it was cosmopolitan in its vision ('there shall be no Greek and no Jew'), it was pacifist in a country that cried for blood (and would soon get it) and it completely lacked elitist tones so that even prostitutes could be redeemed. In the staunchly patriarchal and zero-jokes world of antiquity prostitutes were regarded not as 'sex workers' but as something like a doll invested with filthy flesh, a pseudo-human form of life. So the radicality of Jesus in the context of Judaism should not be underestimated, it was this radicality that got him killed after all. So Jesus was definitely not a 'pathetic victim'. He was an unorthodox figure who firmly stood up for what he believed and paid the ultimate price. This is hell of a lot more than most modern political warriors would have done if they were up against real pressures.

The radicality of Epicurean egalitarianism in the context of the Greco-Roman world should also not be underestimated. Once again I wish to remind people that wealth inequalities were intense to the effect that religious sacrifices contributed significantly to valuable nutrition for the masses. Religion didn't just feed people's illusions. It also fed them literally. This was not a world where criticism of popular religion was a harmless thing to do. Epicureans are known to have faced expulsions for their beliefs.

Post by “Don” of October 4, 2023 at 8:30 AM

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

This is a very interesting discussion and there is much to discuss here.

I would agree that this is an interesting discussion from an intellectual perspective; however, I'm beginning to ask what the practical benefit is. And I say this in reference to the current discussion and to DeWitt's penchant for uncovering Epicurean origins of Christian practices and doctrine. While I remain unconvinced and skeptical of much of these alleged connections among Epicureanism, Judaism, and Christianity, I also don't see why it should be important other than for historical curiosity. It's not as if we who find value in Epicurus's philosophy will suddenly see the light, so to speak, and convert to Christian or Jewish practice.

You have included a voluminous amount of information and commentary in your post no. 26 so I do not have time at this moment to respond to it all. Below is merely a start and not meant to comprehensively reply in any way. I'll try to come back to it later, but you raise some interesting points, not all of which I agree with.

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

For now I will focus on the claim that Epicureanism is about 'living your life to the fullest instead of being a victim on the cross'. This ignores the fact that 'living your life to the fullest' was not the easiest thing to do in antiquity.

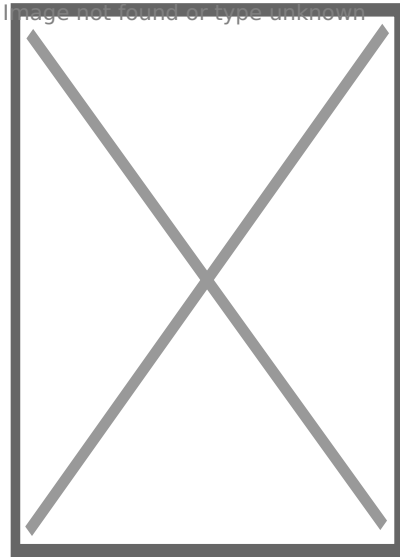
I would quibble with the formulation "living your life to the fullest," although I realize that's a popular way of phrasing it. From my perspective, Epicurus's philosophy is about experiencing the available pleasure at every moment of our lives, every moment of our existence. My perspective on the mention of "bread and water" in the Letter to Menoikeus and elsewhere is about taking pleasure in quotidian experiences like a simple meal we may eat every day. "Living life to the fullest" sounds too much like the skydiving, popular culture "carpe diem" "fear of missing out" "you only live once" idea. While those experiences may be part of Epicurus's philosophy, it's not the primary message.

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

Mary Beard and Vaclav Smil

For those unfamiliar with Beard and Smil:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Beard_\(classicist\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Beard_(classicist))



[Vaclav Smil - Wikipedia](#)

en.wikipedia.org

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

If you oppose luxury you have to embrace minimalism and if you are skeptical toward political ambitions you have to embrace the modesty of a life with limited public exposure within the confines of a small community of friends.

From my reading of the extant texts, I do not see Epicurus opposing luxury when it is available nor do I see him advocating an embrace of minimalism. Additionally, Epicurus did not sequester himself nor his students within the walls of the Garden. His house was inside the city walls of Athens. He took part, and encouraged his students to do the same, in the rites and festivals of his city. As one example of one who has confronted this "minimalist" Epicurus idea, Dr. Emily Austin's recent book does an excellent job of putting the myth of Epicurus's ascetism/minimalism to rest.

That's all I have time for right now. More to come later possibly.

Post by "Cassius" of October 4, 2023 at 9:00 AM

Some targeted comments:

[Quote from Don](#)

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3359-epicureanism-as-the-spiritual-essence-or-religion-of-an-entire-community/>

While I remain unconvinced and skeptical of much of these alleged connections among Epicureanism, Judaism, and Christianity, I also don't see why it should be important other than for historical curiosity. It's not as if we who find value in Epicurus's philosophy will suddenly see the light, so to speak, and convert to Christian or Jewish practice.

I agree with Don that the interest is not at all something that should motivate us to be more embracing of Christianity or Judaism, any more than those cults embrace Epicurus. But this is one of those areas where people differ, and I would include myself in the list of those who was so indoctrinated into Christianity at an early age that it remains fascinating, even later in life, to explore the parallels. And as a manner of exploring the learning about Epicurus, these parallels are going to be of interest to many, and probably a majority, of people who investigate Epicurus, as they provide familiar landmarks during the exploration.

[Quote from Don](#)

I would quibble with the formulation "living your life to the fullest," although I realize that's a popular way of phrasing it. From my perspective, Epicurus's philosophy is about experiencing the available pleasure at every moment of our lives, every moment of our existence.

I see nothing contradictory between those two sentences, but the twist probably comes with the word "available." I don't think Don suggests that you just sit and wait to see what pleasure falls in your lap, but unless you make clear that it is indeed appropriate to go out and seek pleasure, then many people will misunderstand this as a Buddhist-sounding call to retreat inward.

[Quote from Don](#)

"Living life to the fullest" sounds too much like the skydiving, popular culture "carpe diem" "fear of missing out" "you only live once" idea. While those experiences may be part of Epicurus's philosophy, it's not the primary message.

This is where the contradiction comes in. I do think "you only live once" when properly understood is Epicurean, and I do think it is pretty much the primary message.

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

When the ancient Epicureans rejected luxury they automatically and unambiguously rejected political ambition since you didn't get to have the one without the other. If you oppose luxury you have to embrace minimalism and if you are skeptical toward political

ambitions you have to embrace the modesty of a life with limited public exposure within the confines of a small community of friends.

Now here I have to part with Peter somewhat. I don't think the Epicureans reject luxury and embrace minimalism per se, and I think that is a huge mistake of modern Epicureans to imply that minimalism should be the norm. I think the message is that you cultivate your surroundings and adapt to circumstances. You work the fields in the summer and feast in the fall. You intelligently embrace luxury where it can be enjoyed without pain that outweighs the benefits of it. You savor the little that you may have when luxury is not available, but you never aim at either minimalism or luxury as ends in themselves. There is no other word that describes the end of life given by Nature other than "Pleasure."

As to pleasure being the only description of the end: (*"Strip mankind of sensation, and nothing remains; it follows that Nature herself is the judge of that which is in accordance with or contrary to nature. What does Nature perceive or what does she judge of, beside pleasure and pain, to guide her actions of desire and of avoidance?"*)

As to not targeting minimalism or luxury: ([130] *Yet by a scale of comparison and by the consideration of advantages and disadvantages we must form our judgment on all these matters. For the good on certain occasions we treat as bad, and conversely the bad as good. And again independence of desire we think a great good — not that we may at all times enjoy but a few things, but that, if we do not possess many, we may enjoy the few in the genuine persuasion that those have the sweetest pleasure in luxury who least need it, and that all that is natural is easy to be obtained, but that which is superfluous is hard. And so plain savours bring us a pleasure equal to a luxurious diet, when all the pain due to want is removed; and bread and water produce the highest pleasure, when one who needs them puts them to his lips. [131] To grow accustomed therefore to simple and not luxurious diet gives us health to the full, and makes a man alert for the needful employments of life, and when after long intervals we approach luxuries disposes us better towards them, and fits us to be fearless of fortune.*)

Post by “Don” of October 4, 2023 at 9:55 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I do think "you only live once" when properly understood is Epicurean, and I do think it is pretty much the primary message.

Fully agree with "properly understood." I was referring in my post the popular YOLO acronym.

[YOLO \(aphorism\) - Wikipedia](#)

Quote

The word was criticized for its use in conjunction with reckless behavior, most notably in a Twitter post by aspiring rapper Ervin McKinness just prior to his death, caused by driving drunk at 120 mph (193 km/h)

Post by “Cassius” of October 4, 2023 at 10:02 AM

Yes, I think most of us will agree that driving drunk at 120 mph would generally expected to be an un-Epicurean thing to do. 😊

You'd have to stretch pretty hard to come up with circumstances where that would be the prudent thing to do.

But having said that, I am sure some of our active minds here could probably come up with hypotheticals to show that even "Don't drive drunk at 120 mph" isn't handed down by god or written in the great list of Platonic ideals in the sky!

Of course once again there's the problem with hypotheticals..... practical minds don't enjoy them and they quickly get insufferable.

Post by “Don” of October 4, 2023 at 10:37 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

it remains fascinating, even later in life, to explore the parallels [between Christianity and Epicureanism]

Oh, I would include myself as someone who finds that topic interesting. I've just never seen any parallels (with maybe one exception - see below) that convince me of anything other than convergent evolution. I could maybe see Catholic confession as a perversion of frank criticism, but even that may only be superficial without my knowledge of the wider ancient cultural context.

I've seen a lot of proof texting and applying an almost Rorschach Testing to these topics. It seems people, scholars included, see what they want to see.

Post by “Peter Konstans” of October 4, 2023 at 5:56 PM

I am glad I am getting the engagement I hoped I would be getting when I registered here. To avoid any misunderstandings, I wish to make clear that I don't regard anybody on this awesome page (thank goodness it exists) as somehow less Epicurean than I am whatever his views on any of the issues raised here may be. I see us all as being equally dedicated to Epicureanism and these discussions simply serve to provide some intellectual stimulation in the interests of pleasure and it's in no wise my intention to irritate someone or sow divisions.

Now, in the limited time I have before bed I would like to briefly address the issue of Christian epistolography. The most famous examples thereof are of course the letters attributed to Paul as integral part of the biblical canon, although not all of them are considered authentic today. The texts present the very first examples of Christian literature.

Claiming that the letters of the Corpus Paulinum belong to the literary genre of philosophical letters, (a tradition with no antecedents in Jewish culture during Paul's time) does not somehow contradict their status as 'real letters'. Allow me to translate the following paragraph from the German wiki article on the Pauline letters which illustrates the point well.

Die Paulusbriefe sind viel länger als gewöhnliche antike Privatbriefe, haben eine überlegte Gliederung und waren zum öffentlichen Verlesen im urchristlichen Gottesdienst bestimmt. Sie enthalten eine Vielfalt literarischer Kunstformen, die der Autor gezielt als Mittel der theologischen Argumentation einsetzte und die seine rhetorische Bildung zeigen. Ihr Zweck, eine persönliche Beziehung zwischen Autor und Adressaten zu bewahren und zu vertiefen, verbindet sie mit gewöhnlichen Freundschafts- und Familienbriefen. Ihre Kombination von lehrhaften, ethischen und autobiografischen Inhalten verbindet sie mit zeitgenössischen philosophischen Briefen. Darum werden die Paulusbriefe formal und inhaltlich als spezifisch urchristliche Literaturform eingestuft.

The Pauline letters are much longer than common private letters from antiquity. They are composed in neat sections and were meant to be read openly during the proto-Christian mass. They contain a plethora of literary conventional standards employed deliberately by the author as a means to argue theological points thus revealing his training in ancient rhetoric. The letters' goal to maintain and increase the personal connection between author and recipient puts them in the same category as typical correspondence between friends and family. However, their combination of didactic, ethical and autobiographical content puts the letters in

the same group with contemporary philosophical letters. Hence, the letters are classed as regards their formal character and their particular content as a specifically proto-Christian literary genre.

Notice the distinction between Form (format, or formal character) and Inhalt (particular content) in the German paragraph. The formal character here is twofold: 1) that of a Greco-Roman philosophical letter with its typical literary and rhetorical conventions 2) that of a letter between close friends. The particular content is Proto-Christian theology. This distinction between format and content is ubiquitous in all continental European scholarship that has to do with the humanities. So there is no contradiction here from the European point of view. Something can be an ancient philosophical letter, Christian theology and a perfectly 'real letter' at the same time and face no existential crisis.

There is however a cultural tendency to ignore the use of such theoretical tools in the English-speaking countries or even to mock them as unscientific. Caspar Hirschi laments this fact in the English version of his book on nationalism and tries to convince his readers why they are actually useful. This tendency explains why some real historical affinities are automatically felt to be impossible contradictions or arbitrary verbose nonsense (for example the connection between humanism and nationalism that Hirschi writes about).

The tendency also explains some cultural habits that European observers find odd and leave them shaking their heads. For example, English-speaking atheists might talk about the differences between atheism and deism and then say that reasonable people are rather deists since they avoid 'strong claims' or they might talk about the differences between strong atheism and weak atheism etc. The problem with all this is that very little effort is made to contextualize and historicize the discussions surrounding those terms and concepts so in the end the whole thing resembles teenagers analyzing a videogame and arguing over which one is better.

In other words, they act as if the world of ideas is a supermarket where uniquely labeled products are neatly arranged on the shelf for you to buy, use and discard. But the world of ideas rather resembles a complex ecosystem: a highly dynamic and messy ecological environment where individual components are never seen sitting on a shelf. They constantly interact with other components over the course of their life cycle and are then consumed by other components and subsequently recycled into new different ones.

Post by “Cassius” of October 4, 2023 at 6:16 PM

Another very interesting post and I am glad you are pleased with the level of engagement. I am no longer sure if you are Greek or German but your English is top notch!

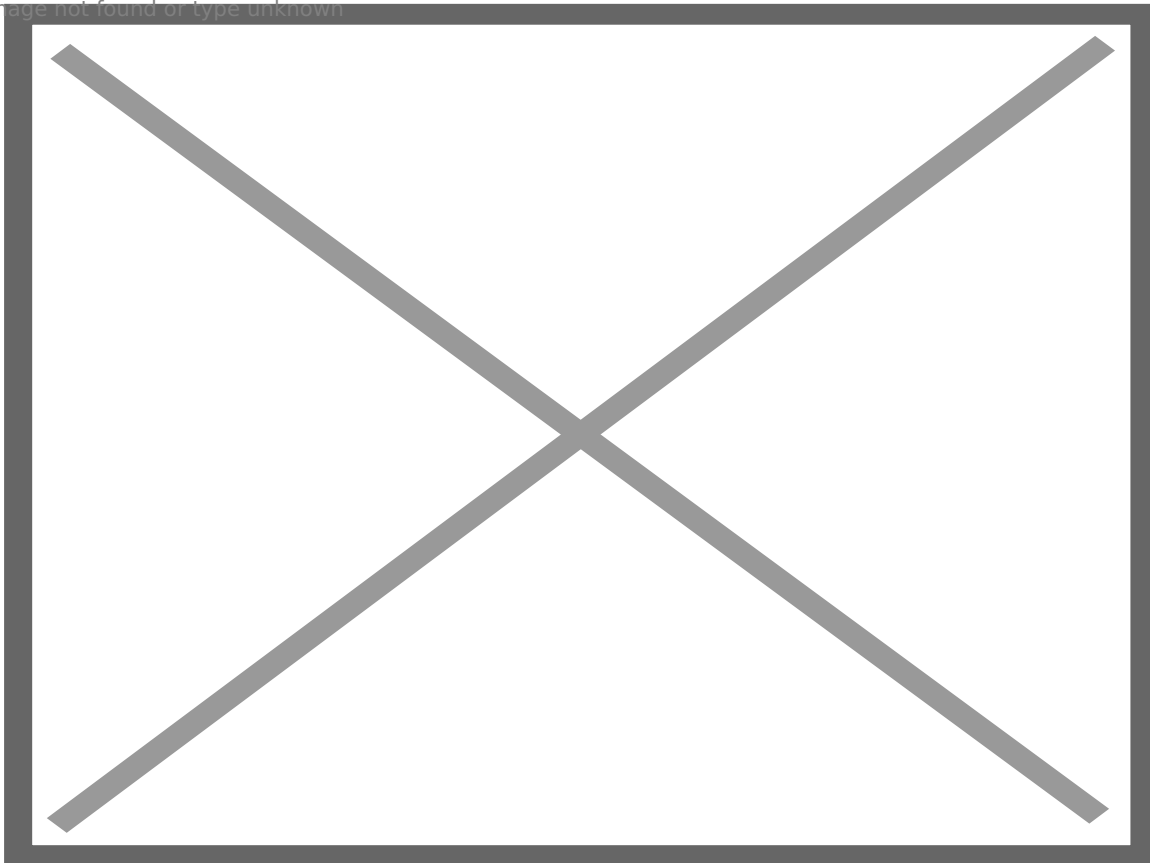
Post by “Cassius” of October 4, 2023 at 6:17 PM

So are you saying that you have found in your studies that there is in fact not much of a historical precedent for the use of letter-writing for spread of philosophical ideas before Epicurus?

Post by “Don” of October 4, 2023 at 6:24 PM

I would want to see more resources, but per this Wikipedia article, letter writing dates back at least to ancient Egypt:

Image not found or type unknown



[Epistle - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org)
en.wikipedia.org

Post by “Joshua” of October 4, 2023 at 6:37 PM

I suspect that Paul wrote letters because he was responding to the same social and political pressures that the Epicureans were responding to, whether or not there was any connection between the two traditions--both groups were barred from teaching in the Gymnasia, the Agora, and the Roman Forum. So they found recourse in one of the only options left to them. This was a stroke of great luck for us, as Zeno's whole output from the Stoa is lost except in fragments while Epicurus' letters survive.

In the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, a similar phenomenon developed called the Republic of Letters, a complex web of private correspondence for the transmission of ideas. Ironically, the term was first used by Francesco Barbaro in a letter to Poggio Bracciolini, and in the *very same year*--1417--that saw the rediscovery of Lucretius by the latter. In one surviving letter, a friend of Poggio pleads with him to be more guarded in his writing--a letter stops being private if it falls into the wrong hands, after all.

Poggio's letter written in admiration of Jerome of Prague, a heretic murdered by the Church at the Council of Constance, is [here](#).

Post by “Don” of October 4, 2023 at 7:19 PM

Discussions like this always lead me back to how much we've lost.

Paul founded probably 20 churches, conceivably wrote letters to each maybe once a year over 10 years. That's potentially 200 letters.

We have 7 undisputed letters left.

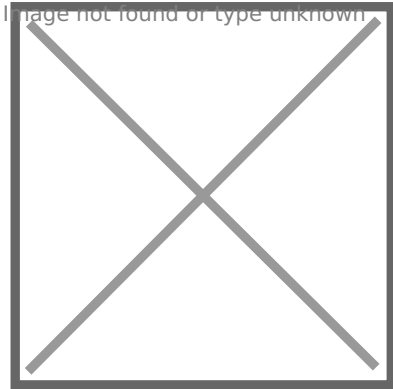
Epicurus had communities of friends in Asia Minor and probably wrote regularly.

We have 3 whole letters plus fragments of a few others.

And the numbers get worse for older civilizations or those not deemed worthy of transcribing or transmitting.

Post by “Don” of October 4, 2023 at 11:02 PM

An interesting paper on the topic of ancient letter writing theory:



[Ancient Epistolary Theory: a Brief Overview](#)

Ancient Epistolary Theory: a Brief Overview
www.academia.edu

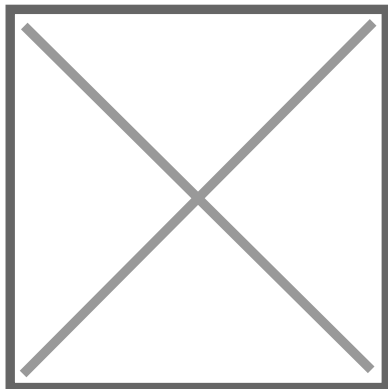
Some quotes:

The oldest preserved letter that contains the epistolary formulas typical for the subsequent epistolographic practice is the letter of Cyrus to Cyaxares, inserted in Xenophon's Cyropaedia (Κύρου παιδεία) (Xen. Cyrop. 4.5. 27-33). Cyropaedia was written around 370 BC. The letters that the manuscript tradition assigns to Plato are also dated to this period approximately.

In the Second Philippic, Cicero calls letters amicorum colloquia absentium 'conversation between absent friends' (Cic. Phil. 2.4).

Interesting to me, the paper also includes numerous types of letters written in the ancient Greek world.

Here's another one:



['Paul's Letter Opening and its Relationship to Ancient Greek Letters: A Study in Epistolary Presence,' in S.E. Porter and Sean A. Adams \(eds.\), Paul and the Ancient Letter Form \(PAST 6; Brill, 2010\), 33-55.](#)

'Paul's Letter Opening and its Relationship to Ancient Greek Letters: A Study in Epistolary Presence,' in S.E. Porter and Sean A. Adams (eds.), Paul and the...
www.academia.edu

The study of epistolography and Paul is a vital undertaking if we are to understand Paul's relationship to the Greco-Roman world of letter writing. Paul did not write in a vacuum, but was rather trained in the letter writing principles of his day.

Personal letters constitute the most common letter tradition of the ancient world, whose general format remained fairly constant from the third century B.C. to into the third century A.D.1

Most openings are short, direct and with very little expansion, with the overwhelming number of letter openings having the following formula: A to B, Greetings with an occasional health wish.

*It is clear from his letters that Paul's standard greeting is not the traditional *χαίρειν*, but rather he employs his now signature "Grace to you and peace" with the additional *!from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*"*

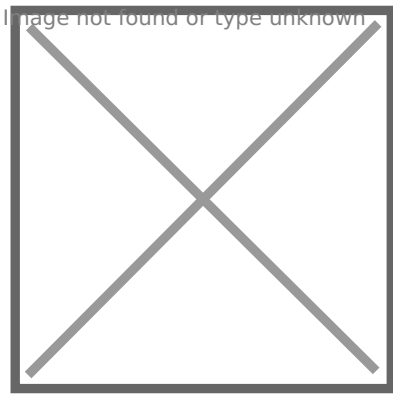
*It is interesting to evaluate the nature of *χάρις υμίν και ειρηνη*. It is clear that there is a relationship between *χαρις* and *χαίρειν*, in that they both are derived from the same root.⁴⁴*

*This similarity is beyond chance and suggests that Paul was adapting his letter greeting from the traditional *χαίρειν* form.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Paul's use of peace is parallel to the Hebrew letter form. As mentioned above, Ezra 4:17-22 and 5:7-17 both utilize the "To Y, Shalom" formula. However, in the LXX the word used to translate "shalom" is *ειρηνη*. It appears that Paul was incorporating the Hebrew greeting into his letters and combined it with the noun form of the verb *χαίρειν* to create his letter greeting.*

I'll stop quoting there, but it seems to me that Paul is simply part of a letter writing tradition within the larger Greco-Roman and Jewish culture in which he lived. I see no reason to try to establish a link specifically between Epicurus's letter writing and Paul's activity.

Post by "Don" of October 4, 2023 at 11:58 PM

FYI



[Material Aspects of Letter Writing in the Graeco-Roman World \(500 B.C. - 300 A.D.\), De Gruyter 2017](#)

Ancient letters had formatting and stylistic conventions that were carefully respected by their writers. This book provides the first comprehensive study of...

www.academia.edu

(Full book)

I found this excerpt interesting, putting Epicurus and Paul in a wider context, noting both similarities and differences within that context:

Quote

Early literary letters were probably collected and edited by students or readers after the death of their authors. The main common characteristic of these letters is that they bear only the external characteristics of letters; in fact, they are rhetorical or philosophical treatises, and can only be placed at the borderline of the epistolary genre. The letters of Plato and the letter of Thucydides are rather συγγράμματα (treatises), in accordance with Demetrius's understanding of the proper style of a letter.¹²⁴ In imperial Roman and late antique times, philosophical doctrines continue to be written in epistolary form, in the style of the Epicurean letter. Such are, for example, the didactic letters of Seneca,¹²⁵ the Stoic letters of Musonius Rufus (1st

c. AD), and the philosophical letters of the neopythagorean Apollonius of Tyana (1st c. AD). To the same type may be classified the letters of Saint Paul, although the latter were sent not only for the purpose of teaching, but also for the spiritual support and practical organisation of newly-established churches. In Late Antiquity, letters that include philosophical doctrines are those of the emperor Julian the Apostate and the church fathers, especially the Cappadocians Saint Basil and Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, also, a large collection of letters (about 1600), including correspondence with Saint Basil, has survived from the teacher of rhetoric, Libanius (AD 314-393). (p.25-26)

Post by “Don” of October 5, 2023 at 8:00 AM

We've been on a history of letter writing tangent on this thread; so, in an effort to get back on track, I'm copying and reformatting in the form of a list the initial questions that [Peter Konstans](#) posed in the first post. Feel free to respond to any or all of the individual questions:

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

1. Has anybody ever experimented with the idea of Epicureanism as a formal spiritual identity capable of defining entire communities? What would Epicureanism look like if it wasn't merely a brotherhood of friends discussing philosophy but was also a sort of quasi religious worldview with its own intricate rituals, symbols and ceremonies covering every aspect of life?
2. Could Epicureanism ever assume a form where it would be able to successfully compete with well-established religious traditions for the hearts and minds of huge numbers of people?
3. What would a 'holy book' of Epicureanism look like and what would it contain other than the letters of Epicurus and the poem of Lucretius?
4. To what extent can the views and advice of brilliant therapists or educators like John Gottman, Gigi Engle or Dan Buettner be thought of as Epicurean and admitted in some form in the 'scriptures' and literature of Epicureanism?
5. How would an Epicurean society raise and educate its kids? Since school is so horrendously boring, tedious and unpleasant to children (school is also the only place other than prison where people are quite likely to be bullied and tortured) how would an Epicurean society deal with the problem of educating the new generation?
6. Given that modern Western hyper-liberalism presents society and individuals with many obvious problems that are impossible to deny today what laws, customs and institutions would hypothetical Epicurean lawmakers create to avoid them?

Post by “Peter Konstans” of October 6, 2023 at 6:37 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Another very interesting post and I am glad you are pleased with the level of engagement. I am no longer sure if you are Greek or German but your English is top notch!

Thanks! I am Greek with no foreign roots as far as I can tell. Having studied German philology I teach the language as a part-time job.

Post by “Peter Konstans” of October 6, 2023 at 7:26 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

So are you saying that you have found in your studies that there is in fact not much of a historical precedent for the use of letter-writing for spread of philosophical ideas before Epicurus?

The use of literary letters in the Greek world is older than Epicurus though not very much older. This genre was originally developed by ancient orators and it was adopted by philosophers (Epicurus was also trained in oratory). Of course the distinction between orators and philosophers was muddy back then. That's why the professional orator and statesman Cicero is also labeled a 'philosopher' even though he was not much of an original thinker.

Paul was a missionary theologian but the distinction between theologians and philosophers also tended to be murky in antiquity. This is seen for example in how Christian theology adopted many philosophical terms like e. g. the Stoic term *pronoia* (providence) and changed their content. Just like Paul's letters (which were read during mass for the purposes of catechism) so did the letters of Epicurus function as materials for philosophical catechism.

The fact that the only specimens coming directly from the pen of Epicurus other than the *Kyriai Doxai* that survived intact are such letters indicates that their use was more popular among Epicureans to gain new converts and educate themselves compared to his many other authored texts which were voluminous and highly technical and as such not suitable for mass consumption. The *Kyriai Doxai* is also highly convenient so it's no wonder this managed to survive too.

Epicureanism had a mission and Epicureans were highly motivated to do what it takes to get as many people as they could to hear their message. Epicurus didn't think of his philosophy as a philosophy like any other. He thought of it as the only true philosophy and the only one of practical and real value.

It was this missionary-like spirit that goaded Diogenes to take up the expense of erecting a massive rock to transmit Epicurus' message to coming generations. I don't know any other example of people using inscriptions to spread an entire belief system and I don't know any other tradition before Epicureanism that did exactly the same thing using literary epistles. The use of epistles for catechism can't possibly have escaped the notice of non-Epicureans if

Epicureanism was indeed popular back then (as it was). But nobody would have had any motive to copy this practice unless they also had their own message to spread to everybody and a strong missionary zeal to go with it. The early Christians were precisely such a movement.

Post by “Peter Konstans” of October 6, 2023 at 4:01 PM

Here are some thoughts about how a theory regarding politics that is compatible with Epicureanism could look like.

Because justice is relative in Epicureanism it follows that the desire to pursue politics is not ultimately rooted in the pursuit of justice. Politics is rooted in two things: the individual desire for power and recognition on one hand and on the other the collective desire to work together in solidarity for common insurance against the forces of nature as well as against depredations by other human groups.

From an Epicurean viewpoint, the first desire is natural but not necessary. So for reasons rooted in Epicurean ethics, keeping political ambitions and passions to a bare minimum is always advisable. A culture of modesty in politicians such as that enforced by the ancient Roman censors would be beneficial.

The second desire is as natural as eating and hydrating and yet fulfilling it is actually painful since it involves individual duties and costs. So justice comes in as a necessary weapon for ensuring that everyone in a political entity contributes his fair share to our common insurance. The urge for someone to conform with justice as defined above is rooted in two things: 1) personal affinity and benevolence towards the group 2) subtle or violent coercion. The less affinity people have for the group the more coercion is required to have them behave justly and as more coercion is used to that end, overt violence rears its head until a vicious cycle finally tears the group asunder in flames. So for reasons rooted in Epicurean ethics, any action and attitude that could conceivably diminish the benevolent disposition of individuals towards the group (for example extreme wealth inequality or jailing people for trivial matters like drug possession for personal use or treating poor foreigners equally or better than the poorest natives) must be seen as unjust because it invites the violent forces of destruction.

So a hypothetical Epicurean society would be incompatible with the political culture of ancient Greco-Roman society because the desire for individual glory was too strong. And it would be incompatible with contemporary Western political culture because it encourages habits and attitudes that result in weak affinity towards the group.

Post by "Cassius" of October 6, 2023 at 4:12 PM

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

A culture of modesty in politicians such as that enforced by the ancient Roman censors would be beneficial.

I fully agree and this reminds me of the story about the person whispering in the ear of the general in the triumph that he is only a mortal.

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

So for reasons rooted in Epicurean ethics, any action and attitude that could conceivably diminish the benevolent disposition of individuals towards the group (for example extreme wealth inequality or jailing people for trivial matters like drug possession for personal use or treating poor foreigners equally or better than the poorest natives) must be seen as unjust because it invites the violent forces of destruction.

I generally agree here, but the details are tricky. Cassius Longinus did not think that force / violence (presumably only in extreme circumstances) was off limits, and I do not consider him to be a bad Epicurean for so engaging. Or, at the very least, I don't have enough information to be comfortable concluding as to the extremity of the situation whether he was or was not correct in his choices. In any case I don't think there can be a "bright line" on these issues. I would see the following references as allowing for force or physical violence in the proper circumstances, and I suspect that there are others that could be drawn to the same conclusion with these simply being among the most prominent:

[PD06](#). In order that men might not fear one another, there was a natural benefit to be had from government and kingship, provided that they are able to bring about this result.

[PD07](#). Some men wished to become famous and conspicuous, thinking that they would thus win for themselves safety from other men. Wherefore if the life of such men is safe, they have obtained the good which nature craves; but if it is not safe, they do not possess that for which they strove at first by the instinct of nature.

[PD14](#). The most unalloyed source of protection from men, which is secured to some extent by a certain force of expulsion, is in fact the immunity which results from a quiet life, and retirement from the world.

[PD39](#). The man who has best ordered the element of disquiet arising from external circumstances has made those things that he could akin to himself, and the rest at least not alien; but with all to which he could not do even this, he has refrained from mixing, and has expelled from his life all which it was of advantage to treat thus.

[PD40](#). As many as possess the power to procure complete immunity from their neighbors, these also live most pleasantly with one another, since they have the most certain pledge of security, and, after they have enjoyed the fullest intimacy, they do not lament the previous departure of a dead friend, as though he were to be pitied.

Torquatus in On Ends Book One -XVI: Yet nevertheless some men indulge without limit their avarice, ambition and love of power, lust, gluttony and those other desires, which ill-gotten gains can never diminish but rather must inflame the more; inasmuch that they appear proper subjects for restraint rather than for reformation. Men of sound natures, therefore, are summoned by the voice of true reason to justice, equity, and honesty. For one without eloquence or resources dishonesty is not good policy, since it is difficult for such a man to succeed in his designs, or to make good his success when once achieved.

This is a subject in which it is very difficult to talk without summoning up modern partisan political examples, but I think it's both important that we discuss this in generic terms as we are now doing, and also important to keep those modern hot-button examples at bay so that the discussion can be truly exhaustive. Once we flesh out the principles we can let people apply those principles to their personal situations as they see fit.

Edit: Cassius mentions [in his letter to Cicero](#) of January, 45 BC, that another general fighting on the same side as Cassius -- Panza -- was also a follower of Pleasure. ("*Consequently Panza, who follows pleasure, keeps his hold on virtue, and those also whom you call pleasure-lovers are lovers of what is good and lovers of justice, and cultivate and keep all the virtues.*") And of course I have not listed in the above cites Torquatus' defense of his ancestors who fought enemies barehanded and even had members of their family executed for failing to obey military rules of order in explicitly Epicurean terms.

Post by “Peter Konstans” of October 8, 2023 at 11:47 AM

In the first century BC the forces of destruction (emanating from the domestic political mistakes of the previous century) were already working in full swing and the situation was no longer salvageable for the Roman Republic. In such a titanic implosion it was impossible for anyone to stand by the wayside and watch. All Epicureans could do at this point is pick the side that

suited their personal interests best. And the side that suited the interests of the little guys best was clearly the populist camp. So I agree with you that engaging in violence is not always avoidable for Epicureans and in certain irreversible historical situations engaging in it is the only possible option left for a more pleasant future. Israeli military historian Martin Van Creveld has even cited examples convincingly demonstrating that in periods of war and instability hedonism of all sorts actually tends to flourish and bonds of friendship between people grow stronger and more sensuous. He notes how after the war period people tend to recall the memories of those times with fondness and longing.

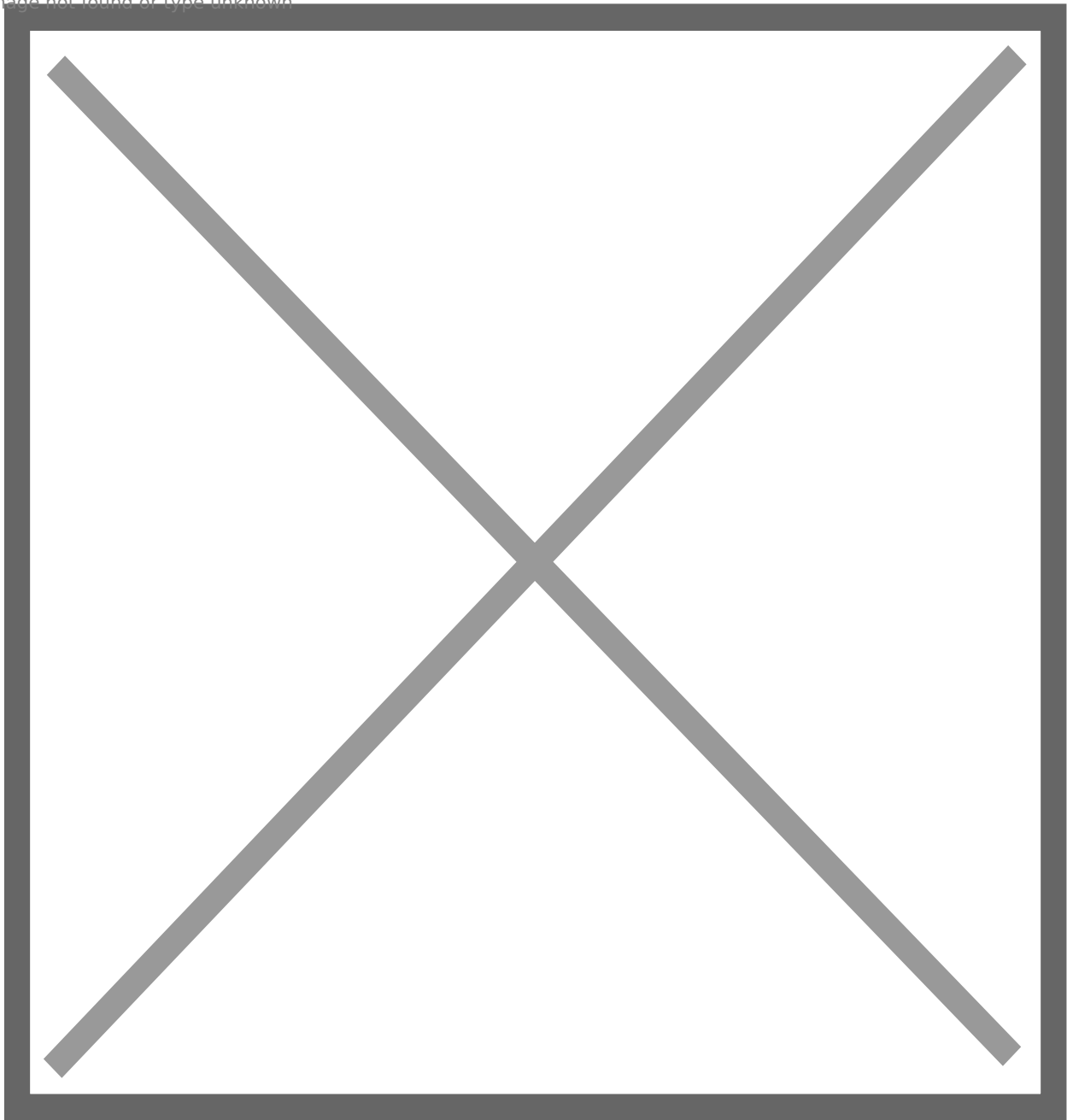
Post by “Peter Konstans” of October 15, 2023 at 2:21 PM

Has anybody noticed that? Great news for pleasure! The legendary silphium plant from Cyrene which Epicurus must have known and possibly even tasted - thought to have gone extinct by the time of Pliny - may have resurfaced in Cappadocia, modern Turkey. There are other proposed candidates as to the identity of this ancient herbaceous rockstar but this is the best bet.

Hopefully we'll be able to get hold of some seeds in the future so we can resurrect its culinary delights. As an Epicurean I am excited about this. The intoxicatingly attractive smell of this plant would procure us a concrete sensory experience that comes to us directly from the age of Epicurus without the mediation of later centuries. It would be the pure smell of BC antiquity, capable of carrying us aloft and thrusting us though time before gently dropping us in the middle of Epicurus' garden.

Because of silphium's unique connection with the Greco-Roman world and the association of its native Cyrene with the hedonist school, I think it would be a good idea to incorporate ferula drudeana into the symbolic imagery of modern Epicureanism.

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[This miracle plant was eaten into extinction 2,000 years ago—or was it?](#)

Silphion cured diseases and made food tasty, but Emperor Nero allegedly consumed the last stalk. Now, a Turkish researcher thinks he's found a botanical...

www.nationalgeographic.com

Post by “Jo.” of October 20, 2023 at 6:13 AM

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3359-epicureanism-as-the-spiritual-essence-or-religion-of-an-entire-community/>

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

How would an Epicurean society raise and educate its kids? Since school is so horrendously boring, tedious and unpleasant to children (school is also the only place other than prison where people are quite likely to be bullied and tortured) how would an Epicurean society deal with the problem of educating the new generation?

I think that much of what makes school boring and unpleasant for children is their lack of choice in *what* exactly they are learning.

This isn't exactly a new approach but I think that giving kids the freedom to study what they are actually interested in, once they've got the essentials down, could very much make the whole "school" thing compatible with Epicureanism, without it being much of a dilemma at all. This could ensure that the children are actually happy to learn and that attending school causes them much less pain.

Bullying is of course a bit trickier. In my experience talking to people about these issues and having an authority figure (who actually knows what they are doing) appeal to the bully's sense of compassion is helpful, though I wouldn't presume my experience to be the only one. However I do believe that talking about it is always good and in the worst cases changing schools is definitely for the best.

The child would know that removing their pain is the top priority (and that this is more effective than comforting themselves by satisfying unnecessary desires). They might conclude that they should endure the potential pain of pointing out their troubles to avoid the greater pains of bullying or the fact that it interferes with their studying, which could cause them much pain later in life, should they fall behind in class.

Post by “Don” of October 21, 2023 at 7:49 AM

[Jo.](#) raises good points and some interesting ideas.

One important thing to remember is that Epicurus wasn't opposed to education in the broad sense. He often uses words like study or meditate on and the like. The word he uses for what he opposed was παιδεία (paideia), as in:

Quote

Fragment 117: μακαρίζω σε, ὦ Ἄπελλῃ, ὅτι καθαρὸς πάσης παιδείας ἐπὶ φιλοσοφίαν ὤρμησας.

I pronounce you blessed, O Apelles! You rush to the study of wisdom pure of all indoctrination (enculturation).

Fragment 163: παιδείαν δὲ πᾶσαν, μακάριε, φεῦγε τὰκάτιον ἀράμενος.

Flee from all indoctrination (enculturation), O blessed one, and hoist the sail of your own little boat.

(My literal translations)

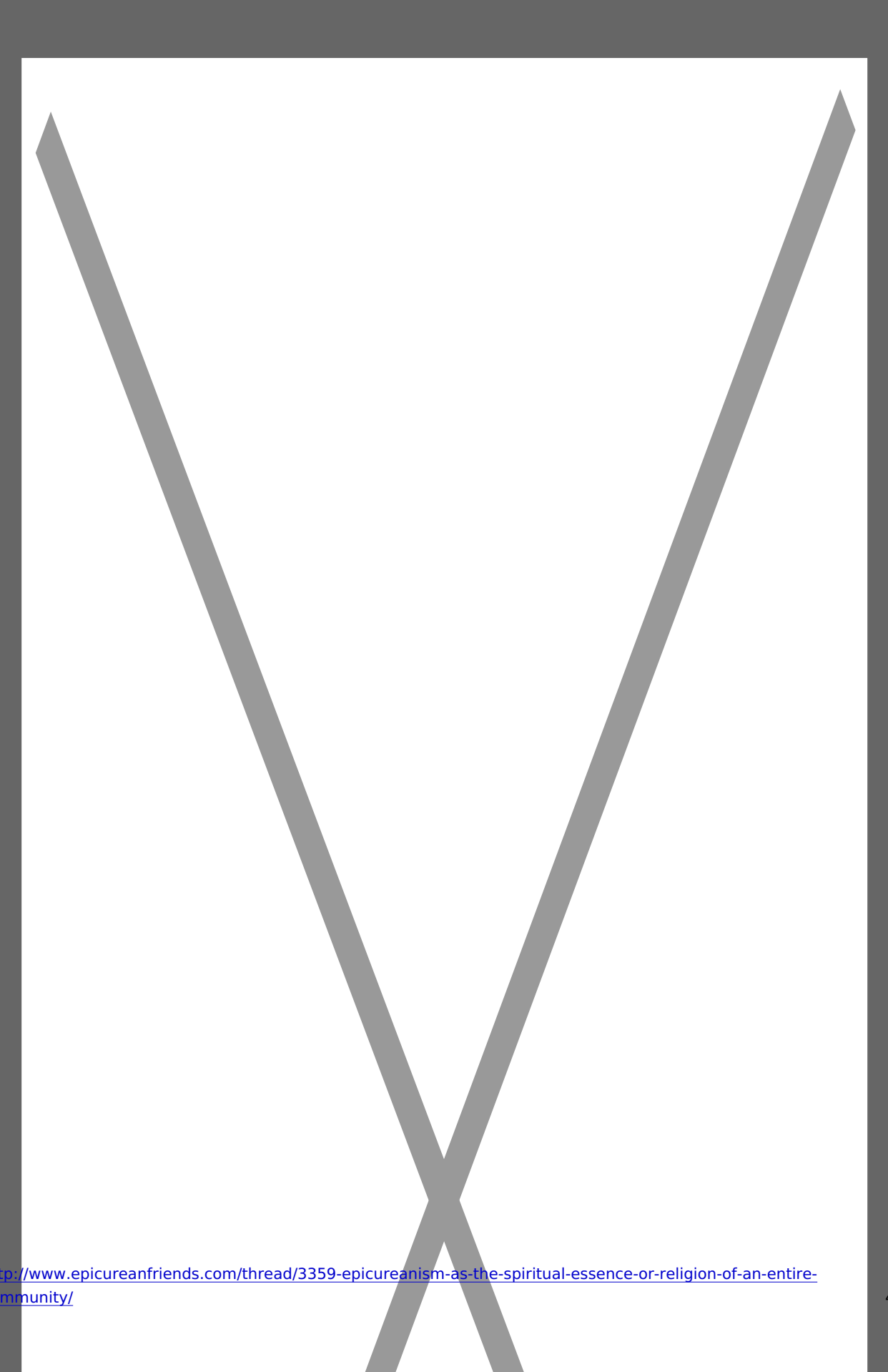
VS45. The study of what is natural produces not braggarts nor windbags nor those who show off the culture that most people fight about, but those who are fearless and self-reliant and who value their own good qualities rather than the good things that have come to them from external circumstances.

οὐ κομποῦς οὐδὲ φωνῆς ἐργαστικούς οὐδὲ τὴν περιμάχητον παρὰ τοῖς πολλοῖς παιδείαν ἐνδεικνυμένους φυσιολογία παρασκευάζει, ἀλλὰ σοβαροὺς καὶ αὐτάρκεις καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀγαθοῖς, οὐκ ἐπὶ τοῖς τῶν πραγμάτων μέγα φρονοῦντες.

(Saint-Andre translation)

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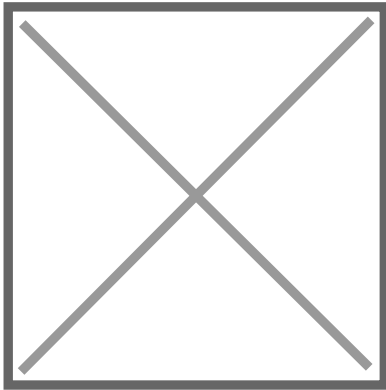
<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3359-epicureanism-as-the-spiritual-essence-or-religion-of-an-entire-community/>

[Paideia - Wikipedia](#)

en.wikipedia.org

Quote from Wikipedia

Paideia was meant to instill aristocratic virtues in the young citizen men who were trained in this way. An ideal man within the polis would be well-rounded, refined in intellect, morals, and physicality, so training of both the body and mind was important. Both practical, subject-based schooling as well as a focus upon the socialization of individuals within the aristocratic order of the polis were a part of this training.



["Paul and Paideia: Greco-Roman education as a background to Paul's conflict in Corinth." Ancient History Research Seminar, Macquarie University, Sydney, September 2011.](#)

"Paul and Paideia: Greco-Roman education as a background to Paul's conflict in Corinth." Ancient History Research Seminar, Macquarie University, Sydney, ...
www.academia.edu

Paideia then, was a process of transformation, both academically and socially. Teresa Morgan suggests that ‘in the ancient world educational theory regularly occurred in the context of political theory... the function of education was to produce people suited to bring about or maintain whatever political organisation the author proposed for a particular state’ (Morgan 1998a: 246-247).

Thus paideia was a process that incorporated a variety of physical, theoretical and practical exercises that were intended to develop the entire character of the future ruler, with all of these subjects being studied simultaneously with literature; in other words, paideia was not so much ‘education’ as it was ‘enculturation.’

PS. ἐπὶ φιλοσοφίαν ὄρμησας (epi philosophian ōrmēsas) from Fr.117: I **really** like the connotation of this phrase! Philosophy is obvious, so however you want to translate that. ὄρμησας conveys a sense of rushing headlong toward something. I get the image in my head of a young kid in a foot race, running with everything they have, toward the goal. Keep that in mind when you read rush or, worse, hasten in some translations. So, maybe: I call you blessed, Apelles! You rush headlong with all you have toward the study of wisdom, free and clear of all cultural indoctrination.

Post by “Peter Konstans” of October 28, 2023 at 3:06 AM

[Quote from Jo.](#)

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

How would an Epicurean society raise and educate its kids? Since school is so horrendously boring, tedious and unpleasant to children (school is also the only

place other than prison where people are quite likely to be bullied and tortured) how would an Epicurean society deal with the problem of educating the new generation?

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The child would know that removing their pain is the top priority (and that this is more effective than comforting themselves by satisfying unnecessary desires). They might conclude that they should endure the potential pain of pointing out their troubles to avoid the greater pains of bullying or the fact that it interferes with their studying, which could cause them much pain later in life, should they fall behind in class.

This assumes that most kids are - at least potentially - interested in something taught in school. I would say that, sadly, more than half are not really interested in anything school has to offer and that there's no trick that can change that. Of course everybody - whether they like it or not - has to be literate and numerate in a modern society. But other than that, instead of wasting resources teaching kids lots of material they are either unwilling or unable to absorb, it would be better to pick those that have real talent and focus on educating them so that they can assume upon maturity those jobs and responsibilities that require specialization and education.

Post by “Don” of October 28, 2023 at 7:56 AM

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

instead of wasting resources teaching kids lots of material they are either unwilling or unable to absorb, it would be better to pick those that have real talent and focus on educating them so that they can assume upon maturity those jobs and responsibilities that require specialization and education.

I would offer a rephrasing of that to:

Find out what talent (and interests) the children have and what excites them about learning and focus on educating that with an emphasis on the individual student.

This would be an overhaul of the entire educational system, but it could potentially have far reaching effects. From cookie cutter to artisanal pastries, so to speak.

Education can't be just about jobs and responsibilities. Yes, life skills and practical skills should be taught (and often aren't now). But education should provide a platform for exploration, experimentation, critical thinking, and finding out answers in a supportive environment.

Post by “Kalosyni” of October 28, 2023 at 11:50 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

From cookie cutter to artisanal pastries, so to speak.

I was reading too fast and read: "cookie cutter artisanal pastries" - which made me think of how here in America some grocery stores turn out these "fake" artisanal breads and pastries (unlike the good quality that you find in Europe.) And then that had me thinking about how much comes out of "economies of scale" for the sake of efficiency and greater profits. So unless that shifts then we are stuck with things. Schools are run under the "economies of scale" mentality - with a focus almost like a "factory" setting. But I don't have school age kids, so probably a bit out of touch with things these days.

Post by “Peter Konstans” of December 31, 2023 at 5:42 AM

Hello fellow garden dwellers. Have a happy and pleasurable new year. I was reading this book recently by Clare Chambers <https://www.amazon.com/Against-Marria.../dp/0198744005> which

makes the case that we should abolish marriage as a state-recognized institution and permit it only as a private ceremony bereft of all legal significance. Maybe this is the course that a society founded on Epicurean principles would opt for. Epicurus himself never married and expressed reservations when it comes to marriage. An Epicurean society should permit Epicurean marriages (they are a perfect opportunity to throw a party!) but we should allow for them to be terminated at any time by any of the two parties without the slightest legal hassles. Christian or Muslim marriages should in my view not be allowed in an Epicurean society.

Post by “Peter Konstans” of December 31, 2023 at 5:55 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

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I would offer a rephrasing of that to:

Find out what talent (and interests) the children have and what excites them about learning and focus on educating that with an emphasis on the individual student.

This assumes that all people have a special gift or talent waiting to be discovered and nurtured. This is an old Western humanist notion that I personally don't think is as true as we'd like to think. Some (probably most) people just don't have any hidden talent and that's ok. This mentality is liberating because it stops us from pressuring kids to 'prove themselves' or 'make something of themselves'. What if just accept that the most valid reason to stick around is to just be: to give pleasure and to take pleasure.

Post by “Cassius” of December 31, 2023 at 6:58 AM

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

because peaceful co-existence with those faiths is impossible for us in the long run.

I would like us to be careful and avoid getting into modern politics, but in generic terms I think that this question falls under general issues of justice and is probably directly relevant to the ending of the ancient Epicurean school (and the ancient world in general).

The example you raise (religious aspects of marriage) could be a useful way of getting at the larger issue: Being free to pursue one's choices seems generally be conducive to pleasure, but enacting rules in a society can also be productive of the safety and ongoing pleasure of the society. Skepticism toward religious claims is a major aspect of Epicurean philosophy, but (being a philosophy rather than a political party) the philosophy gives you general principles to consider but doesn't tell you exactly which to pursue. I do think it's useful to discuss how far an Epicurean community would act on that religious skepticism, but it would probably be necessary to first be clear what kind of "Epicurean community" is being discussed. A regular nation in which many of the leading politicians were openly identifying as Epicurean? We might have an actual example of that in the Rome of 50 BC.

Post by “Don” of December 31, 2023 at 9:02 AM

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

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I should probably rephrase my original rephrasing again in light of your objection, but I'll just forge ahead. Upon reflection, I don't think every person has some innate, hidden "God-given" "special gift" or talent that needs uncovering. I do think everyone is interested in something, but without exposing students to a broad range of topics, they may never have another opportunity in having a glimpse of a wider world that's available to them, especially in smaller, rural communities. Speaking from a US perspective, as that's my background and experience.

I would agree that providing an education in the value of pleasure in one's life would be positive.

I don't think a strictly vocational education that it sounded to me like you were advocating is a positive direction. Are you implying only a select elite should be educated? You've also used the term "real talent," but are you referring to the select few who have "real talent" with the hoi polloi somehow being given a lesser education:

Quote

it would be better to pick those that have real talent and focus on educating them so that they can assume upon maturity those jobs and responsibilities that require specialization and education.

Post by “Godfrey” of December 31, 2023 at 5:04 PM

Of course, this begs the question "who determines what is a 'real talent'?"

Post by “Eikadistes” of December 31, 2023 at 6:13 PM

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

What would a 'holy book' of Epicureanism look like and what would it contain other than the letters of Epicurus and the poem of Lucretius?

I *believe* it would look something like this:

<https://www.amazon.com/Hedonicon-Holy...s/dp/BOCNTN6KH6> 😊

I aim to include Philodemus' prose and Diogenes of Oinoanda's etching in future editions.

Post by “Peter Konstans” of January 1, 2024 at 4:58 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3359-epicureanism-as-the-spiritual-essence-or-religion-of-an-entire-community/>

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

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A hypothetical Epicurean community could be anything from a small village where the majority are Epicureans to a state where Epicureanism is the officially sponsored state ideology or 'religion', kind of like Confucianism was in pre-modern China. 1st century ancient Rome did contain many Epicureans in privileged positions but it was not a society founded and operating on avowedly Epicurean values. Similarly there are powerful people today who claim to represent Christian values and genuinely see themselves as Christians but they live in a society that was actually founded on secular - or to use 19th century terminology 'bourgeois' values - and operates according to them. In this particular sense we can say for example that some genuinely Islamic societies do exist today whereas genuinely Christian societies have all but disappeared.

Post by “Peter Konstans” of January 1, 2024 at 5:08 AM

[Quote from Nate](#)

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

What would a 'holy book' of Epicureanism look like and what would it contain other than the letters of Epicurus and the poem of Lucretius?

I *believe* it would look something like this:

<https://www.amazon.com/Hedonicon-Holy...s/dp/B0CNTN6KH6> 😊

I aim to include Philodemus' prose and Diogenes of Oinoanda's etching in future editions.

That's awesome! Maybe the Epicurean community could expand the hedonicon in the future with texts written today by living Epicureans such as yourself. Would you consider authoring an essay or maybe a literary letter for inclusion in future editions?

Post by “Peter Konstans” of January 1, 2024 at 5:37 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

This assumes that all people have a special gift or talent waiting to be discovered and nurtured. This is an old Western humanist notion that I personally don't think is as true as we'd like to think. Some (probably most) people just don't have any hidden talent and that's ok. This mentality is liberating because it stops us from pressuring kids to 'prove themselves' or 'make something of themselves'. What if just accept that the most valid reason to stick around is to just be: to give pleasure and to take pleasure.

I should probably rephrase my original rephrasing again in light of your objection, but I'll just forge ahead. Upon reflection, I don't think every person has some innate, hidden "God-given" "special gift" or talent that needs uncovering. I do think everyone is interested in something, but without exposing students to a broad range of topics, they may never have another opportunity in having a glimpse of a wider world that's available to them, especially in smaller, rural communities. Speaking from a US perspective, as that's my background and experience.

I would agree that providing an education in the value of pleasure in one's life would be positive.

I don't think a strictly vocational education that it sounded to me like you were advocating is a positive direction. Are you implying only a select elite should be educated? You've also used the term "real talent," but are you referring to the select few who have "real talent" with the hoi polloi somehow being given a lesser education:

Quote

it would be better to pick those that have real talent and focus on educating them so that they can assume upon maturity those jobs and responsibilities that require specialization and education.

I don't advocate a solely vocational education. I don't believe in educational approaches that focus on training. Yanis Varoufakis once said 'Training and education are two different things. You can train a little puppy to do various tricks but you could never educate it' and I agree with that. I simply suggested that we shouldn't waste resources trying to educate all children because a great deal of them do not have a sufficient inclination towards education. What's the point teaching physics to a kid that doesn't possess above average intelligence?

It's the elite of society that really needs education. It's the statesmen, the public servants, the military officers, the doctors in public hospitals etc. Almost anybody who is paid by the public purse and entrusted with responsibility over other people's lives should possess a superb education and should always be a person that is morally and intellectually outstanding and not someone you could easily meet cheering in a WWE event. They should also be paid handsomely. When a career in politics pays less than a career in banking, talent flees the state in droves and mediocrity takes over.

It doesn't take much to discern which people possess a particular kind of aptitude and which don't. Talent scouts do that for a living. Teachers themselves do it all the time. I once heard a teacher say to a kid 'you are very bright. Make sure you put your brain to good use'. Speaking of teachers they have have some of the worst mental health metrics across various occupations. That's because we place impossible demands on them and treat them essentially as babysitters.

Post by “Eikadistes” of January 1, 2024 at 11:10 AM

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

Would you consider authoring an essay or maybe a literary letter for inclusion in future editions?

I added a 3,000-word foreword at the beginning (it's part of the free preview on Amazon and I also included the preview on Academia.edu), but I would definitely like to expand.

Post by “Don” of January 2, 2024 at 7:57 AM

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

I simply suggested that we shouldn't waste resources trying to educate all children because a great deal of them do not have a sufficient inclination towards education...

It's the elite of society that really needs education. It's the statesmen, the public servants, the military officers, the doctors in public hospitals etc. Almost anybody who is paid by the public purse and entrusted with responsibility over other people's lives should possess a superb education and should always be a person that is morally and intellectually outstanding and not someone you could easily meet cheering in a WWE event.

Epicurus welcomed everyone to the Garden to learn his philosophy. If you're advocating "education" only for the "elite of society," we may need to define what it is that each of us mean by the word "education." What you are describing strikes me as something Cicero might advocate, especially when you use references like someone cheering at a WWE event. Epicurus didn't play to the crowd, but he left the door open to *anyone* - regardless of social status - who was curious to enter.

There's also the need for an informed citizenry. That is something that has been neglected and needs to be part of any public educational system. I do agree that teachers are woefully undervalued, overworked, overwhelmed, and underpaid.

Post by “Peter Konstans” of January 8, 2024 at 4:47 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

I simply suggested that we shouldn't waste resources trying to educate all children because a great deal of them do not have a sufficient inclination towards education...

It's the elite of society that really needs education. It's the statesmen, the public servants, the military officers, the doctors in public hospitals etc. Almost anybody who is paid by the public purse and entrusted with responsibility over other people's lives should possess a superb education and should always be a person that is morally and intellectually outstanding and not someone you could easily meet cheering in a WWE event.

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There's also the need for an informed citizenry. That is something that has been neglected and needs to be part of any public educational system. I do agree that teachers are woefully undervalued, overworked, overwhelmed, and underpaid.

The spirit of Epicureanism is of course inclusive. Cicero would want education only for the 'good families'. I want basic education for everyone (although basic doesn't include things like algebra and grammar for me) and I want advanced education for talented people regardless of social background. I don't want a distinction between schools for working class families and schools for rich people. In fact I would prefer to abolish private schools altogether. So I think I have more in common with you in the way I view education than with Cicero. In any case I would welcome a wide-reaching reform in the way education operates. That would be far better than leaving things the way they are. So I think our disagreement comes down to the degree of how far we want to go.

People today have the inclusive right to universal education (or rather obligation since many kids would rather not be in school if they could choose) but you don't have the inclusive right of protection from something as dire as homelessness. I think the second kind of inclusion is more important and more pertinent to people's well-being and pleasure. So we should keep in mind that symbolic inclusion and real inclusion are not the same thing and I am sure most people here understand that well.

Post by “Don” of January 8, 2024 at 7:22 AM

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

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Now we're getting somewhere. Thank you for that clarification. That helps me understand your position a little better.

My follow up question is "What would you include in your 'basic education'?" Epicurus certainly wrote against παιδεία (paideia), the standard form of "education" or (better translated, in my opinion) "enculturation" of his time. I have even translated it "indoctrination" at times, trying to convey his rejection of it. So there may be echoes of that in what you're proposing if I'm understanding your position.

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

People today have the inclusive right to universal education (or rather obligation since many kids would rather not be in school if they could choose) but you don't have the inclusive right of protection from something as dire as homelessness. I think the second kind of inclusion is more important and more pertinent to people's well-being and pleasure. So we should keep in mind that symbolic inclusion and real inclusion are not the same thing and I am sure most people here understand that well.

Getting into "rights", inclusive or otherwise, is a tricky area. George Carlin's take on "rights" always struck me as near the mark: *We don't have "Rights." We have "privileges," because if they can be taken away, they aren't rights.* Epicurus's definition of justice - to neither intentionally harm others nor to intentionally be harmed by others - as part of the social contract seems a solid foundation with far -reaching ramifications.

Post by “Peter Konstans” of January 17, 2024 at 9:52 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

The spirit of Epicureanism is of course inclusive. Cicero would want education only for the 'good families'. I want basic education for everyone (although basic doesn't include things like algebra and grammar for me) and I want advanced education for talented people regardless of social background. I don't want a distinction between schools for working class families and schools for rich people. In fact I would prefer to abolish private schools altogether. So I think I have more in common with you in the way I view education than with Cicero.

Now we're getting somewhere. Thank you for that clarification. That helps me understand your position a little better.

My follow up question is "What would you include in your 'basic education'?" Epicurus certainly wrote against παιδεία (paideia), the standard form of "education" or (better translated, in my opinion) "enculturation" of his time.

That's true but education always has enculturation elements in it. That's because education is a form of propaganda. Epicurus' rejection of paedia reflects his rejection of the values of the society he lived in.

Basic education would include everything in the following text. It's an adapted text from Xenophon taken from an ancient Greek language textbook intended for the use of Greek pupils.

Ἐν Αθήναις τοὺς παῖδας μετ' ἐπιμελείας διδάσκουσι καὶ νουθετοῦσι. Πρῶτον μὲν καὶ τροφὸς καὶ μήτηρ καὶ παιδαγωγὸς καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ πατήρ ἐπιμελοῦνται ὅπως βέλτιστος γενήσεται ὁ παῖς, διδάσκοντες ὅτι τὸ μὲν δίκαιον, τὸ δὲ ἄδικον καὶ τόδε μὲν καλόν, τόδε δὲ αἰσχρόν ἐστι. Εἴτα δέ, ἐπειδὴν οἱ παῖδες εἰς ἡλικίαν ἔλθωσιν, οἱ γονεῖς εἰς διδασκάλων πέμπουσιν, ἔνθα οἱ μὲν γραμματιστὰ ἐπιμελοῦνται ὅπως γράμματα μάθωσιν καὶ τὰ γεγραμμένα ἐννοῶσι, οἱ δὲ κιθαριστὰ τῷ κιθαρίζειν ἡμερωτέρους αὐτοὺς ποιεῖν πειρῶνται καὶ τὰς τῶν παίδων ψυχὰς πρὸς τὸν ῥυθμὸν καὶ τὴν ἄρμονίαν οἰκιοῦσι. Ἔτι οἱ παῖδες ἐν γυμνασίοις καὶ παλαίστραις φοιτῶσιν, ἔνθα οἱ παιδοτρίβαι βελτίω τὰ σώματα αὐτῶν ποιοῦσι, ἵνα μὴ ἀναγκάζωνται ἀποδειλιᾶν διὰ τὴν τῶν σωμάτων πονηρίαν.

So basic education would include teaching right and wrong according to Epicureanism, (Epicurean enculturation) learning to read and write, learning musical instruments as well as strenuous physical education and sports. It would resemble a 'ludus' i. e. a disciplined playing ground of sorts for young people. It would not have the character of a boring academy.

Post by “Eggplant Wizard” of January 18, 2024 at 11:18 AM

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

Has anybody ever experimented with the idea of Epicureanism as a formal spiritual identity capable of defining entire communities? What would Epicureanism look like if it wasn't merely a brotherhood of friends discussing philosophy but was also a sort of quasi religious worldview with its own intricate rituals, symbols and ceremonies covering every aspect of life?

Like I talked about at length in another thread, I think if Epicureanism had persisted through late antiquity, it could easily have developed overtly "religious" tendencies rivaling the theurgic neoplatonism of Iamblichus, Emperor Julian, Proclus, etc. This is because Epicurean piety already had certain concepts that anticipated the theurgists: understanding that the gods do not exhibit favor or wrath toward mortals, but that mortals' own attitudes toward them can engender good or bad effects; that the gods are not pleased by sacrifice but that this benefits the worshiper by drawing them closer to the gods; that popular religious rites are in fact appropriate expressions of piety; that only a purified mind can receive accurate impressions from the gods. And while the theurgists' gods, unlike the Epicureans' gods, did actively govern the world, they did so in a detached, effortless way, like the sun shining. If one takes seriously the idea that the [Epicurean gods](#) are constantly emitting a stream of subtle images that reach earth, then it could easily be inferred that these images are all-pervasive and that various means can be sought to perceive, channel, or embody them.

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

Still, it would be possible to imagine Epicureanism as a sort of atheistic 'religion' in the same sense that for example Confucianism or the Church of Satan founded by Anton LaVey may be branded as such.

As an aside, I would argue that, apart from a few exceptions like Xunzi, the Confucian tradition is theistic. I suspect the presentation of Confucianism as an atheistic or secular ethical system has chiefly to do with a) modern proponents wishing to appeal to post-enlightenment westerners; b) Jesuits and other westerners with an interest in presenting the Confucian rites as devoid of objectionable religious content.

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

What would a 'holy book' of Epicureanism look like and what would it contain other than the letters of Epicurus and the poem of Lucretius?

That's basically what remains to us but we also know that the letters, PD's, etc are all epitomes aimed at beginners and that the full works of Epicurus and his successors were huge, and probably had a lot of subtle and complex material. We are unfortunately left with a stunted tradition. As it is, it demands elaboration and commentary; with elaboration and commentary comes differing interpretations and disagreements.

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

To what extent can the views and advice of brilliant therapists or educators like John Gottman, Gigi Engle or Dan Buettner be thought of as Epicurean and admitted in some form in the 'scriptures' and literature of Epicureanism? How would an Epicurean society raise and educate its kids? Since school is so horrendously boring, tedious and unpleasant to children (school is also the only place other than prison where people are quite likely to be bullied and tortured) how would an Epicurean society deal with the problem of educating the new generation? Given that modern Western hyper-liberalism presents society and individuals with many obvious problems that are impossible to deny today what laws, customs and institutions would hypothetical Epicurean lawmakers create to avoid them?

I'm not a doctrinaire Fourierist by any stretch but I do think Fourier was on to something in proposing communities driven by pleasure and free association rather than coercion and hierarchy. I would say school is tedious and unpleasant because our society is tedious and unpleasant.

Post by “DavidN” of January 26, 2024 at 8:09 PM

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

I think it's fair to think of ancient Epicureans as de facto atheists the way Plutarch thought of them. The acceptance of the existence of the gods whether honestly or pretentiously was useful in a social context where atheism were discriminated against and associated with a significant degree of social exclusion. Today we often use the

term 'social exclusion' lightly and synonymously with 'unfairness' and everybody feels brave enough to 'fight' social discrimination in all its forms but in a pre-modern agrarian society social exclusion meant your very survival was at stake. Why would someone not want to participate in the sacrifices and share in the meat? In the early modern era the Catholic Church tended to regard the beliefs of deists as little more than a damage control cover for atheism and they were basically right. Today deism has essentially disappeared because no damage control is necessary.

I've never liked this argument, there is I believe enough in the surviving texts to suggest that this was not the case. And my personal stance on atheism has always been that the [Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence](#) and thus prefer an agnostic approach until proven otherwise. Thus I tend to see Atheism as unnecessarily nihilistic. Which I feel is more in line with the teachings of Epicurus.

Post by “DavidN” of January 26, 2024 at 8:19 PM

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

How would an Epicurean society raise and educate its kids? Since school is so horrendously boring, tedious and unpleasant to children (school is also the only place other than prison where people are quite likely to be bullied and tortured) how would an Epicurean society deal with the problem of educating the new generation?

I would point out that your talking specifically about post-industrial education, classical and agrarian educational programmes are quite different. And anyone who thinks that bullying is limited to schools and prison hasn't had the opportunity to work in a toxic environment, I have had the great fortune to work in them both literally and figuratively, there not fun but they are educational. So I guess there is a common theme.

Post by “Peter Konstans” of February 1, 2024 at 11:28 AM

[Quote from Eggplant Wizard](#)

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

Has anybody ever experimented with the idea of Epicureanism as a formal spiritual identity capable of defining entire communities? What would Epicureanism look like if it wasn't merely a brotherhood of friends discussing philosophy but was also a sort of quasi religious worldview with its own intricate rituals, symbols and ceremonies covering every aspect of life?

Like I talked about at length in another thread, I think if Epicureanism had persisted through late antiquity, it could easily have developed overtly "religious" tendencies rivaling the theurgic neoplatonism of Iamblichus, Emperor Julian, Proclus, etc. This is because Epicurean piety already had certain concepts that anticipated the theurgists: understanding that the gods do not exhibit favor or wrath toward mortals, but that mortals' own attitudes toward them can engender good or bad effects; that the gods are not pleased by sacrifice but that this benefits the worshiper by drawing them closer to the gods; that popular religious rites are in fact appropriate expressions of piety; that only a purified mind can receive accurate impressions from the gods. And while the theurgists' gods, unlike the Epicureans' gods, did actively govern the world, they did so in a detached, effortless way, like the sun shining. If one takes seriously the idea that the [Epicurean gods](#) are constantly emitting a stream of subtle images that reach earth, then it could easily be inferred that these images are all-pervasive and that various means can be sought to perceive, channel, or embody them.

The theurgists of Late Antiquity (Neoplatonists and their ilk) wanted to defend traditional polytheism in the face of new monotheistic challenges. They felt that philosophy could enable them to cleanse traditional polytheism of its childhood diseases and stupidities. Thus cleansed, polytheism could transform itself into something new and great. Well, that didn't work out at all. But since much of Christian theology is rooted in ancient philosophy it is not surprising that ancient attempts to defend paganism focused a great deal on reclaiming 'true' philosophy.

Epicurus spoke of 'true philosophy' too but it is doubtful that he would have found common ground with half-schizoid people like Julian the Apostate, Iamblichus or Plotinus. My view is that Epicurus' portrayal of the gods as part of the natural world was an elegant way to answer why the hell the whole of mankind believed and worshipped them. Even today we are not quite sure why people made up religion. In view of modern scientific progress it is extremely difficult to argue today that the ontological existence of divinities or immaterial beings is likely.

So modern scientists are almost universally atheist i. e. they believe that gods, magic etc. are completely made up and have absolutely no basis outside of human psychology. But then nobody has worked out a generally accepted scientific theory about how and why religion was

developed by humans. The theology of Epicurus was an attempt to answer why people are clinging onto something that doesn't contribute to pleasure, worldly success or salvation from evils and which instead often causes psychological distress, confusion and pain.

Other philosophers before Epicurus (almost none of which - contrary to some puerile Neoplatonists of later centuries - was inclined to take popular religion the least bit seriously) had their own theories about this important theological issue. But Epicurus had to find an answer in alignment with his own views about the nature of the universe (his cosmology), the nature of man (his anthropology) and the strategy for success and happiness (his deontology).

In terms of methodology Epicurus had a similar view about philosophy as Helmuth von Moltke the Elder had about strategy. The latter once remarked, "The theory of strategy scarcely goes beyond the first principles of common sense." Epicurus applied this 'common sense' in cosmological and theological matters too. For example, fires seen a distance are more or less what they appear to be so the sun must be the same. Since a tiny lamp can light up an entire room, why assume that the sun is larger than the earth we tread on? In antiquity it was rational to suggest this given the profound ignorance of the times.

Despite this ignorance it was rational to posit - correctly - that the world is made up of atoms somehow. And since gods are universal across cultures it was rational to assume that they really do exist somehow. So why not explain the visions of the gods as transmissions of their sublime atoms to the attuned souls of happy and blessed people? After all, from an Epicurean point of view, happiness (eudaimonia) is what makes god-like. In other words Epicurean theology was useful because it served the purposes of Epicurean ethics.

I am not sure that my interpretation is correct. We are in a similar situation in respect to Epicurean teachings as Epicurus and his contemporaries were in respect to the natural world. Maybe the optimal approach is to imitate Epicurus and, like him, opt for the simplest possible explanations when interpreting him.

Post by "Pacatus" of February 1, 2024 at 6:14 PM

Peter, you might find this essay informative:
[https://www.academia.edu/36564126/The P... the Epicureans](https://www.academia.edu/36564126/The_P..._the_Epicureans)

Post by "Eikadistes" of February 2, 2024 at 1:00 AM

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3359-epicureanism-as-the-spiritual-essence-or-religion-of-an-entire-community/>

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

My view is that Epicurus' portrayal of the gods as part of the natural world was an elegant way to answer why the hell the whole of mankind believed and worshipped them. Even today we are not quite sure why people made up religion.

I identify with that perspective.

Hell, for **that** matter, **so did Philodemus**:

"...no one has been prolific in finding convincing demonstrations for the existences of the gods; nevertheless all men, with the exception of some madmen worship them, as do we..."

"...οὐδεὶς εἰκνουμένας περὶ τ[οῦ **θ**]εοῦς ὑπάρχε[ιν τὰς ἀπο]δείξεις εὐπ[όρησ]εν· ὁμῶς δε[σέβ]ονται πάντε[ς εἰ μὴ παρ]άκοποι τινε[ς αὐτοῦς..." (On Piety, Col. 23, 13-17)

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

So modern scientists are almost universally atheist

Not quite. To my surprise, it's closer to half-and-half.

For example, nearly 40% of American chemists surveyed "believe in 'God'" according to a 2009 Pew Research poll [<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2009/...e%20this%20view>]. In a more recent study, more "than half of scientists in India, Italy, Taiwan and Turkey self-identify as religious" who largely do not see a conflict between religion and science [<https://phys.org/news/2015-12-w...scientists.html>].

(I'm not making a point, just sharing a discovery)

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

But then nobody has worked out a generally accepted scientific theory about how and why religion was developed by humans.

A textbook I still have from college called *Supernatural as Natural: A Biocultural Approach To Religion* (Winkelman and Baker 2010) provides a number of great approaches that are useful to objectively evaluate spiritual experiences and religious behaviors. It suggests that religiosity is rooted in ritualized animal behavior and altered states of consciousness. It then describes the ways that various social roles, norms, and cultural innovations developed from those neurobiological roots.

I think that a piece of *ancient Epicurean Theology* bears a striking resemblance to *modern Anthropology of Religion*, which you recognize later in your post:

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

But Epicurus had to find an answer in alignment with his own views about the nature of the universe (his cosmology), the nature of man (his anthropology)...

Epicurus was in a unique position in a newly-connected world, where ancient Hellenic peoples were being introduced to new forms of spirituality ... and they looked strikingly similar to the tones, attitudes, and topics to existing forms of ancient Greek religion. Likewise, our new world is connected by a network of servers that provide us the tools to compare and contrast everything from the beliefs of aboriginal Australians to Dharma ... I agree, there is a parallel in method.

Post by “Eikadistes” of February 9, 2024 at 5:26 PM

We're talking about a lot of this ***theoretically***, as though Epicureanism **isn't already** the "spiritual essence or 'religion' of an entire community". It's happening. It's real. *Did anyone miss the invitations?*

You may not partake in "*Epicureanism*" as the "*spiritual essence or 'religion' of an entire community*" but it's happening. As a sub-culture, it is a sociological and anthropological phenomena that is real and can be addressed its modern, historical context in the English-speaking world (*and the French, and Spanish, and Scandanavian, and Italian, and Iranian, from immediate contacts of mine*).

I prefer my own. I host my own Garden. I compiled my own *Testamentum*. We do our own thing, and I float between virtual Gardens. *Judge on* if *judging* members of your own team is your thing.

Our tradition should have already sprouted, so let's water it. I'm focusing on cultivation.

Post by “Godfrey” of February 9, 2024 at 6:22 PM

For me, the larger issue here is how to precisely define the terms "religion" and "spirituality" so that we can be sure that we're not talking past each other. This is perhaps more of a practical than theoretical issue.

Does spirituality imply a spirit separate from the body? Does it imply a god? Does it relate to one's mental well-being, without any supernatural implications? In the larger populace outside of this forum, it seems to depend on who you're talking to. And we all (I presume) have spent far more of our years outside of this forum than inside, thus we have a variety of preconceptions of what spirituality actually is.

Personally, I would begin to define spirituality as "connectedness" and perhaps (or perhaps leading to) mental well-being. Having written this, I see that "connectedness" may get to the heart of the lack of clarity: connected to what? For me, I would say connected to nature and its grandeur, to community, to family, to an understanding of my place in the cosmos. With the explicit exclusion of any supernatural or mystical realms.

Does this definition make sense to anyone else? Am I missing something major? Does it need fine-tuning?

Post by “Eikadistes” of February 9, 2024 at 6:40 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Does spirituality imply a spirit separate from the body? Does it imply a god? Does it relate to one's mental well-being, without any supernatural implications?

Of course not. We're Epicureans. Why is this even an issue?

Post by “Eikadistes” of February 9, 2024 at 6:41 PM

Why are we so uncomfortable with words that Christians have appropriated?

Post by “Godfrey” of February 9, 2024 at 7:33 PM

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3359-epicureanism-as-the-spiritual-essence-or-religion-of-an-entire-community/>

[Quote from Nate](#)

Of course not. We're Epicureans. Why is this even an issue?

Relax. If we're trying to settle on a definition, we need to rule out the obvious to begin.

[Quote from Nate](#)

Why are we so uncomfortable with words that Christians have appropriated?

That's a good question. In appropriating certain words, Christians, Jews, Muslims, eastern religions/philosophies, new age folks and others who far outnumber us have determined the common usage of the words for the bulk of society. As I stated previously, we all come from varied upbringings, and in these settings were likely indoctrinated with the revised meanings of the appropriated words. So it would seem to be important to define our terms. It shouldn't be difficult, but without doing so we leave the door open for misunderstandings.

Post by “Pacatus” of February 9, 2024 at 7:42 PM

Some of us see Epicureanism more as a philosophy, some as more religious in nature – some of us have a foot in both camps (as do I: I tilt toward the philosophical, which seems the safer space for me, but have some affinity for the more religious view). Some of us have more missionary interests; some of us are just trying to put the teachings into practice in our own lives as best we are able, given our personal situations – both as individuals and as part of wider communities, family and the like. None of those have to be polar, let alone adversarial, positions (though they can become so.)

There will be disagreements among us – some of them strongly felt, some of them sharply stated. None of us are immune from error (especially me, stubborn though I am); but none of us need shrug off our convictions. Some of us tend (at least sometimes) to learn more from debate than simple study; some less so. Argument among friends can be valuable and valued – among entrenched adversaries, generally useless (and sometimes erstwhile friends become such adversaries, irreparably so).

I have in the past relished such argument. But, as I've gotten older (slow learner!), I've realized that, more often than not, it has a corrosive effect on both my emotional and physical well-being. So, this year, I told myself I would swear off. Thus far, I have been less than successful at restraining my entrenched tendencies (and reacting unwisely to old indoctrinations). And I appreciate being called out on that, by friends, when I fail. I will try to do better. I will strive to

be more *pacatus*: peaceful – outwardly and inwardly. Simply expressing my thoughts, and listening to others. (Still stubborn, though ... 😞)

Post by “Cassius” of February 9, 2024 at 7:45 PM

It seems to me that while Epicurus was willing to repurpose words with mixed definitions, he was not (or could not) have been unaware of the likelihood of confusion. I would think this is where we suffer from the missing of texts and we have to recreate what "must" have been there, which is the means of explaining the differences in the terms.

Given the way that Cicero was framing the dispute in 50BC I admit the possibility that maybe the ancient Epicureans did not pay sufficient attention to this, but I cannot conceive that they were unaware of the need to communicate clearly, given what Epicurus said in the letter to Herodotus and the presumption that Epicurus and the other Epicureans were considerate people and used good common sense.

We are going to need to recreate what "must have" existed to explain these issues.

Post by “Eikadistes” of February 9, 2024 at 7:47 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Relax.

This is always a welcome reminder.

Post by “Cassius” of February 9, 2024 at 8:10 PM

OK I may have to moderate some of these comments but I don't think any offense was meant on any side so for now I am not. You guys are on the same path so let's work together for the greater goal of what I think we're all seeing are the benefits of working through the reconstruction of these ideas! We all need to be slow to anger when we are dealing with

friends. Rather than promoting artificial ideas of universal brotherly love, I think Epicurus would approve the "no better friend, no worse enemy" way of looking at things. Certainly in life there comes a time when some people actually are enemies, and we have to realize that, as clearly stated in the principal doctrines and a number of other places about people being well-constituted/disposed toward us. The people in this forum who have been promoted to level three are all on the same team or they wouldn't be level three (or remain for very long!) And just like friends don't hold money in communist form as that is not the way friends work, friends need to cut each other a lot of slack and be slow to anger and to take offense.

Post by "Pacatus" of February 9, 2024 at 8:32 PM

[Quote from Nate](#)

Why are we so uncomfortable with words that Christians have appropriated?

I can only answer for myself, Nate. Sometimes, I can, fairly readily, re-translate; sometimes with a bit of labor that seems worthwhile. But, sometimes, it seems an arduous process (for me) that I just don't need to engage in - effort better spent elsewhere.

An old example: When I was a Christian, I used to argue with other Christians about the meaning of the word "sin" - which, neither in the Hebrew nor the Greek, meant "evil" or "immoral." It meant error, a missing of the mark - sometimes due to personal fault, sometimes just not. The notion that "sin" was something worthy of just retributive punishment (eternal condemnation in hell) - as opposed to some form of restorative/remedial justice - seemed just daft to me: an aberrational understanding grafted onto the word. But, at some point, it seemed that I was just pounding my head on a wall - and, since leaving the fold, I have no need to consider the word further. Kudos to those who are still fighting the good fight.

Kudos to those who are still fighting the good fight over such things outside that Christian context, with other words. Kudos to you on that score (and others, like Don). But sometimes, my own baggage is such that I don't feel the need. Better for me to move on.

Post by "Cassius" of February 9, 2024 at 9:01 PM

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

Kudos to those who are still fighting the good fight over such things outside that Christian context, with other words. Kudos to you on that score (and others, like Don). But sometimes, my own baggage is such that I don't feel the need. Better for me to move on.

It seems to me it is perfectly legitimate to have a "division of labor" and to recognize that some people are more comfortable with some approaches than others. But just because "some people" are uncomfortable does not mean that everyone has to do things the same way. These differences have to be respected and no one forced into anything they re not ready to agree to, but on the other hand there is plenty of room for those who want to go their own way to do so.

It's a fact that the Epicurean "movement" of 2000 years ago did not survive, and some part of the responsibility for that lack of survival has to be laid at their feet for failing to find ways to adapt to less favorable situations. I am not blaming them and I am sure they did what they thought was best, but the bottom line is that they failed to maintain an unbroken organizational trail, so those who pick up after them have to adapt to current circumstances, and also consider what might have been done differently in the past that might have contributed to the problems that occurred.

The decline and fall of the ancient world took a very long time and was not inevitable, nor was it brought about by supernatural powers.

Post by “DavidN” of February 9, 2024 at 9:33 PM

I'm glad were still having this conversation, as a suggestion to Nate and everyone here. These questions that are being asked are best asked now, here amongst friends, rather than by others that are less friendly to Epicurus. Whatever your views may be it is sound policy to be able to defend them. Even if you don't care to defend them to others you at least need to be able to defend them to yourself. Instead of taking anything said here to personally we should see this thread as a chance to learn, even if we all don't agree.

Post by “Godfrey” of February 9, 2024 at 9:34 PM

For me, reclaiming words such as "spiritual" is a valuable exercise. There is much to be gained, I think, from spiritual and religious practices. I certainly can do so on my own, with my own conceptions, but discussing these subjects in a community such as this has the potential to add a degree of richness to the ideas that I might not come up with on my own. There are also genuine differences, I'm quite sure, between what I've come up with for myself and what others have done. We may not all agree on our interpretations, yet we can all learn from the differences, one can hope.

So when I ask questions about the meaning of words, or post in general, I do so not to stir the pot but out of genuine curiosity. If I have nothing constructive to say, I don't post (well, at least not knowingly; I'm sure I have my share of useless posts 😞).

Happy Friday all!

Post by "Bryan" of February 10, 2024 at 4:38 AM

Epicurus - Book 28 (David Sedley trans, fr. 13, col. 4 sup.) "...which instead of ignoring or doubting it, I now think I see vividly. For, as I have said, a person would be correct to make the same choices of vocabulary in the exposition of philosophy, provided that we could count on his seeing that these are classes resulting from the same distinguishing characteristic, in order that he should avoid the pitfalls of major qualitative changes."

To apply a word to a thing we are looking for the inseparable qualities / fundamental distinguishing characteristics (συμβεβηκότα, coniuncta) not the separable qualities / circumstantial characteristics (συμπτώματα, eventa). A title for a nonphenomenal object (such as religion) is only incorrectly applied if its use (1) involves something that can be proved to be untrue, or (2) is unhealthy.

(David Sedley trans, fr. 13, col. 8 inf.) "**As for those opinions which** do not concern actions (by which I mean those which are not included among empirical opinions, but **belong to the theoretical side**), **these will be confuted, if they are false** and whether the cause of their error is irrational or rational, **either (1) because some other than theoretical opinion expressed on the basis of them is untrue, or, (2) if they become indirectly linked up with action, wherever they lead to disadvantageous action**. If none of these consequences ensues, it will be correct to conclude that opinions are not false.

Post by "Cassius" of February 10, 2024 at 5:01 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

For me, reclaiming words such as "spiritual" is a valuable exercise.

[Quote from Bryan](#)

"which instead of ignoring or doubting it, I now think I see vividly.

Let me too try to engage on the precise issue, which I see as something like "describing the valid uses and meanings of the word 'spirituality'"

I see "spirituality" as validly describing a the experience of a very strong and clear feeling of respect and reverence and affection for something. I see it as validly describing an experience that at times is a strong feeling of respect and reverence is directed at other life forms, or at the stars or other "majestic" appearances of nature or other aspects of reality.

I see "spirituality" as invalidly used to describe an attitude of considering something as supernatural, or un-real, or wishfui thinking about things that do not exist.

A smell, for instance can trigger legitimate connections of memory with past good experiences or with particular people or places. Smells can also be used to induce reactions that are close to be psychotic.

A lot of this turns on the issue of whether the feeling being experienced heightens the senses and the thought processes in a realistic way toward greater effectiveness, or whether it deadens the senses and induces feelings of mechanical obedience and suppression of one's own mental activity in favor of some wished-for but not real un-real or un-worldly state of existence.

Experience of a deep and effective mental clarity and appreciation for the immensity of existence and the workings of nature, and of one's connectedness and appreciation for other living beings which enhances one's ability to participate in this universe is a very good thing, Experience of deadening and suspension of mental clarity and appreciation for reality for the purposes of inducing obedience and submission is a very bad thing.

I base all of this on the starting point that it is a core Epicurean perspective to see life as desirable and pleasure as "good," combined with the realization that life is short and for an eternity before our birth we did not exist, and for an eternity after death we exist no more. Further, there is no wishful thinking 'supernatural' justification for our existence - our existence needs no justification more than the sun or the moon need. If one keeps those kinds of

perspective in mind then you don't fall into nihilism and you develop close and emotionally strong ties to the things that are most important in sustaining your existence and happiness.

And among the most important things that help you in sustaining that happy life are those who have taught you and supported you in sustaining that experience, among whom it is legitimate to consider both historic leaders such as Epicurus, such real people as you yourself have come into contact, and such mental expectations of reality that you experience in at least mental form in your ability to visualize a beings who are able to sustain this kind of existence in perpetuity while overcoming any obstacles it may encounter.

(In that last case I wrote plural "beings" because there is good evidence to believe that it was a core observation that "nature never makes only a single thing of a kind," and thus it would not be expected that there is a single "god" but instead numberless "gods" throughout the eternal and infinite universe.)

If a person does not take steps to develop habits and regular activities to exercise the mind in these directions, it is too easy to fall prey to discouragement and nihilism, just like it is too easy to start imagining that there are supernatural gods if one looks up at the night sky but does not apply wisdom to start with "nothing comes from nothing" and to process in one's own mind the issues of beginnings and eternity and infinity. This is not dry "science" but the emotional appreciation of what it means to you as a person to be a part of this.

I would then project based on the above that Epicurus would have seen a proper "religion" as a set of institutions and habits and activities which reinforce the practical ability to keep strong one's experience of these perspectives.

Post by "Cassius" of February 10, 2024 at 7:12 AM

Here is something that I think is closely related to this topic:

Nothing irritates me more than reading academics accuse Epicurus of hypocrisy in writing a last will and testament when supposedly death should have been "nothing" to him.

No community which does not provide for continuity, reproduction, rearing, and education of children and the institutions that support that (such as marriage and families and similar long-term extension of 'friendship') can possibly be self-sustaining over any length of time. It is simply not true that "everyone" does or can ever love everyone indiscriminately such as the monotheistic religions preach everyone as children of the same god. People naturally associate with people of similar disposition to themselves, and there are many different types of dispositions, and those of similar disposition can sustain themselves only by working together

to do so.

It seems to me that Epicurus' will clearly establishes that he was well aware of these issues, and those who respect his example ought to be doing similar things.

As I see it there is far too much "consumerism" in Epicurean philosophy as well, which results in treating it as a sort of happiness pill that can be taken once or periodically and then go about your normal modern-world business as if what you have learned has no practical applications.

Ideas go hand in hand with action and one is useless without the other. Most of what would come under an "Epicurean religion" in my mind is just the practical application of Epicurean viewpoints to real life. Not smoke and mirrors and incantations and white gowns and untranslated words and incense and bowing and asceticism and minimization and zeroed-out minds and transcendental meditation, but clear-sighted active use of the time one has to make one's life the most emotionally satisfying (which means *pleasing*) it can be.

Such people are strong and independent and self-sufficient, but still recognize that there are things that bind them together with their friends that they cannot live happily without cultivating and working to ensure their continuity. If "res-ligio" is taken as a reference to things that bind, then our lives and societies require habits and practices and institutions to bind them together just like our bodies require ligaments to bind our bones and muscles and keep the body functioning. "Ideas" can't do that without action.

Post by "DavidN" of February 11, 2024 at 7:01 AM

Death being a multifaceted event I find it to be intellectually dishonest for anyone truly interested in philosophy to take the stance that Epicurus writing a will would be hypocritical. Epicurus writings tackles the fear of death from multiple angles, fear of the gods, of pain in the afterlife, and the loss of those close to us. So why would it be hypocritical to write a will, such an act would alleviate anxiety about those we care about after we're gone. In such a will would be entirely consistent with his teachings. If death and taxes are all that is certain in this world, should we not prepare for the one as we do the other?

Post by "Don" of February 11, 2024 at 5:50 PM

[Quote from DavidN](#)

Death being a multifaceted event I find it to be intellectually dishonest for anyone truly interested in philosophy to take the stance that Epicurus writing a will would be hypocritical.

There's a big difference between the process of "dying" and the "state" of "being dead." Epicurus can take pleasure in planning for his legacy while at the same time being fully aware that his plans may not be followed. He takes pleasure in doing what he is capable of doing.

Post by “DavidN” of February 20, 2024 at 7:42 PM

12.15-13.00 E. EPICUREAN LIFESTYLE

Chair: Christos Yapijakis – Antonis Bilisis

The theological elements of Epicurean Philosophy

I'd be interested in a transcript of this.

Post by “Kalosyni” of March 26, 2025 at 9:38 AM

I haven't re-read this thread (and there has been a lot discussed here already)...but this seems to be the right place to post...on my mind this morning: "What makes something a religion?" I put that question into Google and the AI came back with this:

Quote

AI Overview

Something becomes a religion when it involves a unified system of beliefs and practices relating to the sacred, often including rituals, moral codes, and a sense of community, as defined by sociologist Émile Durkheim.

Here's a more detailed breakdown:

- **Beliefs and Practices:**

Religions typically involve a set of beliefs about the nature of reality, the divine, and the afterlife, along with practices like prayer, rituals, and ceremonies.

- **Sacred Things:**

Durkheim's definition emphasizes the concept of "sacred things," which are objects, places, or ideas that are set apart and treated with reverence and respect.

- **Moral Codes:**

Many religions also include a system of ethics or moral guidelines that dictate how individuals should behave and interact with others.

- **Community:**

Religion often fosters a sense of community among believers, who share common beliefs and practices.

- **Worship:**

While not always a defining feature, many religions involve the worship of a deity or deities.

- **Examples:**

Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism are all examples of religions that share these characteristics.

Display More

As for my own definition of what I would consider a religion -- I would say that all religions are defined by people who come together in-person to do "worship" together, with multiple rituals and ceremonies that are considered holy/sacred/consecrated in that they are done because they "seek to transcend the earthly realm". Religion is always seeking to connect with something beyond physical matter and to connect with a world existing or transcending beyond death.

We do not have evidence of any of the above in ancient Epicureans, and the extant texts of Epicurus do not provide any guidance for this. Since Epicurean philosophy holds that the soul

dies with the body, then there is no after-life. Also, physical things exist because of physical causes - there are no supernatural forces in the world. Given these concepts, I think it would be difficult to consider or turn Epicurean philosophy into a religion.

These are just my current thoughts, processing some ideas.

Post by “Kalosyni” of March 26, 2025 at 11:37 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

We do not have evidence of any of the above in ancient Epicureans...

Except now thinking, the only evidence that I can think of is the opening of *De Rerum Natura* which has an invocation to Venus, in which one could consider that ancient Epicureans during the Roman times participated in a kind of prayer, to an existing religion of the ancient time - and a worship of Venus. I found this:

Quote

But the most important cause of the identification was the reception into Rome of the famous cult of Venus Erycina—i.e., of Aphrodite of Eryx (Erice) in Sicily—this cult itself resulting from the identification of an Oriental mother-goddess with the Greek deity. This reception took place during and shortly after the [Second Punic War](#). A temple was dedicated to Venus Erycina on the Capitol in 215 bce and a second outside the Colline gate in 181 bce. The latter developed in a way [reminiscent](#) of the temple at Eryx with its harlots, becoming the place of worship of Roman courtesans, hence the title of *dies meretricum* (“prostitutes’ day”) attached to April 23, the day of its foundation.

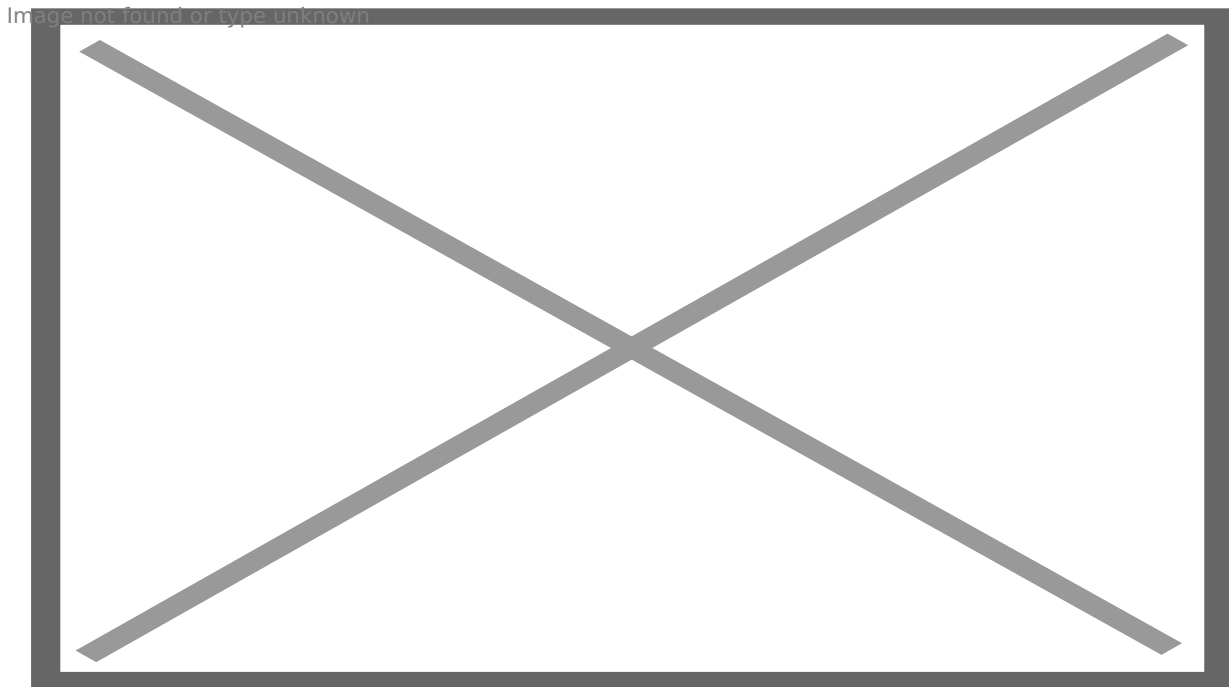
The importance of the worship of Venus-Aphrodite was increased by the political ambitions of the *gens Iulia*, the clan of Julius Caesar and, by adoption, of [Augustus](#). They claimed descent from [Iulus](#), the son of Aeneas; [Aeneas](#) was the [alleged](#) founder of the temple of Eryx and, in some [legends](#), of the city of Rome also. From the time of Homer onward, he was made the son of Aphrodite, so that his descent gave the Iulii divine origin. Others than the Iulii sought to connect themselves with a deity grown so popular and important, notably Gnaeus Pompeius, the triumvir. He dedicated a temple to Venus as Victrix (“Bringer of Victory”) in 55 bce. Julius Caesar’s own temple (46 bce), however, was dedicated to Venus Genetrix, and as Genetrix (“Begetting Mother”) she was best known until the death of Nero in 68 ce. Despite the extinction of the Julio-Claudian line, she remained popular, even with the emperors; [Hadrian](#) completed a

temple of Venus at Rome in 135 ce.

[Source](#)

Post by “Don” of March 26, 2025 at 12:10 PM

There's also the sentiment expressed by things like "football is my religion"



[Is football the universal religion?](#)

The World Cup 2018 has had its share of iconic moments. Kelly Grovier picks out five striking photos from the tournament - finding their echoes in pious art.

www.bbc.com

Post by “Cassius” of March 26, 2025 at 12:38 PM

Right Don. It depends on how you use the word.

As in the cite quoted by Kalosyni, the word used there is "sacred" and that too is ambiguous.

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3359-epicureanism-as-the-spiritual-essence-or-religion-of-an-entire-community/>

Epicurean philosophy is flatly natural and anti-supernatural.

But that does not at all mean that it isn't a highly focused system of thought that holds some things as "good" even to the point of "sacred" and other things "bad" to the point of evil. It's just that there's nothing supernatural at either end.

Post by “Cassius” of March 26, 2025 at 2:50 PM

As far as what I gather is behind Kalosyni's attention her post, after we slice out the "supernatural" part of the discussion, which is admittedly a huge part, I do think that there are very important functions that Epicurean community could and should fill that parallel some of the functions assumed by the opposing religions. People live only a short number of years, and it's important to provide continuity. Older people have to preserve information and coordinate activities from which younger people can learn, and everyone at any age needs a support group for all sorts of reasons. Those functions are best filled by finding like-minded friends, and Epicurean philosophy provides a lot of the glue about what "like-minded" means in a social contest.

I haven't re-read the older parts of this thread either, but I seem to recall that that was the drift of the prior discussion. Kalosyni's bringing up the subject again, but not any conclusions from the past, shows how important the issue is and how things need to develop into the direction where some kind of social connection/unity is in place.

Post by “Eikadistes” of March 26, 2025 at 3:15 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

We do not have evidence of any of the above in ancient Epicureans, and the extant texts of Epicurus do not provide any guidance for this.

I think we have a lot of material from the Epicureans, but, from our eyes (I'm speaking from mine, in particular), Epicurean spirituality doesn't look like "spirituality" because of the historical victory of anti-Epicureans in appropriating terminology. "Spirituality" in general, *should* mean something closer to "psychology", but, instead, has taken on the connotation of "metaphysics" and "mysticism". "Religion" should mean something more like "wisdom

tradition", but is often weaponized to mean "Proper Observance of The God". Still, I think we qualify:

- **Beliefs and Practices:**

Religions typically involve a set of beliefs about the nature of reality (**countless particles in an infinite void**), the divine (**blessedness, defined as pure, uninterrupted pleasure**), and the afterlife (**a non-conscious re-arrangement of particles**), along with practices like prayer (**heavily encouraged by Epicurus and Philodemus in *On Piety***), rituals (**civic festivals such as the *City Dionysia* and *Anthesteria* as well as *personal cults to deceased family members and close friends***), and ceremonies (**Eikas and Hegemon Day**).

- **Sacred Things:**

Durkheim's definition emphasizes the concept of "sacred things," which are objects, places, or ideas that are set apart and treated with reverence and respect. (**Greece in general and Athens in particular, for its historical significant based on the salvific mortals who lived there, as well as using pictures of our Leaders as decorations. We treat Herculaneum, itself, as a sort of necropolis, and privilege true knowledge over vain fantasies, as well as referring to bad habits as "sins" that must be extinguished to protect our happiness**).

- **Moral Codes:**

Many religions also include a system of ethics or moral guidelines that dictate how individuals should behave and interact with others. (**The Epistle to Menoikeus covers the general guidelines en masse, and the fragments provide specific pieces of advice, such as a general warning against holding political office, rejecting betraying friends, approving of sacrifice for loved ones, and caution against careless attitudes toward casual sex**).

- **Community:**

Religion often fosters a sense of community among believers, who share common beliefs and practices. (**This is something the Epicurean tradition does *better* than other traditions, and may be seen as one of the founding traditions that emphasized a unique, community of initiates who lived together. Though, they were not judgmentally exclusive. The primary rituals of our tradition are communal. We are encouraged to study with others along with ourselves. Our holidays are meant to be shared**).

- **Worship:**

While not always a defining feature, many religions involve the worship of a deity or deities. (**Epicurean worship looks different than most other forms of worship. I think that's fair. Our expressions of deity-worship look a bit more like Jain and Buddhist expressions, minus the intensive, psycho-psychical, meditative practices**), but, again, the culture in which we live sometimes even rejects Jains and Buddhists as proper examples of religious worshippers, so ... this is being gate-kept by Jews, Christians, and Muslims. That's my biggest comment on this section. Science is its own form of spirituality. Deities don't have to be magical, and worship doesn't have to be wish-fulfillment.)

I think we check all of the boxes.

Post by “Kalosyni” of March 26, 2025 at 7:28 PM

[Quote from Eikadistes](#)

practices like prayer (heavily encouraged by Epicurus and Philodemus

@Eikadistes If you happen to have the specific text that refers to prayer practices, for both Epicurus and for Philodemus, can you post here? ...would love to read those 😊

Post by “Kalosyni” of March 26, 2025 at 7:29 PM

[Quote from Eikadistes](#)

rituals (civic festivals such as the City Dionysia and Anthesteria as well as personal cults to deceased family members and close friends)

And also this too, would love to have the texts that refer to this.

Post by “Eikadistes” of March 26, 2025 at 7:53 PM

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3359-epicureanism-as-the-spiritual-essence-or-religion-of-an-entire-community/>

[On Piety](#) will be the big resource here:

"Furthermore, | it will appear that **Epíkouros loyally observed all the forms of worship and enjoined upon his friends to observe them**, not only on account of the laws but for physical reasons¹⁰⁵ as well. For in *On Lifecourses* he says that **to pray is natural**¹⁰⁶ | for us, not because the gods would be hostile if we did not pray, but in order that, according to the understanding of beings surpassing in power and excellence, we may realize our¹⁰⁷ fulfilments | and social conformity with the laws. And besides writing this as well, in *On Gods* he¹⁰⁸ says that as being both the greatest thing, and that which as it were excels in sovereignty, it possesses everything: for every wise man holds pure and | holy beliefs about the divine and has understood that this nature¹⁰⁹ is great and august. And **it is particularly at festivals that he**, progressing to an understanding of it,¹¹⁰ through having its name the whole time | on his lips, **embraces**¹¹¹ **with conviction more seriously** [...] not from things¹¹² (*several words missing*) of some things better by effectively preserving one's conception of the gods during certain | times.¹¹³ And not only did he¹¹⁴ teach these things but also **by his very deeds he is found to have taken part in all the traditional festivals and sacrifices**. In the archonship of Aristonymus,¹¹⁵ for instance, writing to Phyrson about a countryman of | his¹¹⁶, Theodotus, he¹¹⁷ says that **he shared in all the festivals** (*several words missing*), and that while he¹¹⁸ was joining in celebrating **the festival of the Choes**¹¹⁹ and **the urban mysteries**¹²⁰ | and the other festivals at a meagre dinner, and that it was necessary for him¹²¹ to **celebrate this feast of the twentieth**¹²² for distinguished revellers, while those in the house decorated it most piously, and after making invitations¹²³ to host a feast for all of them. | Now it would be absurd to relate in addition that they¹²⁴ thought it right to make use of oaths and epithets of the gods, since their philosophical writing is filled with them. But it is proper to say that he¹²⁵ advised | them to retain asseverations made by means of these and similar expressions, and above all to preserve those made by Zeús himself in this open manner,¹²⁶ and not writing 'by the twin shoots!'¹²⁷ or merely 'it must be so'. Moreover to Kolotes he took pains with regard to all forms of oaths and | speaking about the gods. And in the archonship of Charinus¹²⁸ and that of Diotimus¹²⁹ **he warns against violating the covenant of the sacred festival table**. | [...] But also writing to Polýainos that the **Anthésteria too must be celebrated** and that **it is necessary to make mention of the gods** (*one word missing*) | of many [...] to conceive of their¹³⁰ nature as accurately constituting the notion of benefit according to the epistemological standard. And, lest I extend my discussion, again: 'Let us sacrifice | to the gods', he¹³¹ says, '**devoutly and fittingly on the proper days, and let us fittingly perform all the acts of worship in accordance with the laws, in no way disturbing ourselves with opinions in matters concerning the most excellent and august of being. Moreover, | let us sacrifice justly, on the view that I was giving. For in this way it is possible for mortal nature, by Zeús, to live like Zeús, as it seems.**' [...] And in his *Symposium concerning the rites*²⁴⁵ (he says): '**Let us celebrate the festivals**', | and '**Make fine sacrifices to a god**', [...] from the holy rites in prayers against these cities..." (Philodemos, [On Piety](#), translated by Obbink)