

2000 Years of Pointing Out That They Are Not Reconcilable. Convinced Yet?

Post by "Cassius" of October 8, 2018 at 8:42 AM

Discussion at Facebook is here: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/Epicure...56428411072777/>

My comments:

"For someone who doesn't, but believes happiness and pleasure to be the highest goal then they may decide to seek other means, outside of Epicurus. If that gives them pleasure then we cannot judge since all pleasures are true. So if someone likes meditation, prayer or singing hymns in their choir and it gives them pleasure, what good is it to take those things away?" >> In this back and forth exchange above I think we have to be careful in arguing for or against "true" pleasure or "real" pleasure. It seems to me that the Epicurean texts say that pleasure is pleasure, so if we feel pleasure from an activity then that is by definition a pleasurable activity. The question more "VS 71. Question each of your desires: "What will happen to me if that which this desire seeks is achieved, and what if it is not?"" If the pleasure of chanting hymns (just one example) leads in fact to a lifetime of pleasure, then that's the only validation that activity needs, per [PD10](#) and other texts.

However it is the Epicurean observation that it is in the nature of things that humans face many threats to their long term happiness, both internal and external to themselves, and that we cannot as a matter of reality confidently expect that all pleasurable activities will lead to net lifetime maximized pleasure and minimized pain. Epicurus considered his natural physics, ethics, and canonics to be the most reliable way to achieve lifetime maximized pleasure, and we have to challenge deviations from those observations as to whether they will in fact in the circumstances of the deviator be successful.

So that's the approach I would take to analyzing any attempts at eclectic combinations with other philosophies or supernatural religions: "What will happen to me if that which this desire seeks is achieved, and what if it is not?" Or, which is I think is essentially the same thing, "What will happen to me if I engage in this activity and what will happen to me if I do not?" In one of my rare moments of agreement with Karl Marx, I consider supernatural religious based philosophies or actions to be "the opiate of the people." And while opiates can be very effective in relieving pain or providing pleasure in the short run, they rarely provide us the focus to anticipate and to see the many many challenges to our long-term pleasures that almost all of us face.

Poster:

My main point is that EP is not going to banish religion away. Unless a person is truly going to give up and renounce/denounce their faith or if they never had one to begin with then you

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aren't going to have scores of people embracing the philosophy. There has to be a more restrained and moderate point of view. Otherwise the choices are atheism or classical Epicurean theology (which falls apart just as quick as any supernatural religion). There are many things that are valuable that Epicurus spoke of that may truly interest a broad range of people. But if they must become atheists or believe the myths of the supernatural [Epicurean gods](#) only, then it will remain a tiny movement. It's just my opinion, everyone has their own view on it.

Poster from Greece:

"Piety according to sources of epicurean philosophy", by [Γεώργιος Καπλάνης](#), founder and member of the Group of friends of Epicurean Philosophy-Garden in Thessaloniki.

For two years now have been discussed two possibilities:

- a) Whether Epicurus was an atheist, and was hidden behind a theology to avoid persecution,
- b) Whether Epicurus was indeed pious, and he meant that.

Of course, Cicero explicitly states that the Epicurean methodology of thinking does not accept disjunctive dilemmas, but that is another big issue.

However, in both the above cases, Epicurus, integrating his theology, "On the divine word" in his philosophy, should have faced the problem of cohesion. That is to say, if we likened his philosophy to a coherent system, we should be able to go from one point to another. But if he was built a theology simply to exist and be covered behind it, he risked to build something strange, unrelated to the rest, and becoming ridicules, since, in that era, people would understand this immediately.

Therefore, in order for his teachings to remain coherent, he should manifest his piety to the gods, and be able to go from Physics to Canon, and to Ethics.

And here we have to define "piety". It is very easy, because it is defined by Lucretius (in his work "DE RERUM NATURA", Book V, f. 1200 - 1205):

<< Piety is.... to be able to see everything with reasonable calculus (sober reasoning) without anxiety>>. And so, since "everything" goes back to the Nature of things, the disregard on Ethics and the "calculus" in the Canon, the consistency exists, at least in the practical part, the experiential approach of theology. This is the piety. Ever since, according to Lucretius, it is not to present yourself with your head covered, to bow in stones, to visit all the altars, to raise your hands to the sanctuaries, to knit prayers one after another,

But when you can see all the things with sober calculus, the piety is the imitation of the gods, but also the rivalry to the gods, which ultimately function as templates, and in my view as archetypes, meaning as prototypes, that is as reference points, but this issue, if you would like, we can discuss it another time. Thus, the Epicurean reaches to live as a god among men ("see Letter to Meneoceus, 135). This corresponds to the "theosis" that other religions pursue. But

that "theosis" requires many sacrifices, pains, fasts, etc., while here whoever lives according to the Epicurean philosophy, he becomes pious as he competing straight the gods in happiness. Noteworthy is Diogenis Oenondas's report: "Because neither little are, nor ineffective, that make our mental mood the same as the gods, and show that we are not inferior to the blessed and incorruptible being, even though we are mortal..."For as long as we are alive, we are just as happy with the gods ... " (Diogenis of Oinoanda "The Great Inscription", apt. 125, publications of "Thyrathen").

Thus, we conclude that the course of Epicuru's life, which is a course of the study of Nature, is at the same time a course of theosis - in the epicurean sense. So, is a course of initiation, but without secret/mystical teachings.

This process also includes participation in religious feasts, because they honor the divine standards, as well as the prayer.

As for the prayer, Epicurus said that it is «οικείον» intimate to our nature to pray, and advised us to pray, not because the gods need prayers, but because in this way we can capture the value and perfection of the gods. Thus, in practice, prayer activates the mental and ethical forces of man, but in addition it also activates his brain functions, stimulates the mind and helps to bring inspiration to the person who prays.

For years now I was looking for an epicurean prayer, but it was finally in front of me. In my opinion, Lucretius begins his work with a prayer to Aphrodite. Lucretius begins to write a scientific work, a scientific research on the Nnature of things. At first, he briefly refers to the dynamic of nature that moves the things, and he attributes this to Aphrodite:

Mother of Rome, delight of Gods and men,
Dear Venus that beneath the gliding stars
Makest to teem the many-voyaged main
And fruitful lands- for all of living things
Through thee alone are evermore conceived,
Through thee are risen to visit the great sun-
Before thee, Goddess, and thy coming on,
Flee stormy wind and massy cloud away,
For thee the daedal Earth bears scented flowers,
For thee waters of the unvexed deep
Smile, and the hollows of the serene sky

Glow with diffused radiance for thee!

Seeking a way to stimulate his mental functions and to enliven his inspiration, Lucretius continues the prayer :

“And since 'tis thou alone

Guidest the Cosmos, and without thee naught

Is risen to reach the shining shores of light,

Nor aught of joyful or of lovely born,

Thee do I crave co-partner in that verse

Which I presume on Nature to compose”

Thus, Aphrodite, Lucretius and his work become one.

Cassius:

" Unless a person is truly going to give up and renounce/denounce their faith or if they never had one to begin with then you aren't going to have scores of people embracing the philosophy. There has to be a more restrained and moderate point of view. Otherwise the choices are atheism or classical Epicurean theology (which falls apart just as quick as any supernatural religion)"

This is to me a question that each of us has to answer. If it means that scores of people never embrace the philosophy, then that's the way it is, and I think Epicurus endorsed separating ourselves from the crowd when that is necessary.

But I don't think that that is necessarily so. There's ONE fundamental point: "There. Are. No. Supernatural. Gods." People who refuse to accept that are always going to stay outside the core Epicurean umbrella, and they are going to try to pick and choose Epicurean sayings to fit their own desires, just like people (a much larger group of people) do the same with ancient Stoicism.

If there are Supernatural Gods then everything in Epicurean philosophy is nonsense and harmful. If there are no supernatural gods then Epicurean philosophy is the only one that consistently pieces together a philosophy of how to live best.

And I think over time as space travel becomes more advanced, and as we discover life outside of Earth, the paradigm will begin to shift and people will more easily accept that humanity is not the highest form of NATURAL life in the universe, and the Epicurean system will make perfect sense.

I can't say that I am looking for the 30,000 gods of ancient Greece, because I strongly suspect

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that most of them were the products of overactive imaginations and simple personification of natural forces. As long as we're stuck with the only alternatives being (1) humans are the highest form of life in the universe and (2) Yahweh, Allah, Diana, and the rest, then we're stuck in limbo. But those aren't the only alternatives, just as Epicurus saw that (1) chaos and (2) Divinely-imposed order are not the only two alternatives on the source of the existence of the universe.