

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

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

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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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.

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.