

Thoughts and Discussion on Organizing Epicurean Community

Post by "Don" of February 5, 2024 at 11:02 PM

One big problem with *any* Epicurean endeavor in our times is that, in many senses, we're all making it up as we go along. There is no "apostolic succession," no unbroken lineage, no "authority" to say if we're getting it "right"... especially in light of the potential windfall of Epicurean texts now that reading the Herculaneum scrolls is possibly becoming a reality. We're trying to pick our way through an Epicurean labyrinth using a flashlight in the pitch dark. Maybe there's a couple candles lit in a couple locations, but by and large, we don't really have a guide... okay, we have a guide (pleasure) but our instructions on how we should/could/would apply it - in relation to what Epicurus taught - are only in summary with gaps in the paper and pages torn out of the manual.

Here at this forum we have a group of individuals who want to retain their autonomy, independence, individual interpretations (granted, within certain guidelines) with just enough moderation to keep things civil but with no one/way to "interpret" what direction is more "correct" (orthodox?) than another. Note, I don't think there is anyone who can interpret with absolute authority! However, in some ways and at some times, I find the lack of structure, lack of suggested ritual, and lack of a hierarchy frustrating. BUT I realize this is a *discussion forum*, and it has served - and continues to serve - a vital, unique purpose online. I wouldn't continue to think of myself as "Epicurean" (whatever that means! See below) without it, by Zeus!

The Athenian group seems to be headed in another direction, sponsoring in-person events - to which Cassius has provided content! But they don't have any more claim to "authenticity" than anyone else. The embers of the Epicurean school were kept barely hot enough to give off the faintest glow for centuries. Just because they're in Greece doesn't imbue them with any claim to preserving some lineage. (Fourth leg of the Canon anyone?)

Additionally, it seems (to an outside observer) over at the Society of Friends of Epicurus, they want more structure, more "religiosity," more ritual, more hierarchy. But the insistence of using Latinized Greek words like hegemon, Kyria Doxa, "One way to *meleta* on..." and using v in Latin like Liber Qvintvs instead of just leader, Principle Doctrine, "One way to meditate on..." and Book Five seems very pretentious and almost cute to me. I freely admit that I like some of the work coming out of SoFE very much, but the insistence to use these unnecessary Hellenisms and idiosyncratic Latin spellings is an impediment to taking it seriously sometimes. There's no need or reason to be exotic, arcane, or mysterious. From all accounts, Epicurus spoke and wrote plainly. Using those exotic-looking Greek and Latin words isn't necessary if you're targeting an English-speaking audience....well, unless you're talking about ataraxia or eudaimonia LOL 😊 but I digress.

So, what does any of this have to do with the topic of this thread? Maybe this should have been posted over on the "religion" thread. To bring this back to community building, there doesn't seem one way to do this in the modern world. We do not live in the ancient world. To try and reconstruct the structure of Epicurean communities is a failed endeavor. We simply don't know enough on how they were constructed it seems to me. [Pacatus](#) has offered a list of suggestions, some I agree with, others less so. I'm also not sure whether he's offering these as guidelines for *this* specific community or if he feels they should apply to any community calling itself "Epicurean." (I sincerely hope he replies to this rambling post.) There's also no "authority" that could make ANY list of guidelines apply to a group that wants to call itself "THE genuine, authentic Epicurean School." And then there's the issue of marketing. If one "Epicurean" group becomes more well known - a la Massimo Pigliucci's "Stoicism" - do they get to dictate "real" Epicureanism?? *Will the real Epicureans, please stand up!* Who gets to define who is and who isn't an Epicurean? Who should?

As individuals, we can call ourselves anything we want...but does that make it so? What constitutes an Epicurean community? What constitutes an Epicurean? Would Epicurus recognize the "brand" of "Epicureanism" being "practiced" on this forum, over at SoFE, over in Greece? Before we start laying out who's in and who's out, I think we have to wrestle with: Are any of us actually "in" in the first place...or are we playing a part of our own composition? Have any of us really "earned" the privilege of calling ourselves members of an "Epicurean" community in the first place? Are we really just "hedonists" seeing pleasure as the guide with a thin veneer of Epicurean terminology and the vaguest understanding of what it really meant to be an Epicurean in the ancient world? Granted, in some ways I'm being consciously provocative to encourage discussion - but only in some ways. I find it both frustrating that there's not more structure to this set of practices/beliefs/life philosophy, but I also find comfort in being able to apply a label to a philosophy I *think* I'm trying to structure my life around...even if that label maybe doesn't fit.

In the words of Epicurus, I've "prattled suffice for the present." I certainly don't know if I've added anything to the discussion, but hopefully I've prattled enough to engender further discussion.