

Epicurean Views On Hierarchy In Social Structures

Post by "DavidN" of March 13, 2024 at 5:09 PM

[Quote from Peter Konstans](#)

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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Having an egalitarian ethos is not the same thing as being egalitarian in the sense of having an egalitarian political agenda. Epicurus had an egalitarian ethos insofar as he allowed women and slaves to join his school and declared that philosophy is useful for all humans and not just an elite training programme for those males aspiring to excellence and virtue. But he certainly wasn't egalitarian in the sense that he wanted to abolish slavery or institute common ownership of wealth or women. Some radical ideas along those lines did exist in those centuries and the comedian Aristophanes mocks some of them.

Epicurus rejected mainstream culture but saw no need to replace it, counsel it or modify it and in that sense he was apolitical.

Though modern egalitarian movements may confuse socialism and egalitarianism, I would refrain from making the same mistake.

In Epicurean terms, [slavery](#) was an *eventum*, an accident that might befall a person, not a *coniunctum*, something inseparable from a person's nature (contrary to modern slavery). From this perspective Epicureans didn't need to support or oppose slavery as it wasn't part of a person's identity, but was instead an event in life. Also by allowing slaves to learn in their schools Epicureans could have been facilitating the escape of slaves because slavery in Rome was not ethnically based. If a slave could learn Latin and pass themselves off as a citizen they could have escaped and tried to start over outside the empire.

Though I agree that Epicurus was apolitical, I would deny your assertion that he had no desire to "replace, counsel or modify" mainstream culture. By providing an alternative path for people he was doing just that. His was simply a "[passive resistance](#)" by building what was effectively a parallel culture.