

What Epicurus Offers To The Modern World As Of April, 2024?

Post by "Cassius" of April 26, 2024 at 8:34 AM

My preliminary comments are:

At the very least one observation that goes along with the discussion is that Epicurus was long dead even when that was written, so he was not around to give orders, nor does there seem to have been a strict passing of "authority." I would certainly personally not trust a subsequent head of the school as much as I would trust Epicurus himself. The more time that passed after Epicurus died, the more and different arguments that would have arisen requiring variations on the original responses.

I would also see an analogy to seeing Epicurus as "a god" or even a "father figure" as Lucretius discusses -- gods don't intervene to tell us what to do, they serve as examples that we emulate as best we can. Father's sometimes try to intervene, but the "father figure" I would suggest is generally associated with the idea of giving wise advice to be followed as best the child can apply it. And when Philodemus was writing Epicurus wasn't around to be the kind of father who demands to be obeyed.

At the same time, there is no doubt in my mind that some kind of uniformity of message is necessary if one is to be logically thought of as an Epicurean. Epicurus' logic was as rigorous as anyone else's, and once a core doctrine was established with confidence (as opposed to subsidiary ideas where "waiting" and keeping an open mind between apparently valid alternatives is appropriate) then logical consistency requires general acceptance of those views. It's very possible to be friendly and accepting of those with differing views in many subjects, especially with students during a learning process. But if being considered an Epicurean means anything, it means some kind of agreement with core doctrines. And if one is running a school or any kind of organization, then it's inherent in the organization that there is going to be some kind of line between what is and what is not acceptable. I can't imagine Romans and most Greeks taking much of anything "on authority." The Pythagoreans seem to be an exception, and we see Cicero himself arguing against that point of view in his philosophical works. But at the same time, words and ideas have to mean something, and we do the best we can to be clear when we use them. The word "Epicurean" is not infinitely flexible, nor does it mean only that one wants to be "happy" or that one finds "pleasure" enjoyable.

We're going to rightly recoil against aggressive claims of authority since for 2000 years we've lived in a world ruled by oppressive religions. But the remedy to oppression isn't total abandonment of standards, randomness, and absence of consistency, it's well thought out standards based on sound evidence and sound reasoning. And that does mean eventually

coming to conclusions, not reverting to skepticism and holding that no conclusions are possible.