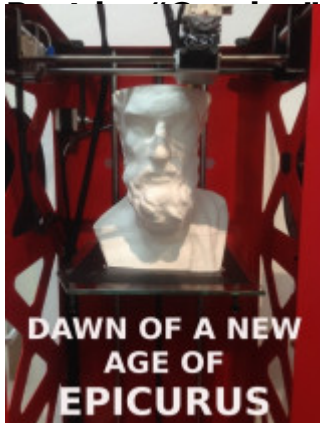


On Ice Cream And Epicurean Philosophy



of May 14, 2019 at 4:34 PM

We have recently been discussing the challenges that people run into in writing about Epicurean philosophy. Here's another aspect I think is worth pointing out:

Many people, especially those who just find out about Epicurus, seem to have the impression that the brilliance of Epicurus is summarized in the observation "Don't eat too much ice cream or you'll get sick."

It amazes me how many people seems to think that Epicurus was needed to come along and make this point. They seem to think that prior to Epicurus no one had corrected the Stoics for drowning their pain in too much alcohol, or the Platonists for having too much sex with their shared wives, or the Aristotelians for stressing out over their political organizing, or the Pythagoreans for placing too much reliance on their magic numbers. Apparently many modern philosophers want us to believe that it was a novel and blindingly impressive idea to observe that "focusing on the basics" is an effective way to increase happiness and reduce stress.

"Thank goodness Epicurus came along to show us that eating too much ice cream makes us sick!!" seems to be the attitude of these people. And so people who follow their lead endlessly repeat the same superficial points about Epicurus over and over - points that as Cicero's Torquatus truly observed, we "ought to be ashamed that we did not learn as children."

We have people reading my post here from all over the world, and for some of them English is not their first language, so let me be clear:

I am being totally sarcastic! If we were to picture Epicurus here today, seeing what people consider to be his most important teachings, no doubt the pose he would assume would be the classic "face-palm" -- he would be shocked and amazed to see how the world had trivialized his philosophy.

My point here is that when we think about talking to other people about Epicurus, don't start and stop with non-controversial points like the "natural and necessary" categories. Not only was this not one of Epicurus' primary conclusions, if you were listing his major doctrines in order you would have to go over TWENTY-SEVEN OTHER MORE IMPORTANT POINTS before heard any mention of "natural and necessary."

The problem with Stoicism, Platonism, Aristotelianism, Pythagoreanism, and other philosophies is not that they don't understand that eating too much ice cream makes you sick. The problems

with those philosophies are much more profound, and the insights of Epicurus in defeating them are much too important, to get stuck on points that are obvious even to children.

So I suggest you ask yourself: (1) "Why does the modern world praise Epicurus to the skies for a point that any child learns quickly by personal experience?" and (2) "Why does the modern world ignore and disparage the major points that made Epicurus famous in the ancient world?"

The answer isn't hard to find, and it's not because the modern world is filled with people who have a problem eating too much ice cream. So let's move past the basic and obvious points, and discuss the points that about Epicurus that much of the world wants to suppress.