

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

Post by “DaveT” of March 27, 2025 at 4:55 PM

Such an interesting topic containing so many variables that raise new issues!

I'm new to the study of Epicurus' actual teaching. But here's what I get out of the texts linked to this website. He taught that there is no un-caused cause; there is nothing that comes from nothing. His gods were not supernatural. They were immortal beings who existed in and above the earth. They could be prayed to for intervention in earthly affairs, but only intervention through natural causes rather than magic. That's why, for instance, blood sacrifices were done, to gain favor, and avoid disfavor (originally, perhaps as a last ditch act that coincided with the coincidental coming of a rain after a drought) .

As for the gods created by humanity over the last ten thousand years, the variety and involvement of those gods sometimes coalesced into religions managed by priests and kings to define virtues either by experience of what works to keep the peace among the populace, or by interpretation of non-material (faith based) unexplained occurrences within the natural world to keep peace, order and solidarity.

As peace keeping tools, the virtues discovered by humans, served to solidify the community to prosper and defend itself against outsiders.

I just don't see Epicureanism as either a faith, or a religion in the sociological sense. It is his explanation of natural human behavior, practiced by everyone, that includes the value of avoiding pain, accepting temporary pain and finding happiness in its absence. Certainly, if a group of people in a community practiced the individual nature of his teaching while exercising his virtue of prudence, happy and loving communities would result.

And in closing, science, in the true sense of being a method of discovering truth about the physical universe, by rational methods, can never be a religion any more than can Epicueanism.

I'm looking forward to hearing anyone's thoughts how my rather terse analysis can be clarified or corrected.