

My Epicurean plans for 2018

Post by “Cassius” of January 7, 2018 at 1:36 PM

After a great deal of reflection on the state of my Epicurean activities and goals, I have decided on a number of changes that I will be implementing in the near future:

(1) I am convinced that Facebook adds very little additional utility, and many negatives, to philosophical activism. While I have learned a great deal and “met” many great people by using it, Facebook has never been a good platform for extended philosophical discussion. Worse, Facebook seems headed in a direction of greater censorship and use of algorithms that make it harder and harder to see the content that users want to see. And worst of all, many of us have put great time and effort in composing posts with lots of detail which should be part of an ongoing chain of reference for years to come. Due to the way Facebook is structured, however, those posts are quickly lost forever. I am not yet at the point of closing my account, because I think Facebook remains viable for “advertising” and allowing new people to find my work. It may come to that, but what I am definitely going to do in the meantime is to cease making “new-original” posts at Facebook. Any new posts I generate will simply be links that begin at NewEpicurean.com or Epicureanfriends.com. I will post links to those articles on Facebook just as I do for Twitter and other platforms to which I expect to expand, such as Minds.com, Gab.ai, and others. I will always keep a list of links to my work at NewEpicurean.com and EpicurusToday.com.

(2) At the same time that I reduce Facebook interaction, I will increase my involvement in platforms under the control of myself and my friends which focus directly on promotion of Epicurean philosophy. I believe that EpicureanFriends.com is now mature enough to serve as my primary platform for detailed philosophical discussion and cooperative projects. Traditional forum software such as is used there allows posts to be organized by topic and referenced for years to come. I have always wanted to devote my time primarily to working with friends on a common goal, and the traditional forum format at EpicureanFriends.com allows for that kind of ongoing and productive community.

(3) In addition to Epicureanfriends.com, I believe it is long past time to take advantage of newer technologies that allow us to interact personally by text, voice, and video conference, such as the Epicurean group at DiscordApp.com, and through use of Skype and/or Google Hangouts. There has never been much evidence for “Epicurean communities” in the ancient world, and there are not likely to be any such living arrangements in the near future. If Epicurean friends are to work together we have to take advantage of the internet to work together when we cannot get together in person. I will make a point of working with others here to set up a text/voice/video conference every Twentieth, at the very least, as requested by Epicurus himself. But much more regularly than that I want to take advantage of DiscordApp.com and Skype to speak with live fellow Epicureans at least once a week, if not nightly. It should be very

easy to set up a time of day / day of week, in addition to the 20th of each month, for personal interaction. I will be working on a schedule for that.

(4) Like many others here, I also want personal “live” interaction with like-minded Epicureans. To those who point out that there are no Epicureans with whom to socialize, there is only one answer: We must work to educate and create them. I see that effort as including a life conference, probably on a Saturday at some central location, where we can have Epicurean activists make presentations on their areas of interest and expertise. But more than that, I think we can use Meetup to allow us to network with people who are interested in philosophy. With sufficient motivation and effort it is possible to create small local groups that meet regularly, as now exists in Australia and Greece. There is no reason that their success cannot be duplicated in almost any locality.

(5) There is one more important element missing from the current situation that will be essential to making the above goals workable. To date, those of us who have been promoting Epicurean philosophy have written much, but done little to address the confusion and ambiguity that surrounds what Epicurean philosophy is really about. Relating that only to myself, I very much question whether it is really productive to simply discuss philosophy on a random basis with all comers who ask questions. I don't think it is possible to judge the productiveness of discussion without first taking a stand on what those discussions should be about: In other words, what core aspects of Epicurean philosophy must be defended and promoted at the expense of leaving behind those who disagree. It is very clear that there is wide disagreement in the philosophic community as to what Epicurus really taught. The majority of academics, and therefore the majority of casual observers on the internet, have come to believe what I think are some very damaging and inaccurate ideas, a few of which are:

(A) that Epicurus was a “Tranquillist,”

(B) that Epicurus held that some types of pleasure (“katastematic”) are more important than others;

(C) that Epicurus taught that “ataraxia” is the goal of life, with no need to translate that word into any other language, or define in any other language what it really means;

(D) that Epicurus was an “atheist,” and that his explanation of divinity was a thinly-disguised ruse to protect himself from suffering the persecution of Socrates; all of which is wrapped up in a general conclusion that Epicurus was a Stoic who liked to play with words, and who came up with some useful phrases, but who is nothing but a warm-up to the later Stoic philosophers who really hold the key to proper living.

As anyone who has read my posts knows, I reject all of those characterizations of Epicurus. I do not believe that any effort to promote Epicurus which does not address and refute these contentions is doomed to failure. I myself was generally aware of these accusations about Epicurus since college, and they kept me from reading further, as I believed then, and believe

now, that those positions on life are transparently false. It was only when I began to read the work of Norman DeWitt and see that these contentions were not necessarily so, and that in many respects Epicurus taught the reverse of what was said about him, that I began to grasp what I think is the real significance of Epicurus.

So as I proceed with the goals I have listed as one through five above, I will at the same time proceed with distilling these issues down to bullet point form, and use them for the development of a “curriculum” or “discussion guide” for use in the anticipated Meetup get-togethers. I will be posting about this online, and I will appreciate the assistance of anyone who is willing to contribute. But Epicurean philosophy is not a hierarchical organization, and I don’t expect anyone to “follow” me any more than I would agree to follow anyone else. I will share the material that I create, and if it is useful to others, then they will be welcome to use that material themselves, and I will be happy to collaborate with them in making the material and the structure better. It is possible that I will be able to do this in association with the “Society of Epicurus” umbrella, but that may not be the case. I will post about any structure that is needed beyond the Society of Epicurus, if any, on the existing NewEpicurean.com page, and at EpicureanFriends.com.

Again, I very much appreciate all the friendship I have found at Facebook, and the collaboration of the last several years has been very worthwhile for me. But times change, and the days grow shorter for all of us. The only thing that certainly lies ahead of us is death, and the only thing we can do to live our lives successfully is to fill them with as much pleasure and as little pain as possible. It’s therefore necessary to constantly reevaluate how best to use our time, and that’s what I am doing now. While it may not be at Facebook, I look forward to working with all of you toward more successful promotion of Epicurean philosophy in 2018.

- Cassius