

Discussion of the Society of Epicurus' 20 Tenets of 12/21/19

Post by "Hiram" of December 28, 2019 at 11:54 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I think I see this same tension in the work of Catherine Wilson ...

These are the issues that I see dividing u....

If you read my review of her book, you will see that these are NOT exactly the issues that are dividing us (only your perspective of them), and that I agree with much of your critique of her. I will discuss in more detail below, and later as time allows, if you let me.

Concerning the 6th Tenet, that's the reason why I chose the word particle instead of atom, because atom means indivisible and this will avoid the confusion.

[Quote from Elayne](#)

I am being straightforward here. I know nothing about you personally, so I am not making a personal insult. But your direction in philosophy is not consistent with science. It has a strong thread of idealism for which there is no basis in reality. I do think Epicurus' ethics was consistent with his physics. It does upset me that you are using your public platform to put Epicurus' name on a version that doesn't fit the physics.

Not sure what you're even talking about ... idealism? Really? In the years I've been promoting EP this has always been clear. Can you elaborate?

If by this you mean the "idealist interpretation of the gods" and "the atheist interpretation of the gods"--the first is one of the academically accepted interpretations and the last one is the interpretation that is most prominent perhaps among today's Epicureans, including Ilkka and myself (sources and arguments cited from both our blogs). If Society of Epicurus is to be a big-tent organization of Epicurean intellectuals, people who hold the three views will have to be willing to work with each other (obviously this is my project, not yours, but if you ever have to create an organization you will have to consider this issue).

So [Elayne](#) I'm sorry if I ever disparaged you particularly. I have history with Cassius, six years, and I've come to expect that he already has made up his mind before I present any critique, which has produced distance between us. So I'm made to feel like he will not profit from my words, and like I'd rather talk to a wall or a mirror (a drag queen once told me that mirrors don't

lie, and it's true!). I was very thankful to him for his influence in the initial years of my formation, but we have been for some time obviously in the process of parting ways and it would be nice to do so with friendly discussions and, as we clarify our points of disagreement, (and ONLY if there is room for parrhesia, and therefore for Friendship) to challenge each other from time to time. Can two factions of Epicureans work together, and to what extent? I don't know.

Also thank you for admitting that you do not rely on Philodemus, and this is a **highly important point of sincere divergence**. It's also very problematic. I had a very strong suspicion that you hadn't read his Peri Parrhesias.

I do not consider Epicurus infallible, and I suspect most modern Epicureans think the same, and I also think that Philodemus is extremely important because by the time he was writing, many generations had been connecting theory with practice for centuries. So it's an error on your part to dismiss his writings.

Also, there is the problem of **defining authority**. And how is authority used. For you, it's Epicurus--for me, it's the canon, and all the intellectuals that have studied nature following this tradition will continue to use the canon, and perhaps some will even continue to **perfect** its use. This point of divergence will become more crucial if you ever decide to try to create an Epicurean organization, because it will define everything else.

I don't just respect Lucretius, Philodemus, and even people like Lucian the comedian--which acknowledging that none is infallible. I also consider Michel Onfray to be the most important Epicurean intellectual of our generation, but I don't think you guys have anything approaching a clear idea of his work, and this--again--makes it difficult to connect theory with practice, with the current societal needs and issues that Epicurean philosophy has real moral guidance to give on.

I see Epicurean philosophy as a growing and evolving, adaptable, school of thought, and I get the sense that you, Cassius (and probably a few others) do not, you are instead Epicurus-only fundamentalists.

I am willing to concede that your approach is a FORM of Epicureanism, even if not one that I would agree with or find useful. I think Cassius is willing to concede the same to me, but so far you're not, for reasons that are not fully clear to me.

I wish to address your gate-keeping behavior, and I think Philodemus is important for this. **If you adopt a fundamentalist approach, and claim that you're the ONLY TRUE Epicurean and no one else is, that you're right and only you are right but no one else is (even _Philodemus!_, as you have just admitted--who was a recipient of centuries of tradition directly from a Scholarch of direct lineage), then in practice that becomes a mechanism to avoid frank criticism, which is a critical component of the mode of operation of EP.** My challenge is for you to think about the repercussions of this.

If a person does not accept our frank criticism there is no true friendship. If I am made to feel like I must be an object to your ideology or your agenda in order to be in your circle, and I can never be a subject (Hiram, with my own ideas, history, cultural baggage, likes and dislikes, my gayness and my hostility against the Catholicism I was brought up in, the FULL human being), then there is NO possibility of proper inter-subjective relations between us. AND of friendship. I can't be a subject, only an object. I would be forced to become a flatterer, rather than a Friend in the proper sense. Which is where Philodemus comes in, because **Philodemus wrote about this, which means that he must have observed it in his Garden or other Epicurean spaces, and that this is a tendency in some Epicurean communities and he wanted to warn us about it.**

Philodemus said that flatterers were a category of false friends. The person who is always right and does not accept a critique (for instance, the fundamentalist) will attract flatterers instead of friends, and your gate-keeping behavior and Cassius' insistence that he will "only work with" others who agree on all his opinions creates the possibility for surrounding yourself with flatterers, who may feel like they must remain more-or-less silent when they have a sincere disagreement with you in order to avoid your excommunication.

That's PHILODEMUS' critique of flatterers: that they are not real friends. My own critique is that you will not receive the proper "medication" of frank criticism, the moral and intellectual challenges that come with friendship, if you continue to push away potential friends and surround yourself with flatterers in the service of the fundamentalist stance.

Surrounding oneself with flatterers is safe, it's comfortable, and I'm sure even enjoyable. Surrounding oneself with friends is enjoyable also, but CHALLENGING. Less comfortable.

I was hesitating to offer parrhesia, as I said, because I was not confident you + Cassius would profit from my words, which is why I've so carefully presented them, but even if I leave the forum, at least I hope you profit from THESE words. There is no TRUE Friendship without parrhesia, there is no intersubjectivity if people are made to feel like objects in your circle and pushed into the role of a flatterer (as you and Cassius often seem to each other), which is what the "I am always right, you're always wrong" and the impervious-to-frankness attitude produces. You will continue to push away friends and the only people you'll attract who will remain here will be flatterers.

I was thinking of leaving the EF forum, actually, for some of the reasons that I've shared before, and it's hard to figure out what to do with my six years of history with Cassius: you're always right, I'm always wrong, there is a closed bubble and I am now frequently not made to feel welcome in that closed bubble. But what if I stay?

So I guess what I'm saying is that I would like to be your friend, but I will not be your flatterer, [Cassius](#) and [Elayne](#). I will not be your object, only a subject. You do not have to _accept_ my offer of friendship, only the challenges that come with it (or you can reject it, to follow through your own agendas and projects to your liking and miss out on profiting from my words) ... but for me to stay, you would have to evaluate the problems related to the fundamentalist stance

which nurtures the gate-keeping behavior. This means that you would have to accept that there ARE sincere Epicureans who will not be Epicurus-only fundamentalists.

And if [Elayne](#) rejects Philodemus teachings, as she is free to do, then it's not clear what rules other than the ones he laid out would govern our interaction! I mean, Philodemus was on the receiving end of centuries of Epicurean community practices. We have ZERO of that.

oh and thank you [Elli](#) for defending "autarchy". It's a neglected subject, which is why I dedicated 2019 content in my blog to it and to epicurean economics.