

SOE13: The goal of religion

Post by "Hiram" of December 30, 2019 at 10:56 AM

Concerning [Cassius](#) ' feedback:

Quote

SOE13: The goal of religion is the experience of pure, effortless pleasure.

Objection to SOE13: This statement seems to me to have no foundation in the Epicurean texts whatsoever. Are you saying "should be" rather than "is"? In that case the goal of a "proper" religion would be to promote pleasure and avoid pain, just as the purpose of every tool would ultimately be the same. But unless I am mistaken you are certainly not meaning to imply that this "is" the goal of every current world religion.

The goal to religion (pleasure) is assigned by Epicurus as part of his moral reform.

The source is from Philodemus' [scroll On Piety](#); here are some of the direct quotes:

Quote

But those who believe our oracles about the Gods will first wish to **imitate their blessedness**, insofar as mortals can, so that, since it was seen to come from doing no harm to anyone, **they will endeavor most of all to make themselves harmless to everyone** as far as it is within their power, and second, **to make themselves noble** ...

The just person has noble expectations concerning the Gods, and at the same time exceedingly enjoys pleasures that are unalloyed and effortless.

When describing the truly pious person (according to the Epicureans, as opposed to the vulgarly-pious), Philodemus describes this person as enjoying pleasures that are UNALLOYED and EFFORTLESS.

I interpret unalloyed / pure to mean that, **when subjected to hedonic calculus, they produce no disadvantages.**

I interpret effortless to mean just what it says. The pleasure here is easy, perhaps tied to singing a religious song or uttering a praise or to contemplation.

Here are other quotes which further clarify what Epicurean piety feels like:

Quote

(To others,) piety appears to include not harming both other people and especially one's benefactors and homeland. To be sure, they honor something rather kindly and propitious, whereas we all regard our views as the **true cause of our tranquility**.

... for every wise man holds pure and holy beliefs about the Divine. - Epicurus

So here we see that "making oneself harmless to everyone", making oneself noble, and having views that are "a true cause of our tranquility" are also properties of true piety, according to the Epicurean sources.

Many of the passages in the scroll were notes taken during class (under Zeno of Sidon), and many were quotes from Metrodorus and Epicurus, to whose authority Philodemus appealed frequently.

My purpose in having a "purpose of religion" Tenet is to help us have concrete Epicurean moral guidance to offer to religious students of Epicurus, and also to dig up the few sources that we have regarding this for study.

Here is On Piety:

<https://www.amazon.com/Philodemus-Pie...n/dp/0198150083>

I suppose I should also address this here:

Quote

SOE12: There are three acceptable interpretations of the Epicurean gods: the realist interpretation, the idealist interpretation, and the atheist interpretation.

Objection to SOE12: What does "acceptable" mean? Acceptable so as to be a member of Society of Epicurus? Acceptable so as to not be considered an enemy of Epicurus? These categories listed here have no generally accepted definitions so would require explanation. I cannot imagine that any interpretation that implies that Epicurus was intentionally being less than honest with his statements on gods would be acceptable to a "Society of Epicurus." And Epicurus' statements were very specific -- he used the term "gods" to refer to naturally-occurring, non-supernatural, non-omnipotent beings which he held do exist somewhere in the universe, but not here on Earth, and having no concerns about us whatsoever, but about which we are able to either perceive or conceive aspects of pleasurable living that can serve as worthwhile things for us to contemplate and emulate. Obviously much has been lost and is unclear but no interpretation that does not accept that Epicurus meant what he said should be acceptable (in my opinion) to a society modeling itself after Epicurus.

Yes, The accusation that Epicurus didn't say what he meant is dangerous. I think he was a realist, and was using the methodology we see in "against empty words" to redefine the word "gods" according to nature.

The idealist and atheist interpretations are by those who came before him. So this is to say: Epicurus himself was a realist. Later Epicureans may agree with his views, or believe that the gods whose bodies are made out of particles:

- a. do not exist, but their contemplation has utility (the idealist interpretation)
- b. do not exist, and their contemplation is pointless or unnecessary (the atheist interpretation)

Here is Ilkka's easy-to-read essay on this:

<http://menoceus.blogspot.com/2014/08/epicurean-gods.html>