

SOE13: The goal of religion

Post by "Cassius" of December 30, 2019 at 6:29 PM

OK I am back after a delay in being able to respond. I want to repeat that I do not intend to dismiss anything in particular that can be well documented from the texts, but the first test in my mind of texts that are not well documented is "Is the suggested translation consistent with what we know from the reliable texts and from our understanding of the Epicurean worldview / nature of the universe?"

Here I would scrutinize both "noble" and "piety." We know that the only ultimate standard is pleasure and pain, and that concepts that we today associate with "nobility" are run through with Stoicism. Even if we are certain that the original text used a word like "kalon" (which is not a given unless we have a very good chain of custody of the original texts, which I don't think we have here) then we have to rely on what the translators think the word "kalon" meant to the Epicureans, and we know that they used words with their own twists on definitions.

I think that especially goes for "piety." I know what that word implies in 2019 America, but I don't know whether our word corresponds to what was in the texts or the minds of the ancient Epicureans. "Piety" has lots of meanings today and I don't think we can suppose anything about what it meant to the Epicureans that would be inconsistent with what we understand about their core views of their gods. To me personally I would not associate "chanting" with my attitude toward an Epicurean god in any way, even though I find singing and various types of music to be very pleasing. That is just an indication that you and I are different, and the more people we polled the more differences would arise, all of which preferences could be entirely consistent with Epicurean philosophy if they bring pleasure to the people holding them.

In both my examples I am just emphasizing that I think it is very dangerous to jump to conclusions and suggest particular applications that should apply across the board. We have a tremendous amount to do in order to get a good picture of what we DO know, so much so that I personally recoil from too much speculation about what we don't know.

And I say that especially in the context of "Society of Epicurus." I think it is absolutely fine for you Hiram or anyone else to define their own perspective on pleasurable living and unite a community that feels the same way. My comments and reservations are simply that - since we are discussing an organization called "Society of Epicurus" -- my personal opinion is that the more specific you are in endorsing particular practices, the more you stray from a "philosophy" into the realm of a particular type of community.

I don't know if I am getting my point across but to repeat it, I am all in favor of particular communities studying Epicurean principles as an aide in their own decisions about how to live. What you are discussing is totally appropriate for something with a name like "The Hiram Crespo Society of Epicureans." And of course since it is still somewhat a free country there is no

stopping you from naming it anything you like, including a broad name like Society of Epicurus. My comments are just comments to register my view that by implying that particular preferences are identical with Epicurean philosophy, the result is something that I don't think Epicurus would approve of, because you are implying that one single set of preferences alone are consistent with Epicurus, when (in my view) that is clearly not the case.

No doubt you would reply that you think I am promoting a "Cassius Amicus Interpretation of Epicurus." But in dealing with that back and forth, the important distinction is that I recognize that some or all of your preferences are legitimate lifestyle choices if they bring you (and people like you) pleasure. All I am saying is that not everyone agrees with those lifestyle choices and I think it is improper to suggest that Epicurean philosophy leads to a single set for everyone.