

# Episode Three - So Great Is the Power of Religion To Inspire Evil Deeds!

Post by "Cassius" of January 25, 2020 at 8:47 AM

In this Episode three we probably have enough material to stick with the Iphianassa passage before going forward. Let's use this to highlight the general topic of the Epicurean theme that supernatural religion is not necessary for happy living, and that in fact it detracts from that goal. I think there are other relevant passages in Epicurean literature that we can draw on, so let's try to list them here. The first one that come to mind is from [Diogenes of Oinoanda](#):

Fr. 20

[So it is obvious that wrong-doers, given that they do not fear the penalties imposed by the laws, are not] afraid of [the gods.] This [has to be] conceded. For if they were [afraid, they] would not [do wrong]. As for [all] the others, [it is my opinion] that the [wise] are not [(reasoning indicates) righteous] on account of the gods, but on account of [thinking] correctly and the [opinions] they hold [regarding] certain things [and especially] pains and death (for indeed invariably and without exception human beings do wrong either on account of fear or on account of pleasures), and that ordinary people on the other hand are righteous, in so far as they are righteous, on account of the laws and the penalties, imposed by the laws, hanging over them. But even if some of their number are conscientious on account of the laws, they are few: only just two or three individuals are to be found among great segments of multitudes, and not even these are steadfast in acting righteously; for they are not soundly persuaded about providence. A clear indication of the complete inability of the gods to prevent wrong-doings is provided by the nations of the Jews and Egyptians, who, as well as being the most superstitious of all peoples, are the vilest of all peoples.

On account of what kind of gods, then, will human beings be righteous? For they are not righteous on account of the real ones or on account of Plato's and Socrates' Judges in Hades. We are left with this conclusion; otherwise, why should not those who disregard the laws scorn fables much more?

So, with regard to righteousness, neither does our doctrine do harm [not does] the opposite [doctrine help], while, with regard to the other condition, the opposite doctrine not only does not help, but on the contrary also does harm, whereas our doctrine not only does not harm, but also helps. For the one removes disturbances, while the other adds them, as has already been made clear to you before.

Are there other Epicurean texts directly on point on the corrupting power of religion?

Am I also not remembering that someone famous in the Middle Ages made a comment about Lucretius' line "So great is the power of religion to persuade to evil deeds!" being one of the most memorable of the poem that would live forever? or as long as poetry survives.... or something like that?

[This below is a hint of it](#), but not the full quote:

"When a single day brings the world to destruction, only then will the poetry of the sublime Lucretius pass away." This judgment by the Roman poet [Ovid](#) , written in the generation after Lucretius's death, has been echoed by such writers as Voltaire and [George Santayana](#); the author of *De rerum natura* (On the Nature of Things) holds a place in world literature as one of the great philosopher-poets.

[Another hint of it](#):

The most obvious and famous result of this attitude is Lucretius' extreme hostility to traditional religion—which, in his view, is neither reasonable or natural and is the source of endless anxiety and cruelty. And responses to his poem often begin and end with that. Voltaire, as one might expect, enthusiastically approved the most famous line in the poem attacking traditional religion: "That shows how much/ religion can turn mankind to evil" (1.134), and the energy of that endorsement is matched by any number of people who turned away from Lucretius in horror for this irreligious stance.