

# Reverence and Awe In Epicurean Philosophy

Post by "Cassius" of October 26, 2020 at 7:43 PM

This is a trite example, but I remember when I was growing up and trying to learn to play tennis that people would constantly make the suggestion that i should get a much practice as possible playing with older and better players, because that's how you learn to improve yourself.

Many of the suggestions of Epicurus about contemplating eternity and infinity and the gods seem to me sort of the same kind of thing - that we make our lives better by regularly visualizing "better" examples of what we would like to be ourselves.

But remember, I am the one who holds open the door to the possibility of ancient astronauts and the whole "Star Trek" kind of universe as *possibilities*, and in fact *probabilities* in some form or fashion, but always only of speculative / aspirational value without some direct reason to consider them of personal relevance to me in a particular situation.

Even saying that, I don't discount that what we are discussing can have a very important role in life. I am with Nietzsche in thinking that nihilism and similar kinds of radical "nothing makes any difference" attitudes requires a strong antidote. I don't follow his view that "eternal return" is particularly helpful with that, but if the cultivation of feelings of reverence and awe toward "life" or whatever we conclude makes the most sense, then that would be an important tool to keep in the quiver.

Seems to me that there are several references (for example better to believe in the myths of religion than in hard determinism) that would support the probability that everybody doesn't have the constitution of a Socrates or a Plato to want to go around sparring with words every day, and that type of personality is going to be attracted to different parts of the Epicurean philosophy than are others. I don't think it would ever be permissible to stoop to out and out "noble myths" that are patently false, but there is enough logical foundation (isonomia, eternity, infinity) plus enough raw direct "sensation" (the feelings we are talking about) to provide an important part of an Epicurean culture.

And I do think they were headed toward an Epicurean "culture," or at least that would have been a natural evolution of the school. Honor the founders on the 20th and regular occasions, look upon Epicurus as a father figure who we can almost think of as "godlike," and surround yourself with a community of friends who regularly talk about unanswerable questions about an infinite and eternal universe with no life after death, and you've got a formula for a day-to-day culture in which contemplation of "divinity" would be a natural part.

Edit: I don't want to stop on that note. I never want to underestimate the intelligence of the ancient Epicureans. I really have no clue where the "limit" is of what is possible in terms of what goes on in the universe, so I don't want to sound like every aspect of what I am saying amounts

to a pragmatic argument that "it's useful even if it isn't true." I really don't know what "it" is in this context, and I think a close reading of the texts will lead in some very interesting directions.