

Thoughts on Reverence, Awe, and Epicurean Piety

Post by "Godfrey" of October 28, 2020 at 9:03 PM

I just finished reading [Significance of Worship and Prayer Among the Epicureans](#) on the forum Filebase and it stirred up a flurry of thoughts which I'm putting down here. This is one attempt at distilling and resolving of some of the discussion from [Reverence and Awe in Epicurean Philosophy](#); from the discussion I'm pretty sure several of us are going through a similar process!

Epicurus didn't do away with the gods but felt that he had reasoned out their true nature. Since his reasoning began with the conception of the gods current in his time, and he saw value in religion, he felt no need to reimagine the common worship although he did reinvent the mental content. What follows is me riffing on this idea.... 🤔

To us living today, the gods of Epicurus' time are but interesting historical myths. Our challenge then is to undergo the same process of reasoning as Epicurus, but with respect to the idea of the omnipotent god commonly worshipped today. The same critiques apply, but how can we apply EP to arrive at a useful model of piety?

Similarities between Greek and modern god(s): control the affairs of humans; can be influenced through worship, sacrifice, prayer, etc; control the natural world; know the thoughts of humans(?).

Differences: one omnipotent god today v a group of gods in Greece.

The similarities listed above for god(s) were eliminated by Epicurus, to be distilled down to indestructibility and bliss. But he retained the Greek model of anthropomorphic gods, which has been for the most part discounted by our time. If I was to presume to discover the key idea of the contemporary god, it would be that it is a generative force. I think we would all agree that it isn't anthropomorphic. So to this idea we would then apply the Epicurean canon, reasoning, and current experimentally verified science.

Epicurean, canonic pleasure, which equates to health and growth, is inherent in the generative force of life, and it is to that which we can connect. And furthermore, it's indestructible and blissful. But we mustn't add to it anything that is unverifiable by accepted science. Epicurus wrote of his pleasure in studying natural philosophy; that same pleasure is available to us. Studying, understanding and basking in the pleasure inherent in life's generative force, I think, constitutes in broad terms a modern Epicurean "spiritual practice."

From this point Epicurus decided, in his typically radical fashion and for whatever reason, that attending the festivals, etc, was an appropriate form of worship for his "flock." This is as radical as are other parts of his philosophy, in fact it's so radical that I can't see myself following this advice. But if you distill the essence of a current religion to the worship of the generative force,

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it's easy to find the beauty and pleasure inherent in mainstream religious practice. Of course it's not so easy to ignore the corrosive aspects of religion, and perhaps more difficult still to actually attend a service as the early Epicureans did!