

From Stress to Happiness

Post by “Pacatus” of November 18, 2022 at 2:24 PM

Not sure if this is the right place to post this, but -

Last night we watched a lovely documentary on Netflix called “From Stress to Happiness.” The main guide is a Buddhist monk (though the Benedictine brother David-Steindl-Rast, now aged 96, also makes an appearance).

As I watched, I found myself reinterpreting into Epicurean terms - and concluded that their message (though very good) would be even clearer and better grounded from an Epicurean perspective (and without Buddhist commitment to such things as “samsara” - which, though not emphasized, naturally crept in).

Also, I thought that an expansive understanding of Epicurean friendship can cover most of the ground of Buddhist compassion and loving-kindness - even if an attitude of friendliness is not reciprocated (and self-protection, especially by withdrawal, is called for), that attitude (like an “attitude of gratitude” even in the face of travail) is still more conducive to our own happiness.

Also, for the first time, I really started to think of Epicureanism as a “faith” - without supernaturalism or strict religious insistence on “right doctrinal belief” no matter what (to be a “True Epicurean™”?). A reality-based faith that evolves well into our modern world (e.g. modern theories of physics, neurobiology and more developed understandings of deductive/inductive logic). A faith, rather than just an intellect-based philosophy as a good guide to life. A faith as an evolving way of life - in which I will always be a beginner (with my own fits and starts).

[All of which is to say that maybe I finally absorbed (beyond just intellectual assent) some of what Epicurus’ was actually trying to say - and has been said on here.]

Anyway, I just wanted to share my initial, unsorted thoughts on seeing the film.

Post by “Cassius” of November 18, 2022 at 3:39 PM

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

I really started to think of Epicureanism as a “faith”

I think once you start thinking about "i've never seen an atom but I am 100% confident that atoms or something like them exist" and then start parsing out whether the words "believe" or even "faith" are interchangeable with being 100% confident in something you have never seen for yourself, it becomes possible to see these words as less threatening, and then move the focus of concern to other aspects where it probably deserves to be. Seems to me the issue is more in the claim of divine revelation of claiming to know things without evidence or similar expressions, and it is better to dive into those details than to get too obsessed about particular words.

I say that even though I agree that phrases like "people of faith" are huge red flags and cause for very legit concern and distancing.

Post by "Pacatus" of November 18, 2022 at 4:02 PM

Yes. I hasten to add that for me neither "belief" nor "faith" are interchangeable with being 100% certain (let alone the absurdity of some Christians who, generally quoting St. Paul, claim that faith itself either a) is knowledge, or b) is itself actually evidence that guarantees knowledge).

Yes, faith is still a "red flag" word (my wife grimaced a bit when I used it 😊), and there are likely better ones ...

Post by "Pacatus" of November 18, 2022 at 4:30 PM

[Cassius](#)

I want to add that "philosophy" can be a "red-flag" word too, in the modern (seemingly pervasive) academic sense that it strictly involves intellectual pursuit - rather than as a therapeutic way of life, as the Hellenistic philosophers (especially Epicureans) understood it. And a (over-) reliance on intellection seems to inform things like CBT, as embraced by modern Stoics.

Since other languages sometimes seem to get me out of everyday and ingrained definitions, maybe the Spanish "*via vida*" is a good substitute (for me) for "faith." "*Es mi via vida.*"

Post by “Pacatus” of November 18, 2022 at 5:56 PM

I came upon this, regarding the trap of certainty:

“Epicurus also saw that man’s natural fear of the unknown is seized upon as a tool by false priests, professors, and politicians who demand obedience through the call for ‘certainty.’ The call for ‘certainty’ in human action is a false standard which can never be met, and the real evil of those who call for it is that they are aware of the trap which they lay for the unthinking. The only remedy for this abomination is for men to acknowledge that their knowledge and their lives are **limited to the scope to the bounds established by Nature.**”

- Cassius Amicus, *Ante Oculos: Epicurus and the Evidence-Based Life* (emphasis in the original)



I had this e-book long ago, but, it seems, never finished it (mea culpa! - I’ll blame my ADD). 😞

Post by “Root304” of November 22, 2022 at 2:33 AM

I want to say the difference between Epicureanism as an intellectual pursuit and Epicureanism as potentially a faith or religion is when you get intentional with ritual technology; votive offerings, olfactory activation, meditation techniques, prayer-like recitation of the texts, communal singing. That sort of thing.