

Why Did Epicurus Not Focus His Teaching In Public?

Post by "Cassius" of May 16, 2018 at 9:12 AM

[Poster at Facebook](#): Epicurus seemingly retreated to the Garden according to DeWitt because of fear of his life, many modern people say this is a big reason why they won't be an Epicurean because they want to make change and involve themselves in politics. My question is: Was this retreat to the Garden a cultural thing (because of fear of his life and the little to no influence he would have had in the government type) or was it supposed to be a social statement? As in "live this way, it is the best way for humans to live".



Cassius: I remember a comment like that, but it's always necessary to keep an open mind as to the wider context. We don't have a clue as to the conditions on which people came to visit Epicurus in the garden - maybe he decided he didn't want to yell over the noise of others in the public square, and that was a good enough reason not to focus his work there. Or maybe, more importantly, he didn't CARE to compete in the public places, because he was more interested in training his own students to live their own lives properly than he was to put on a show to people who disagreed with him. I think there are multiple reasons for everything and it's improper to put too much focus on any one without more evidence.

Cassius: This is similar to the question of Epicurus' teachings about the gods. Many people argue that Epicurus developed his position about the real existence of "gods" to avoid being put to death for atheism. I don't think that is true at all, and I think that if Epicurus' followers (for example Lucretius) had detected insincerity in him on such an important point we would certainly know it and he would never have been taken seriously on anything else. If you know someone is lying to you on one of the most important questions in life are you going to trust them on less important questions? Was it SO important to be in Athens that Epicurus chose to lie on that issue and subject his entire philosophy to the charge of manipulation and insincerity? I don't think so at all. Some may reject his views on that or any other issue, but the charge of insincerity is far worse than being wrong.

Also - "My question is: Was this retreat to the Garden a cultural thing (because of fear of his life and the little to no influence he would have had in the government type) or was it supposed to be a social statement? As in "live this way, it is the best way for humans to live".

Think about it: How much more are we able to accomplish here in this MODERATED group, which requires admission for posting, keeping discussions on topic and throwing out clear disrupters, than if we had to shout over ever Stoic, Platonist, Marxist, and Religionist who happened to wander by and insisted on manipulating and dominating our conversations? Why isn't it likely that Epicurus faced VERY similar issues in "teaching in the public square"?

The answer to that question can be filed under "Why the argument that Epicureans should crusade against other people's pain rather than seek to enhance pleasure isn't what Epicurus did or taught."

Cassius: Not at anyone here, but sometimes I just want to scream!   If Epicurus' goal had really been to teach people to live quiet, shy, retiring, lives in obscurity, does anyone really think that the best way for him to do that was to move to Athens and devote his life to churning out polemical books, letters, and essays challenging every key religious and philosophical principle held to be sacrosanct by every reputable leader in the city? Not only was he not running scared from persecution and hiding in obscurity, he was standing up in the middle of the enemy, throwing truth in their face, and challenging them to do it!