

On Sharpening Distinctions Between Epicurean and Other Philosophies, Religions, and Movements

Post by "Cassius" of June 3, 2019 at 9:01 PM

Here are some general thoughts that occur to me during the course of an ongoing debate about a different non-Epicurean philosophy:

it is not my goal in this or any other Epicurean forum to just meet new people, smile to them about how we all want to be happy and have less pain, and walk away. I don't think that was what Epicurus was all about either. What I find in my life is that my greatest pleasures and support comes from dealing with FRIENDS who largely see the world the way I do -- and that does not mean "we just all want to be happy" and leaving it at that.

The reality is that people tend to gravitate into circles with which they identify, and there are certain core attributes of the Epicurean circle that go far beyond "atheism" and "let's all be happy." The world "happy" is notoriously ambiguous, and the Happy Christian and the Happy Muslim and the Happy Jew and the Happy Communist and the Happy Capitalist (and on and on in listing the mainstream political parties, philosophies, and religions) have very little in common with the core values of what I understand Epicurus to have taught. And the harsh reality is that people in crowds lose what little sanity they have as individuals, and the larger and more homogeneous the crowd of the groups that I just mentioned, the more intensely ANTI-Epicurean they tend to be.

I am all in favor of using words that do not offend unnecessarily, and of being as compassionate and kind to individuals as we possibly can. But it does us no good in our goal of identifying - or "making" - new people like us if all we do is smile and nod and talk about how much in common on the surface that we have with each other.

Because at a very basic level we don't have much in common with people who look to God to tell them what to do, or look to virtue idealism to tell them what to do, and who decide what to do based on the reward or punishment they face after death, or who think that "logic" is the answer to every problem and who in fact look down on and attempt to suppress emotion. Those are huge differences in perspective, and we could go on and on listing more.

One thing that Epicureans seem to largely agree on, but most others muddied over with "spiritualism" and "new age" nonsense, is that this is the only life we have, and this is the only opportunity to experience whatever pleasure we are going to experience. That means that we don't have a lot of time to dawdle around smiling and talking sweet nothings to organizations that are inherently at core anti-Epicurean.

Eternity is a long time, and I hate the thought of wasting one second (though I admittedly do it all the time). That's why I see much of the job of rediscovering Epicurean philosophy as a kind of "campaign," and not as just a pleasant thing to do in the afternoon. If we can identify quickly that a certain group is going in a different direction than we are, then we should point it out in sharp contrasts so that the people we are looking for can find us, and the rest can look elsewhere. I have no ill will toward any individual of any race, creed, religion, or political persuasion. But to the extent that any grouping or category of people have a culture or direction that is at root actively anti-Epicurean, then my judgement is that [PD39](#) and [PD40](#), about separating ourselves from our enemies, and guarding the power to defend ourselves from them, is the best prescription:

39. The man who best knows how to meet external threats makes into one family all the creatures he can; and those he can not, he at any rate does not treat as aliens; and where he finds even this impossible, he avoids all dealings, and, so far as is advantageous, excludes them from his life.

40. Those who possess the power to defend themselves against threats by their neighbors, being thus in possession of the surest guarantee of security, live the most pleasant life with one another; and their enjoyment of the fullest intimacy is such that if one of them dies prematurely, the others do not lament his death as though it called for pity.