

Welcome JCrago!

Post by "Cassius" of January 4, 2021 at 11:44 AM

Today I see that Jordan has rejoined the Epicurean philosophy Facebook group, and [posted a long piece about his background](#). That material needs to be here on this website somewhere for those who interact with Jordan, so I'm pasting it here. Jordan if you prefer it to be somewhere else or want to expand or elaborate, please do:

Hello all. My story goes thus: I come from an atheist family from Britain. We moved to rural South Africa when I was ten, and I was placed in schools where the curriculum was explicitly guided by Protestant Fundamentalism. I'll never forget a cartoon in my biology textbook where a kid from this perfect white nuclear family runs up to a chimpanzee enclosure at the local zoo and exclaims, "Gee, Dad! He looks like a man!" And then, sanctimoniously, the Dad delivers all the usual Young Earth Creationist drivel. Throughout my teens, I rebelled against religion. I had a penchant for National Geographic, and I knew all the YEC doctrines were crap -- and I lost no opportunity to tell the students and teachers their beliefs were nonsense.

When I returned to the UK when I was 19, I got very interested in the New Atheist movement -- led by the likes of Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens. However, in 2017 I underwent a powerful religious experience which I interpreted as an Evangelical experience of Christ. I became an Anglican -- never a YEC -- but I always felt uncomfortable with the traditional doctrines. They struck me as either metaphysically implausible, or ethically questionable. But I'd discovered the benefits of religiosity, of having an ideology to guide me and base my identity on; of having a community of like-minded friends with whom to discuss philosophy. So I tried to stick it out, hoping my doubts would eventually peter out. But they didn't, and about nine months later I grudgingly and sadly renounced my faith.

Then I discovered liberal theology, popularised by the likes of Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan. But the initial excitement of finding a more intellectually fulfilling theology was replaced by a feeling of disappointment, both at how unrecognisable it made the Christian faith and at how unpopular and alienating a theology it is. And so, I renounced my faith again. It was around this time I discovered a book called 'The Pleasure Principle' by Catherine Wilson, and I felt an immediate affinity with the philosophy of Epicurus. It seemed to offer purpose, meaning, and value in an ontologically purposeless, meaningless, and valueless physical universe, while at the same time avoiding the pallid nihilism of the existentialists.

I became very active in one of the Epicurean online communities for the next year, but then my undeniable desire for religiosity pulled me away from Epicureanism and back towards Christianity. However, my return to Christianity was nothing more than a shorter version of my first stint: I felt attracted to Faith, but soon I found I couldn't accept the traditional doctrines; I

explored liberal theology, but I again found it underwhelming, and I returned to atheism. But atheism alone is not enough -- at least for me -- and I have returned to what I consider the most attractive atheist worldview -- the philosophy of Epicurus.

However, there is a difference between atheism and secularism. The first is the denial of a transcendent God, the second is the rejection of religion. Epicureanism is a form of atheism, but it needn't necessarily be a form of secularism. It can be an atheist religion, and I am deeply interested in what I call Epicurean Neopaganism. Neopaganism is an atheistic religious movement which interprets the gods of classical religions as concepts, ideals, symbols, or archetypes to be worshipped. It is a way of seeing the world as divine, rather than claiming the world is divine. We see a version of this in Lucretius:

"If anyone decided to call the sea Neptune, and corn Ceres, and to misapply the name of Bacchus rather than to give liquor its right name, so be it; and let him dub the round world "Mother of the Gods" so long as he is careful not really to infest his mind with base superstitions."

My favourite part of *On the Nature of Things* is the glorious opening hymn to Venus, the chief "deity" of Epicurean Neopaganism. Here is a quote from the Introduction of the Penguin version of *On the Nature of Things*:

"Lucretius' Venus may seem to have too many functions: she is the mother of the Romans, the Epicurean pleasure principle, the season of spring, the sexual drive, the goddess of peace and a kind of muse invoked to impart beauty to the poet's language. How, it may be asked, can a single figure symbolize so many disparate things? But that is precisely Lucretius' point: everything that happens, the experience of pleasure, the winds blowing, the flowers blooming in the spring, the beasts rutting, the poet composing - has the same essential cause. Every action, all creation and all destruction are alike the product of the push and pull of atoms, of these elementary particles colliding, cohering or flying apart."

Venus, in Epicurean Neopaganism, is a way of poetically worshipping Nature within the confines of metaphysical naturalism. It is a middle way between the superstition of Abrahamic faith and New Atheist anti-spirituality, and it's a project I'm keen to develop. Would this be of interest to other members? Even if it isn't, I hope to get to know many of the other members through participating in the interests of this group.

Peace and safety to all!