

The dark Epicureanism in the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam

Post by "Stan85" of May 24, 2018 at 10:57 PM

I've mentioned in another thread that the Epicurean philosophy strikes me as deeply pessimistic. I think this pessimism is brought out beautifully in Edward Fitzgerald's Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam: <http://classics.mit.edu/Khayyam/rubaiyat.html>

Sure, Khayyam may not be an orthodox Epicurean, but his attack on the theistic or conventional judgments and his praise of simple pleasures are in complete conformity with Epicureanism. Yet unlike, say, Lucretius, his tone is distinctly somber. Rather than liberation from the false values of the herd, the subtext here seems to be disillusionment and skepticism.

The following verses seem to be of particular relevance for Epicureanism:

Quote

A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,

A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread--and Thou

Beside me singing in the Wilderness--

Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!

Some for the Glories of This World; and some

Sigh for the Prophet's Paradise to come;

Ah, take the Cash, and let the Credit go,

Nor heed the rumble of a distant Drum!

And those who husbanded the Golden grain,

And those who flung it to the winds like Rain,

Alike to no such aureate Earth are turn'd

As, buried once, Men want dug up again.

The Worldly Hope men set their Hearts upon
Turns Ashes--or it prospers; and anon,
Like Snow upon the Desert's dusty Face,
Lighting a little hour or two--is gone.

Think, in this batter'd Caravanserai
Whose Portals are alternate Night and Day,
How Sultan after Sultan with his Pomp
Abode his destined Hour, and went his way.

Alike for those who for To-day prepare,
And those that after some To-morrow stare,
A Muezzin from the Tower of Darkness cries
"Fools! your Reward is neither Here nor There."

Why, all the Saints and Sages who discuss'd
Of the Two Worlds so wisely--they are thrust
Like foolish Prophets forth; their Words to Scorn
Are scatter'd, and their Mouths are stopt with Dust.

Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and Saint, and heard great argument
About it and about: but evermore
Came out by the same door where in I went.

With them the seed of Wisdom did I sow,
And with mine own hand wrought to make it grow;
And this was all the Harvest that I reap'd--
"I came like Water, and like Wind I go."

Display More

It would be interesting to compare orthodox Epicureanism with the worldview suggested by these lines.