

Who Was Bernard Mandeville and Was He Truly An Epicurean?

Post by "Cassius" of August 26, 2021 at 3:03 PM

I just finished reading Remark O. Overall it is a very memorable slash and burn of Stoics, Priests, Government officials and others who claim virtue in public but do the opposite in private (and sometimes in public too).

It does seem to me that he has a good understanding of Epicurus, but it's hard to say whether he is going to extend it philosophically or just be content to cite him in support of his contention, which is something like that everyone in fact acts to pursue what they find pleasing so we should be honest about it.

No doubt it's easy to see why he is labeled an "egoist" but that just obscures the deeper issues in my view. I would say that Ayn Rand is fairly labeled an "egoist" but I am also convinced that scratch the surface of her philosophy and she is throughout Platonist and even Stoic in her worship of reason. Labeling someone an egoist might be a decent indicator of Epicurean views (because the stoic majority views that negatively and labels most all Epicureans as egoists) but unless you drill down to the specifics you probably can't be sure what is going on in the original writings.

Here I would say there is a good chance that Mandeville combines his view of pursuit of pleasure with considerably more Epicurean philosophy. His ethics at least here do seem based on pleasure, but I don't see much if any recognition of the need for friends of the same viewpoint or much if the practical advice about evaluating the total balance of pleasure and pain.

Maybe since he is a doctor (I gather?) He is more of a materialist, but if so that's not in this section of this poem.

And I haven't seen any references to epistemology here though that's not unexpected given this subject.

So more reading would be necessary but I would rate based what I've read so far as someone who seems to be willing to go further than most in support of some of Epicurus' most controversial ethical positions.