

Mises UK piece "Epicurus, Father of the Enlightenment"

Post by "Cassius" of September 18, 2018 at 1:23 PM

I see that the article reproduces two accusations I find most irritating:

- (1) that Epicurus "derided" mathematics, and
- (2) that Epicurus "rejected" politics.

I continue to think that is misrepresentation. It is not "deriding" something to put it in its proper place, and it is not "rejecting" something in total to carve out a proper and an improper use for an activity.

It would be very helpful in promoting Epicurus to have a reference that articulately points out that Epicurus was not "anti-science" and "anti" all politics.

I have already mentioned the differences between Epicurus and stoiches with regard to the natural sciences. Knowledge for us is valued not mainly because it liberates us from mental pain, but because it leads to mental and physical happiness. We observe. We form hypotheses. We experiment. We make use of the mathematics that Epicurus derided. We use the knowledge thereby gained to change our conditions of life. We check suffering. We cure illness. We extend life. We fill our lives with the wealth that comes from our knowledge.

With regard to his ethical theories, the modern utilitarians have also gone beyond Epicurus. They begin with the same premise, that the purpose of life is happiness, but pass then to the notion of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. This leads them into the politics that Epicurus rejected—in an investigation of what social orders are most productive of the general happiness, and to a willingness to argue for the removal of impediments to that happiness.