

New Sedley Chapter On Ancient Greek Atheism

Post by “Godfrey” of March 25, 2022 at 5:42 PM

From Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes by Edith Hamilton:

...people felt about Dionysus as about no other god. He was not only outside of them, he was within them, too. They could be transformed by him into being like him. The momentary sense of exultant power wine-drinking can give was only a sign to show men that they had within them more than they knew; “they could themselves become divine.”

To think in this way was far removed from the old idea of worshiping the god by drinking enough to be gay or to be freed from care or to get drunk. There were followers of Dionysus who never drank wine at all. It is not known when the great change took place, lifting the god who freed men for a moment through drunkenness to the god who freed them through inspiration, but one very remarkable result of it made Dionysus for all future ages the most important of the gods of Greece.

What was done at his great festival was open to all the world and is a living influence today. No other festival in Greece could compare with it. It took place in the spring when the vine begins to put forth its branches, and it lasted for five days. They were days of perfect peace and enjoyment. All the ordinary business of life stopped. No one could be put in prison; prisoners were even released so that they could share in the general rejoicing. But the place where people gathered to do honor to the god was not a wild wilderness made horrible by savage deeds and a bloody feast; it was not even a temple precinct with ordered sacrifices and priestly ceremonies. It was a theater; and the ceremony was the performance of a play.

I was unaware of this change in Dionysian revelry. As underlined, she doesn't say when this change happened, and I suspect it was after Epicurus' time. But it potentially brings a different perspective to the festivals.

Further on she states that

His worshipers believed that his death and resurrection showed that the soul lives on forever after the body dies.

So that's problematic.