

A Facebook Question On Continental Philosophy and Nate's Response

Post by "Cassius" of January 22, 2023 at 8:53 AM

[Admin Edit - This [Facebook Exchange](#) is far beyond me but Nate's answer looks so worthwhile that I thought we ought to preserve it.

Al Drea -

What do modern Epicureans think about the way ideas from ancient atomism (eg. Epicurus, Lucretius) are used in recent Continental philosophy? I mean writers like Althusser, Deleuze, Badiou, Zizek, etc.

Nate -

Some of their ideas are on point, but most others are dissimilar. For one thing, there is much less of a focus (to the point of rejection) on physics in Continental philosophy. Early Continental philosophy was largely oriented toward the works of Kant whose ethics and metaphysics heavily contrasted with atomism and hedonism. Still, there are similarities. For example, I think Epicurus would have appreciated Derrida's analysis of the relationship between signifiers and that which they signify as well as his critique of "logocentrism". Deconstruction is an effective tool that Epicurus might have used in criticizing popular culture, but the objects of Derrida's focus were not of primary interest to Epicurus. Baudrillard's focus on nihilism is antithetical in tone to Epicureanism, though, his critique of popular culture would have been well received by Epicurus. I don't think that he would have agreed with Sartre's characterization of human life as being Sisyphean or Camus' framing of human existence as alienating and dissociative, though, both philosophers' emphasis on finding answers internally through responsibility and care reflects Epicurus' project. Deleuze's Kantian interest and focus on metaphysics generally floats at the other end of the philosophical pool; Althusser spends a lot of time juggling the Marxist dialectic, and "material" or not, the dialectic connotes Plato to Epicureans; still, the importance each places on the value of the individual in orienting a political narrative strikes me as being Epicurean in tone. Nietzsche is a key point of interest in that he shows no restraint in expressing unconditional admiration for Epicurus, though he later goes on to criticize him in later works. In general, I think we will find more overlap with Epicurean ideas in the modern Analytic tradition than the Continental.