

Epicurean Philosophy Vs. Humanism

Post by “Peter Konstans” of October 2, 2023 at 6:56 PM

In this excellent book by [Caspar Hirschi](#), *[The Origins of Nationalism: an alternative History from Ancient Rome to Early Modern Germany](#)* (Cambridge 2011) we see that humanism was once a movement (a concrete intellectual and political movement of the early modern period and not just a set of abstract ideas) that was closely associated with nationalism. This is something that modern 'humanists' would find completely preposterous and yet it is true. As Hirschi observes the concept of 'humanism' has today been absorbed by humanitarianism. Nevertheless the epithet humanist still vestigially preserves in Europe some of its original chauvinistic flavors and Europeans will often make quick use of the handle to express pride in the cultural achievements and refinement of European civilization and then proceed to bask in its reflected glory. In the US the word humanism functions as a registered trademark of mainstream leftists who especially use it when in a mood to attack the religious aspects of their political opponents in the name of progress and modernity. None of this has anything to do with Epicurus who lived in world that was alien to modernity and its political agendas and whose only concern was guiding his community to a pleasurable life. If he lived today would he tell us that the key to leading a life of pleasure is becoming humanists and spend our time picking quarrels with the enemies of progress? I doubt it.