

"Moral Darwinism: How We Became Hedonists." Review.

Post by "Daniel" of April 9, 2019 at 6:02 AM

THE FALL AND RISE OF EPICUREANISM

"...As the Roman Republic crumbled from internal decay, and the two Caesars, Julius and then Augustus, substituted imperial for republican rule, the new empire championed the philosophy of the Stoics, which seemed to answer far better to the required virtues of duty and self-sacrifice for the common good than did the apolitical and pleasure-based morality of Epicureanism...In addition, while Stoicism argued that the natural order was divinely ordained and the gods watched over human affairs, Epicureanism denied any relation of the gods either to nature or human affairs - and moreover had the malodorous reputation of being either openly or secretly atheistic..."

"...But during the first four centuries of Christianity, Epicureanism was a living rival, strong enough and pervasive enough to be an object of worry, and hence an object of scorn, both in regard to its focus on pleasure and the denial of the soul's immortality, and its alleged atheism..."

"...The thirteenth-century incorporation of Aristotle as the pagan philosopher most compatible with Christianity deserves our special attention...it was Aristotle's account of nature, as taken up by Christianity, that formed the intellectual foundation of scholasticism; as a result scholasticism was the reigning intellectual approach going into the Renaissance...much of the success in reintroducing Epicurean materialism on friendly terms in the West depended on a general discontent with the excessive dry formalism into which scholasticism had unfortunately fallen by the Renaissance...Christians, at least some of them, were therefore ready to use one pagan philosophy (Epicureanism) to uproot another (Aristotelianism)..."

"...because of some who were enamoured with Aristotle and neglected or downplayed Scripture as a source of truth, other Christians (the so-called radical Augustinians) came to see Aristotle's thought as a kind of spiritual contamination and tried to destroy its influence. The theology they used to combat Aristotelianism, called nominalism, inadvertently paved the way for Epicureanism..."

"...In the spring of 1417 Epicureanism was awakened from its deep slumber. Poggio Bracciolini, infected with the characteristic Renaissance desire to..." *[Here, Wiker summarises the rediscovery of De Rerum Natura. The story is told in disparaging terms, of course, just the opposite of "The Swerve". There's a moment in which he even hints that the destruction or loss of Lucretius's book would have saved us lots of trouble.]*

“...The works of Epicurus, along with those of his poetic spokesman, became once again available...the publishing history of both attest to the spread of interest in Epicureanism all over Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and the firm reestablishing of Epicurean materialism by the seventeenth century...”

“...First, there was the not-such-a-bad-guy approach of simple restoration without advocacy...Second, there was the honey-on-the-rim-of-bitter-poison approach of introducing Epicureanism through an appreciation of Lucretius the poet...A third way attempted to subordinate the materialism of Epicureanism to Christianity, creating a Christianized hybrid of two utterly irreconcilable views of the universe...”