

Rarely read writer DeCasseres on Epicurus' great discovery

Post by "EricR" of February 27, 2022 at 8:01 AM

It has been forever since I posted something here. But when I came across this quote in a book I'm reading, I thought it might be appropriate to share it with you.

The book is called "Spinoza, Liberator of God and Man" by Benjamin DeCasseres (1873-1945). He was a writer in many forms, from editorial to poetry, and the author of many books and booklets. He is associated with the Egoist philosophical tradition. This is not the place to outline that tradition, but I can say that some of its writers point to Epicurus as among the first to work out a philosophy that placed the individual as "the measure of all things".

In the opening chapter of the book on Spinoza (an actual ancestor of DeCasseres), he outlines a brief history of philosophy up to Spinoza. He opens the first chapter with this fascinating concept,

"I conceive the Philosophic Mind as a being. Its adventures are epics. It is Ulysses, Don Quixote, Siegfried, Hamlet, Gulliver, Lucifer. Mind is man's only weapon against oblivion and destruction. Thought is war. Encased in a little skull, Mind, dowered with the power of infinite combinations, with its feet of reason and its wings of imagination, makes perpetual war on Mystery."

When it came to Epicurus he says,

"Trapped between the contradictions of Plato and Aristotle, Mind fell into the pits of self-mockery - the autumnal beauty of Skepticism and the winter of grim Stoicism... And Mind entered the skull of Epicurus, the Goethe of antiquity - "The meaning of Life is Life itself"..."

The mind of Epicurus had made a tremendous discovery, the greatest that had ever been made - that the will-to-live and the will-to-pleasure are one. Whatever lives, lives for egoistic gratification."

I really enjoy poetic writing like that. How can you resist a line like "the winter of grim Stoicism"?

Treating the Philosophic Mind as a single entity that enters the heads of different individuals is a great literary device that links them all to a single pursuit. And his idea that Epicurus' discovery was the greatest ever prompted me to share this with you.

Post by “Cassius” of February 27, 2022 at 8:53 AM

[Quote from EricR](#)

I really enjoy poetic writing like that. How can you resist a line like "the winter of grim Stoicism"?

I can't. It is outstanding and appropriate!

Eric first it's good to see you post again. You have many recent "soul-mates" I would predict in both [Scott](#) and [Kalosyni](#).

Also -- I will look to see if that material from De Casseres is on Archive.org or other place where we can link to more of the text. If you know of a place please go ahead and add it here too. I gather that he was at least somewhat sympathetic to Nietzsche and there are bound to be more parallels to follow.

Post by “Don” of February 27, 2022 at 9:45 AM

[Quote from EricR](#)

the winter of grim Stoicism...

Yeah, I'm a sucker for some fine wordsmithing. That's a good line.

Post by “EricR” of February 27, 2022 at 10:46 AM

Thanks for the warm welcome (or returning welcome...not sure... 😊)

Anyhoo...I've been roaming a variety of philosophic materials and came across DeCasseres in my exploration of Egoism. It is possibly the most despised set of ideas from virtually all others, which reminded me of the line in chapter one of Dewitt's book about Epicurus being "*at the same time the most revered and most reviled. Of all founders of thought in the Greco-Roman world.*"

If I am honest with myself, I must admit to placing concerns for my own well-being, pleasure, pain, enjoyment, suffering, etc. ahead of others most of the time. I presume I don't need to explain to folks here that this does not involve callousness or a lack of compassion, kindness, etc.

This honest reference to oneself and one's own pleasure and pain as the arbitrator of what is good is one of the reasons I feel drawn to Epicurus.

As to your question about DeCasseres' sympathies towards Nietzsche [Cassius](#), I'm not sure but will see what else I can find. Certainly, Nietzsche is well established as an Egoist writer, but I am not clear on what the various writers thought of each other. As I come across interesting material, I can share it here.

Post by “Kalosyni” of February 27, 2022 at 11:55 AM

[Quote from EricR](#)

"And Mind entered the skull of Epicurus, the Goethe of antiquity -

"The meaning of Life is Life itself"...

The mind of Epicurus had made a tremendous discovery, the greatest that had ever been made - that the will-to-live and the will-to-pleasure are one. Whatever lives, lives for egoistic gratification."

I would add that "egoistic gratification" cannot come to the fullness of joy and will not be completely pleasurable unless we join together with others in friendship and savoring of life -- we would then come to let go of a hyper self-focused individualism, and would learn that the mutual consideration of others within a community leads to the greatest ease and enjoyment in life -- and come to see that other's needs are equally important as our own -- the greatest pleasure arises when we interdependently "feed" each other -- but this depends on the safety and trust in a private community kepos. (This is just a vision I see of a well-established Epicurean philosophy garden).

Post by “Joshua” of February 27, 2022 at 12:02 PM

I immediately thought of Shakespeare:

Quote

Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by this son of York son of Neocles!

Post by “EricR” of February 27, 2022 at 4:09 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

I would add that "egoistic gratification" cannot come to the fullness of joy and will not be completely pleasurable unless we join together with others in friendship and savoring of life -- we would then come to let go of a hyper self-focused individualism

I said nothing about "hyper self-focused individualism". This is the issue with the word "egoist" that I was talking about. It has become a despised word because it is assumed to refer to some form of mean-spirited selfishness that harms other people. In fact, the word merely refers to the idea that each individual person is the measure of what is good for that individual. Nothing more or less.

I don't know what you mean by "the fullness of joy". But whatever it exactly is, the statement seems to indicate that one cannot experience it without other people. I have deep, satisfying, complete feeling experiences on my own all the time so I must differ on this point.

My sense is that you don't like the word "egoism" because you equate it with this "hyper-self focused" state which you appear to think is bad. Again, I'm only using the word in its simplest form. Namely, referring to oneself with regard to determining what is good or bad which in the context of Epicureanism is pleasure or pain.

Post by “Kalosyni” of February 27, 2022 at 4:29 PM

Thank you @EricR, your last thread helps clarify "egoist" and "egoism" -- as being the way of being which comes out of the internal subjective feeling of a given person.

[Quote from EricR](#)

I don't know what you mean by "the fullness of joy". But whatever it exactly is, the statement seems to indicate that one cannot experience it without other people. I have deep, satisfying, complete feeling experiences on my own all the time so I must differ on this point.

Okay, that is good to know, and reminds me that everyone has individual preferences and experiences, and so I need to be more careful before I assume a given level of social involvement as being best for everyone.

Post by "EricR" of February 27, 2022 at 4:45 PM

Glad you understand. Caution with assumptions is always prudent.

I have been wrong so many times it is comical. It took me a long time to accept (not to learn, but to really accept) that my view of what is best is not universally true. It is one of the things that brought me to a more individualized view of living well.

I still sometimes wish everyone would just "get it" and start making better choices, live better lives, be better people. Alas, noble sensibilities are sometimes like leaves on a tree, hanging on in strong winds.