

Reverence and Awe In Epicurean Philosophy

Post by “Joshua” of December 24, 2020 at 2:22 PM

It is true, Susan, as you say; Epicurus did not formulate a philosophy of mind that would impress a Gautama, or a Shankara. But neither did these two develop philosophies of nature that would have engaged the attention of an Epicurus. And if there be any room for mysticism in this tradition, it must necessarily be a mysticism of nature, and not of mind.

When I contemplate the cosmic scale—when I consider, from my humble vantage point, the deepness of time, the incomprehensibility of the twin eternities that stand in apposition on either side of my short life—then do I feel something of the mystic's ultimacy. We are, as Lucretius put it, "all sprung from celestial seed". There is an ineffable kinship in this; that we share a like beginning not only with the animal, but with the vegetable and mineral.

That while poring over these ancient texts I also breathe, and so literally 'con-spire', in one atmosphere that spans distant oceans, with the humble grassy reeds of the Nile Delta, whose forgotten ancestors were made into the papyrus scrolls upon which these books were first written down and copied—and that we alike were mothered by the same earth, and we alike shall die here, our atoms in some later age to mingle in forms equally kindred, and yet half alien—that in this there is something encouraging and almost transcendent.

This is all poetry and metaphor, of course. And there will be those who say that the Epicurean cosmos is terribly cold, heartless and bleak. I have no answer for this, except to say that I do not share that view. Upon the Universities of the West are draped the name of *Alma Mater*. The credit for this coinage belongs to Lucretius—and yet for him this Mother was the whole generative power of nature. If you can look at another human and see at once the man, the material, and the animal, and see also the boundless world of Nature that it took to make thus much, you may find a glimmer of something mystical in these kinships.

Quote

We are star stuff harvesting starlight. -Carl Sagan

Quote

There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved. -Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*