

Episode Fifty-One - The Workings of Images

Post by “Joshua” of January 5, 2021 at 9:54 PM

I am inclined to agree with Elayne when it comes to 'stretching the text'---If indeed that is what we are doing, in a fair analysis. A few months ago I read *The Rise and Fall of Alexandria*. I've mentioned it before, but I keep coming back to it because for me the key point I take from it is this; we have an obligation to estimate the value of these early thinkers by considering the context in which they wrote. Take a practical example:

Hippocrates' understanding of internal medicine, and its supposed foundation in the fluctuations of the four 'humors', is so *wrong* that it can be difficult for us to appreciate how much progress he had made toward being right. The men of his age believed, by and large, that disease and health were the sport of the gods. A prayer here, a burnt offering there--throw in a consultation with a witch or an exorcist, when other means fail--that was the best they could hope for. Hippocrates took a more analytical view of things. He thought that disease of the body had its origin in nature, and not the divine. He thought that the course of disease could be traced, from cause to effect, and that with sufficient study these natural processes could be laid bare to the understanding of the human intellect. This early and infantile version of science has in the intervening centuries been clarified, expanded, systematized, subjected to rigor and experimentation--has indeed been reworked almost beyond recognition. *Almost*. But the kernel of the original idea (which was nothing short of a revolution in human understanding, for its time) remains unaltered. The origin of disease is not in caprice and malevolence, not vengeance and anger; it is instead rational and explicable.

There's no shame in Lucretius being 'wrong' from time to time. He got nearly everything of real importance right.

Quote

"But still, what a difference when one lays aside the strenuous believers and takes up the no less arduous work of a Darwin, say, or a Hawking or a Crick. These men are more enlightening when they are wrong, or when they display their inevitable biases, than any falsely modest person of faith who is vainly trying to square the circle and to explain how he, a mere creature of the Creator, can possibly know what that Creator intends." -Christopher Hitchens