

Where Is Epicurus In The "School of Athens"?

Post by "Cassius" of May 17, 2021 at 12:54 PM

Glad I could help Elli! I will never believe for a second that the Vatican ever lost track of the correct image of Epicurus. I will never believe for a second that the Vatican didn't keep in its records a complete copy of Lucretius' poem. I will never believe for a second that there aren't many more texts of Epicurus and the Epicureans secreted away in the Vatican Library even today.

The Vatican has always known, and some of us over the years have always known, that Epicurus was the Number One mortal enemy that the Church has had since its inception. Nietzsche saw it. Norman DeWitt was probably correct that the early Christians considered Epicurus either one of, or the main, "Anti-Christ." Talmudic scholars have always known it, using Epicurus' name as a term of denunciation. I don't know about the past Islamists, but I would certainly expect them to have seen the same thing.

This is something that is totally lost in discussing Epicurus as primarily interested in "pleasure," especially in the form of "absence of pain." Epicurus was a philosophical and moral revolutionary, and the various religious groups had to work to stamp him out because his comprehensive view of the universe and the place of humanity in it would blow their fantasies sky high if they became well known and accepted by significant numbers of people. It does a great disservice to Epicurus to focus on food and drink and bodily pleasures - there's no doubt in my mind but that Epicurus was aiming at a virtual overthrow of the established culture and education - the groups that adopted Christianity and Islam and (today) Humanism so completely. People who are focused on those issues won't ever see what a revolutionary Epicurus was.

I think a lot of people over history have seen and understood that, and the Vatican saw and understood it too. I would therefore expect that they studied their primary opponent in close detail and kept good records of how they planned to defeat his ideas and prevent their flaring up ever again.

And the primary way they did that was to multiply Cicero's characterization of Epicurus as effeminate (focused on sensual pleasure rather than seeing "feeling" as the philosophical opponent of Virtue and Religion. And that's the way they succeeded in branding his ideas as disreputable and unfit for discussion in the camp or in the Senate (the way I understand Cicero described it).

In fact that's the thought I woke up with this morning, and started to post about. I know in the past I've received some criticism for focusing on the importance of "pleasure" as the goal of life, and at this point I'll begin to agree with that criticism, at least to this extent: I don't think

Epicurus saw his work on the practical side of pleasure (what to eat, drink, clothing, dance, etc) as particularly unique or what he wanted to be remembered for. I think Epicurus saw his achievement as his insight that pleasure is really feeling, and that it's feeling rather than virtue and religion and rationalism that life is all about. I think Epicurus saw his comprehensive view of the universe as natural, as eternal, as infinite, and that there are no such things as supernatural gods or life after death, as the key benefit of his philosophy. Yes pleasure is important, but it's third in line in the [principal doctrines](#) after the dogmatic assertions that there are no supernatural gods and there is no life after death. The place that pleasure holds derives from those insights, and that there are no ideal forms or anything magic about "logic" and rationalism, and it's on all of that where Epicurus departs from the prior consensus, not just in appreciating good food and drink.

The Vatican knows that. The Vatican knows that defining "epicurean" as pursuing fine wine and dining and the like is never going to be a threat to their empire. They don't really care even for that, and thus they promote Cicero's "absence of pain" viewpoint, but in reality its the rest of the philosophy that's the iceberg waiting to take out the Vatican's Titanic.