

Michel Onfray: A Transcendental Epicureanism

Post by "Cassius" of July 6, 2018 at 2:59 PM

Wow a lot of work went into this and it's great to see that much effort. My view, though, is that I fully reject Onfray's characterization of Epicurean philosophy, which presumably is the foundation on which the rest of his analysis takes place:

"Nietzsche is right to say that philosophy is an autobiographical confession; that of Epicurus was the thought of a sick, fragile man with a weak body distorted by extremely painful kidney stones during a period that was unaware of any effective sedation. This is why his hedonism is austere, ascetic, minimal, and defines itself by the absence of pain. To refuse to satisfy all desires, (focusing mainly on) those of hunger and thirst, then to make of this satisfaction the peace of the body, therefore the peace of the soul, this links the hedonism of Epicurus to a wisdom of renouncement. On the other hand, the Roman Epicureanism of Lucretius turns its back on the Greek formula."

Once again we have the irony of someone 2000 years later, with a handful of texts, saying that he understands Epicurus better and far differently than did Lucretius, whose brilliance is a focus of much of the rest of the essay. There is a contradiction here that cannot stand, and my view is that Lucretius understood Epicurus perfectly well - and if Onfray thought it stands for a life that is "austere, ascetic, minimal, and defines itself by an absence of pain" then I doubt his other "insights" will be very helpful.

Epicurus did not live to renounce his own life, or to teach us to renounce ours. It's nihilism and asceticism and austerity like this that should be renounced.