

Michel Onfray: A Transcendental Epicureanism

Post by "Cassius" of July 9, 2018 at 5:37 PM

Poster RR: [Cassius Amicus](#) I'm also fairly certain that Michel Onfray has never read any of DeWitt's material on Epicurus. To my knowledge his only cited material on Epicurus (rather than Lucretius) has been the extant letters (and maybe a few of the Vatican sayings and PDs). I do think he's a bit unfair in his estimate of Epicurus, but that's a problem that many academics have, even those who recognize the need for a counter-history of philosophy. Do you think he offers a fair assessment of Lucretius?1

[Cassius Amicus](#) I scanned back through the article but I am short of time to reread the whole thing. Let me focus on this passage: "On the other hand, the Roman Epicureanism of Lucretius turns its back on the Greek formula. We are unaware of the biography of this Roman philosopher. We can barely affirm that he was a knight during the first year of the Common Era, but from his work we can deduce that his body was one of great health. Lucretius does not wish to define ataraxia as solely the satisfaction of necessary and natural desires; he wishes that all desires be satisfied if they are not repaid by a greater displeasure."

BINGO he is hitting on THE BIG issues. Do we limit desires to natural and necessary? Or do we evaluate ALL desires, and choose whether or not to satisfy them, according to the calculus or cost and benefit? And the issue of the definition of "ataraxia" is closely related to this - I contend the modernist definition of ataraxia is erroneous and in fact has no real meaning, If we follow this line of Onfray's thinking to go past "natural and necessary," we are inevitably led back to the common sense definition of ataraxia as no more esoteric than "one or a combination of any number of ordinary mental and physical pleasures without any mixture of disturbance/pain."

So if Onfray's interpretation of Lucretius follows through with these comments, then that is excellent. But in the meantime I would temper my enthusiasm for his interpretations by keeping front and center that Epicurus himself was the master who Lucretius was attempting to follow as closely as possible, so we should never admit that there is a conflict between the two. It sounds like Onfray was (in my view) on the right track, and it's up to us to carry that track all the way back to Lucretius to reclaim the full force of the philosophy. Which means the first part of that passage cited above about Lucretius "turning his back" on the Greek formula (presumably meaning Epicurus) is just totally wrong.