

Other Epicureans: Dante Alighieri's Friend and Late Foe - Cavalcante de' Cavalcanti & Manente Degli Uberti

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I just finished reading *Dante and Epicurus: A Dualistic Vision of Secular and Spiritual Fulfillment* by George Corbett and came across a number of interesting anecdotes (In particular, I am fond of being called a "gastrimargi"):

"The foremost channel for Dante's second-hand reception of Epicurean theses was Cicero. From direct citations, we know that Dante certainly read De finibus, the first two books of which are devoted to Epicurean ethics, and De natura deorum in which Cicero criticizes at greater length Epicurean natural science. Just these two Ciceronian works would have sufficed to provide Dante with a substantial, if biased, account of Epicurean ethics and natural philosophy." (Corbett, *Dante and Epicurus* 9)

"A further potential influence on Dante's understanding of Epicureanism emerges from the scholastic commentaries of the thirteenth century. As one might expect, the scholastics appear to have generally held the correct view with regard to Epicurean ethics. The followers of the flesh are humorously nicknamed, as Albert the Great notes, 'gastrimargi' [stomach-madmen]" (Ibid. 16)

"In line with Cicero's treatment in De finibus, Dante elects the noble Roman Torquatus as the advocate for Epicureanism in his prose works, the Convivio and the Monarchia. Aside from the pagan Torquatus, Dante identifies four thirteenth-century magnates as 'disciples' of Epicurus in Inferno X: the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, the influential Ghibelline Cardinal Ottaviano degli Ubaldini, and the Florentine statesmen Farinata and Cavalcante dei Cavalcanti. To this list we may add Guido Cavalcanti who is indirectly associated with Epicureanism and named in the canto. All five of these thirteenth-century personages appear to have been accused of Epicureanism or of the denial of personal immortality during their lives and, by extension, of irreligion and a sceptical attitude towards Christian revelation." (Ibid. 42)

"Pope Gregory IX accused Frederick II of gross impiety: 'He said that the whole world has been taken in by three impostors: Jesus Christ, Moses, and Mohammen'. The Pope's account is borne out by countless anecdotes about Frederick II's religious scepticism. Cardinal Ottaviano was infamous for his Epicurean sympathies: [...] [in his acts and his words he was an Epicurean]. His doubt of the soul's immortality is illustrated by his self-damning epitaph: [...] [who used to say frequently during his life: 'if the soul exists', speaking sceptically, 'I have already lost it for the Ghibelline cause']. Farinata and his wife Adaletta were posthumously condemned for heresy by Salomone da Lucca: 'The sentence [...] held them both guilty, and ordered the separation of

their bones from those of the faithful, and the confiscation of their goods'. Cavalcante dei Cavalcanti, or so the early commentaries would have us believe, wholly followed the Epicurean sect and unceasingly persuaded others of his mortalist convictions [...]. Guido Cavalcanti, as Dante implies in Inferno X, was infected by his father's notorious Epicureanism" (Ibid. 42-43)

"The four Epicureans named in the course of the canto are Farinata (c. 1210-64), Cavalcante dei Cavalcanti (c. 1210-80), Frederick II, the Holy Roman Emperor (1194-1250), and the Ghibelline Cardinal, Ottaviano degli Ubaldini (c. 1210-73)." (Ibid. 70)

"He [Cavalcante] wholly followed the sect of the Epicureans, always believing and persuading others that the soul would die together with the body: therefore he often had on the tip of his tongue this saying of Solomon: 'For the dissolution of man and of beast is one, and their condition the same'." (Benvenuto da Imola, gloss to Inferno X. 52-54)