

Episode 151 - "Epicurus And His Philosophy" Part 07 - "The New School In Athens"

Post by "Joshua" of December 3, 2022 at 9:33 PM

Under the second heading of Chapter 6, we get an interesting look at the meditative practice of "touring the cosmos" in thought. I've collected several quotations that express the sentiment, and finally a passage from Horace contrasting the limitless ambitions of the mind with the brief span of human life.

*A Greek it was who first opposing dared
Raise mortal eyes that terror to withstand,
Whom nor the fame of Gods nor lightning's stroke
Nor threatening thunder of the ominous sky
Abashed; but rather chafed to angry zest
His dauntless heart to be the first to rend
The crossbars at the gates of Nature old.
And thus his will and hardy wisdom won;
And forward thus he fared afar, beyond
The flaming ramparts of the world, until
He wandered the unmeasurable All.*

-Lucretius, translated by William Ellery Leonard

Therefore superstition is now in her turn cast down and trampled underfoot, whilst we by the victory are exalted high as heaven.

--Lucretius, from the Loeb Classical Library

Life piled on life

*Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains: but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.*

- Ulysses, Alfred, Lord Tennyson

*"You who measured the sea, the earth, and the numberless sands,
You, Archytas, are now confined in a small mound of dirt
Near the Matine shore, and what good does it do you that you
Attempted the mansions of the skies and that you traversed
The round celestial vault — you with a soul born to die?"*

—Horace, Odes I.28; transl. Peter Saint-Andre

This is the Horace who has abandoned his earlier Epicureanism in favor of a piety more palatable to the new Emperor's of Rome. In Ode 1.34 we catch the repudiation by reference to Lucretius, who in book 6 around line 140 maintained that "Jupiter's" thunder was never heard when the skies were clear.

Horace;

Once I wandered, an expert in crazy wisdom, a scant and infrequent adorer of gods, now I'm forced to set sail and return, to go back to the paths I abandoned. For Jupiter, Father of all of the gods, who generally splits the clouds with his lightning, flashing away, drove thundering horses, and his swift chariot, through the clear sky, till the dull earth, and the wandering rivers, and Styx, and dread Taenarus' hateful headland, and Atlas's mountain-summits shook. The god has the power to replace the highest with the lowest, bring down the famous, and raise the obscure to the heights. And greedy Fortune with her shrill whirring, carries away the crown and delights in setting it, there.

--Translated by A. S. Kline