

The dark Epicureanism in the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam

Post by “Pacatus” of December 1, 2023 at 5:16 PM

Edward Fitzgerald himself thought of Khayyam as an Epicurean (as [Kalosyni](#) noted above) rather than a Sufi, like Rumi or Hafiz; and rejected the notion that Omar’s references to wine (for example) ought to be spiritualized – in spite of attempts to do so. Omar was influenced by Lucretius, though his own poetry was more lyric than narrative-didactic (though the lessons are there).

“Khayyam is famous for having sort of Epicurean themes in his poems and meditations on mortality and death and how to live a life that is meaningful ... in the face of uncertainty, reality, and mortality and temporality.” Austin O’Malley (scholar of classical Persian, University of Arizona)

Omar’s references to God can be taken as (sometimes humorously) metaphorical in many ways – but definitely not as a divine persona that meddles in human affairs.

Fitzgerald’s renderings have been criticized by academics – but one is hard-pressed to find a translation equal in lyric profundity (at least in my limited experience).

At bottom, I do not find Khayyam (or Epicurus) to be pessimistic at all – and suppose that those who do, find anything outside the comfort-zone of idealism (religious or philosophical) somehow pessimistic to them.