

The Facial Expression of Epicurus

Post by "Pacatus" of December 15, 2023 at 4:07 PM

Interesting: Heraclitus was known as the weeping philosopher (grieving the state of the world), while Democritus was known as the laughing philosopher (with some argument over whether that was a mocking laughter at the state of the world, or – my preferred interpretation – trying to inject some cheer into the world, since cheerfulness was a main virtue for Democritus).

Perhaps, for Epicurus, a visage that captures at once his sadness at “what a mess the standard philosophers and religions had made of the world;” his sincere (serious) determination to right those wrongs as best he can, out of compassion for humanity; and a bit of a good-humored smile and twinkle in the eyes that reflect that compassion and kindness. At least, that’s the way I like to see it. And in that vein, I think that Genevra Catalano’s (Nate’s wife’s) rendering of the elder Epicurus (on the right of the three renderings I posted above) captures all of that the best. (The one on the left is by Allesandro Tomassi, and I posted it before with attribution; it reminds me of a person wise beyond his years that I briefly knew.)

Note: Catalano’s "Epicurus Dines" (also available on Etsy) shows a more pensive Epicurus.



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Democritus:

“Best is for a person to live a cheerful life as little distressed as possible.”

“A life without festivity is a long road without an inn.”

“cheerfulness”: Democritus’ Greek word was euthumia, which could also mean tranquility and contentment (cheerfulness is the predominant translation). Cheerfulness becomes a practice and a discipline that is seldom effortless.