

Epicureanism During the Middle Ages

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 13, 2024 at 9:38 AM

I just found this article (interview) and it mentions that he wrote an essay.

A word of caution, at the start of this he goes with an "either/or" dichotomy - saying Epicurus taught that the wise refrained from engaging in "lust and debauchery" and instead "leaned towards a rather radical form of asceticism". (The [Ethics forum](#) has sections which deal with this issue, will try to post a link to a more specific section soon).

But the article has some interesting ideas regarding history of Epicureanism.

Quote

Heretic and a slave to desire or radical ascetic and paragon of virtue: who was the real Epicurus? Retracing the history of representations of Epicureanism, the CNRS philosopher Aurélien Robert shows that the Middle Ages played an important role in rehabilitating a Greek philosopher who had been deprecated and caricatured since antiquity.

Quote

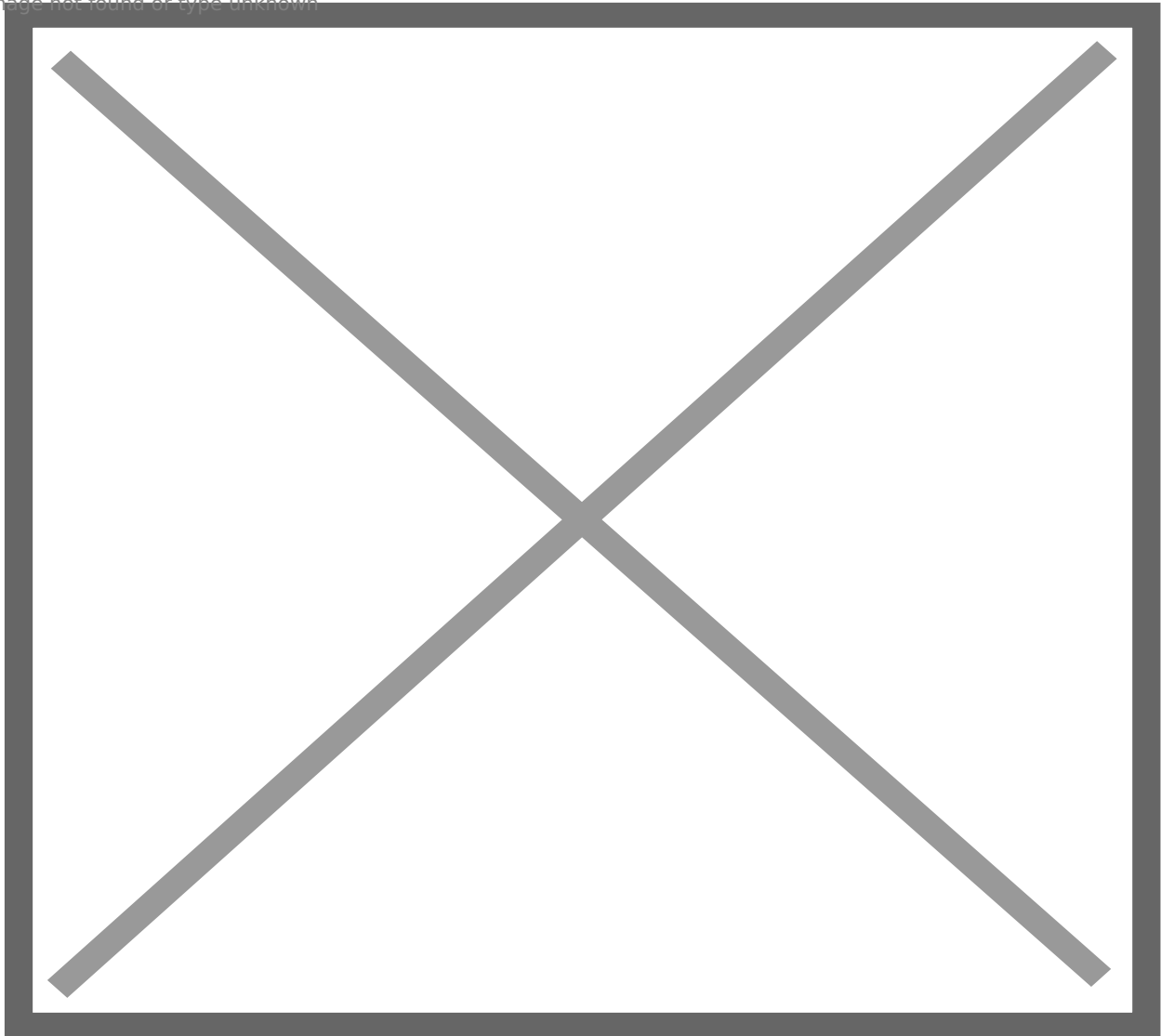
That said, your essay shows that the rehabilitation of Epicurus dates from the Middle Ages, and not from the Renaissance, contrary to a still widely held belief...

A.R.: Indeed. For nearly 100 years it has been endlessly repeated that the chance rediscovery in the early 15th century, by an Italian humanist named Poggio Bracciolini, of *De Rerum Natura* (On the Nature of Things), a text by Lucretius from the first century BC containing an overview of Epicurean philosophy, enabled the return to grace of the Greek hedonist on the philosophical scene. This thesis is a myth. As paradoxical as it may seem, it was the Middle Ages that brought Epicurus out of the underworld, which quite simply went unnoticed until now due to the focus on texts (sermons, theological treatises, poems, etc.) that stigmatised Epicureans.

A close look at the medieval documentation on Epicureanism in all its facets shows that, starting in the 12th century, philosophers like Pierre Abélard, his follower John Salisbury or the learned Englishman William of Malmesbury, praised the excellence of Epicurus' ideas, especially in the realm of ethics. In addition, the early 13th century saw the proliferation of collections of 'Lives of the Philosophers', some of which presented him as a model of morality, including for Christians. In my work I show that the clerics of the Middle Ages contradicted themselves. Although perfectly aware of

the substance of Epicurus' philosophy, they discussed it only within their own elite circles, while deliberately propagating a false image of Epicureans to the public, as a simple but effective fear tactic.

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[The Middle Ages brought Epicurus out of the underworld](#)

Heretic and a slave to desire or radical ascetic and paragon of virtue: who was the real Epicurus? Retracing the history of representations of Epicureanism, ...
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