

# Threads of Epicureanism in Art and Literature

Post by “Joshua” of November 30, 2024 at 8:36 AM

[Alexander Ross](#); *Arcana Microcosmi*, [Book II, Chapter 16](#); 1652; A rather choleric response to Gassendi's reception of Epicureanism. The text is of no use at all, but the footnotes by James Eason of the University of Chicago elevate the reading experience to high art.

Ross was in an ongoing literary and intellectual feud with this man;

[Sir Thomas Browne](#); *Hydriotaphia*, [Chapter 4](#); 1658; A curious meditation on life and death, with a few lingering paragraphs on Epicurus entombed in the sixth circle of Dante's *Inferno*:

## Quote

Pythagoras escapes in the fabulous hell of Dante, among that swarm of Philosophers, wherein whilest we meet with Plato and Socrates, Cato is to be found in no lower place then Purgatory. Among all the set, Epicurus is most considerable, whom men make honest without an Elyzium, who contemned life without encouragement of immortality, and making nothing after death, yet made nothing of the King of terrours.

Were the happinesse of the next world as closely apprehended as the felicities of this, it were a martyrdome to live; and unto such as consider none hereafter, it must be more then death to dye, which makes us amazed at those audacities, that durst be nothing, and return into their Chaos again. Certainly such spirits as could contemn death, when they expected no better being after, would have scorned to live had they known any. And therefore we applaud not the judgment of Machiavel, that Christianity makes men cowards, or that with the confidence of but half dying, the despised virtues of patience and humility, have abased the spirits of men, which Pagan principles exalted, but rather regulated the wildenesse of audacities, in the attempts, grounds, and eternall sequels of death; wherein men of the boldest spirits are often prodigiously temerarious. Nor can we extenuate the valour of ancient Martyrs, who contemned death in the uncomfortable scene of their lives, and in their decrepit Martyrdomes did probably lose not many moneths of their dayes, or parted with life when it was scarce worth the living. For (beside that long time past holds no consideration unto a slender time to come) they had no small disadvantage from the constitution of old age, which naturally makes men fearfull; And complexionally superannuated from the bold and courageous thoughts of youth and fervent years. But the contempt of death from corporall animosity, promoteth not our felicity. They may sit in the Orchestra, and noblest Seats of Heaven, who have held up shaking hands in the fire, and humanely contended for glory.

Mean while Epicurus lyes deep in Dante's hell, wherein we meet with Tombs enclosing souls which denied their immortalities. But whether the virtuous heathen, who lived better then he spake, or erring in the principles of himself, yet lived above Philosophers of more specious Maximes, lye so deep as he is placed; at least so low as not to rise against Christians, who beleiving or knowing that truth, have lastingly denied it in their practise and conversation, were a quæry too sad to insist on.