

Recent Article on Why Stoicism Remains So Popular (Vis-à-Vis Ancient Rivals)

Post by “Cassius” of January 18, 2025 at 9:25 AM

Ok read it. No need to soften my comments. But I will add more:

Quote

But Stoicism’s history extends far beyond its recent resurgence. When Zeno founded his school, he did so at a time when other philosophical currents were trying to address similar issues. He was a disciple of the Cynics, and during this period, Epicurus founded Epicureanism, while Pyrrho developed Scepticism — philosophical schools that also offered practical responses to the societal challenges of their time.

I almost want to come to the defense of traditional Stoicism after reading that article, as I think the ancient Stoics would themselves if they could read it. The article is the kind of breezy dismissal of the deeper significance of Stoicism that they would have detested. They weren't just "offering practical responses to the societal challenges of their time." The Stoics - and the Epicureans - were taking philosophy seriously and attacking issues of eternal and enduring significance- worth living and dying for -- and not just acting as social commentators offering the latest self-help advice.

Next, on a slightly different issue:

Quote

The French philosopher Michel Onfray wrote in EL PAÍS that “without Epicurus, there would have been no Renaissance, no Montaigne, no libertine thought of the 17th century, no philosophy of the Enlightenment, no French Revolution, no atheism, no philosophies of social liberation.”

I don't know that I think that Epicurus himself would agree with that. Gosh knows I have a high opinion of Epicurus, but the arguments that had Epicurus not lived there would never have been an enlightenment or French Revolution or atheism or philosophies of social liberation" seems to me to go way too far. In the end, Epicurus didn't invent something from nothing - he simply did the best job so far of putting all the pieces together into a coherent whole. Others would eventually have done something similar, and we would know their names instead of Epicurus'. So I don't think Epicurus himself would have agreed with a view that he was an indispensable genius.

As Lucretius himself said, nature never makes only a single thing of a kind.

In fact, I sense there's something Stoic even in looking at Epicurus that way - as if everything good in life comes because a god has handed it down from heaven. I think if Epicurus heard that kind of argument he would have said not to worry about looking to Epicurus, look to NATURE and you'll eventually --even if after a much longer journey making do without his help -- get there on your own.