

New (October 1 2019) Catherine Wilson Speech Video on Epicurean Philosophy

Post by "Hiram" of October 13, 2019 at 2:02 PM

I don't remember Wilson mentioning class warfare, or Lucretius.

Epicurus, and especially Metrodorus, did bind philosophy with economics and taught that we should at once philosophize, engage in business, and laugh. Epicurean ethics is also very concerned with consumption and with being aware of its natural limits, and Philodemus articulated a doctrine of the natural measure of wealth. There is a scroll titled "Peri Oikonomias". So, the "homo economicus" aspect is clearly there in our tradition, but this is not a Marxist idea. Capitalists make these same claims that we as a species must engage in networks of mutual benefit (or if not, exploitation), and of production. People in human society have to produce, SOMEONE or something has to produce, and SOMEONE or something has to extract the product being produced so that it is consumed, and we all have to consume--at least to some extent, as nature does not give us a choice.

Also, I've never read (correct me if I'm wrong) any narratives of a "golden age" in the past where humans lived perfect lives, and then civilization made things progressively worse. I don't think such idealisms exists in the anthropological accounts we find in De Rerum Natura, for instance. We DO find in Diogenes of Oenoanda a "golden age" projected into the FUTURE, but in the text it says that it is based on the supposition that ALL humans are able to attain wisdom, and this is a BIG if. Even the text admits that this is a big if, and that Diogenes was merely engaging in an intellectual exercise when he entertained this idea.

Concerning Marxism, Marx erred in thinking that his interpretation of history was fully scientific and in trying to predict a future utopia that did not materialize. But his ORIGINAL project was to reject the German idealism of his predecessors, and to furnish a MATERIALIST re-interpretation of the idealists' DIALECTIC view of history, which saw history as a thesis - antithesis - synthesis of IDEAS. Marx said: NO, the real thesis - antithesis - synthesis is between the various groups that are struggling for the MATERIAL means of production and the MATERIAL conditions in which they exist. So he was on to something, as he rejected a Platonic view of history, but his determinism and his utopian idealism proved to be an error.

I believe that we can apply a polyvalent approach to our view of history (I think both ideas and material conditions change each other). In Epicurus, we see a synthesis of Cyrenaic ethics and Democritan physics. In our embrace of friendship, I see a synthesis of Theodorus the Atheist's misanthropy and Anniceris' philanthropy. But there are also material reasons / conditions that led to the emergence of, for instance, the passive model of recruitment in EP, with privacy among friends being a synthesis of the retreat approach and the missionary-public approach,

and this would have resulted from the Platonists' expulsion of Epicurus from Mitilene, a very concrete, material circumstance. So there is a dialectic of both ideas and of material conditions that are both in evidence, and from studying the Philodeman scrolls it's very clear that the Epicureans continually perfected and developed their ideas as a result of constant challenges from other schools.

Also (as Michel Onfray attests) I believe that we DO need a historical narrative as Epicureans because narrative and voice are power, and it is not advantageous for ourselves or for human society to be deprived of the wisdom of the Epicurean school. So while I disagree with Marx's particular over-confident narrative of history (even of future history), I do agree with him, with Nietzsche, and with Onfray that we should study, evaluate, and question the over-arching narratives of those in power and of our intellectual enemies, and posit our own narratives based on the study of nature and on real events.