

A New Angle of Attack? Thomas Jefferson Hogg

Post by “Joshua” of November 28, 2019 at 9:52 PM

Mr. Hogg was lifelong friends with one of the pre-eminent English poets of the Romantic Period, and must have moved in circles that included Mary Shelley (*Frankenstein*) and Lord Byron. We know for certain that Percy Shelley read Lucretius, and that may be the materialist author Hogg is referring to.

I think it's clear from the broader context of the passage that he regards materialists, atheists, and Epicureans as ultimately benign, but also selfish, insensible, and out of touch. The last sentence is meant to be read as a summation of legacy; Plato and Aristotle didn't literally feed thousands, but their intellectual legacy was taken up by Christians, Deists, Spinozoans, etc. And the idea is that while adherents of these sects held charity to be a virtue and a duty, the heirs of Epicurus cared only for themselves.

Quote

Their narrow sect cannot possibly flourish; we cannot live upon this world alone.

But this is the stand-out sentiment for me. What does the second "cannot" mean? Does it mean that it cannot be possible that we live alone? Or that we cannot possibly tolerate the truth of living alone, and that's why we need comforting lies about Providence or Godhead? Hard to say.

Later in the book he has this (and much else) to say about medical doctors of his time;

Quote

[They are] too frequently epicureans, obtruding and thrusting in men's faces a low, offensive, and shallow materialism.

These excursions are amazingly common in the text. It's as if he wrote a biography about his more-famous friend just so that he could fill up the pages by getting his own ideas into circulation under the name.

I've had rather enough of Mr. T. J. Hogg, and will be happy to leave this selection here and never revisit his book! What Epicurus taught was never shallow; but it was clear, so that you could see right down to the bottom. Plato by contrast is so muddled and murky you can't see an inch into him. They see this obscurantism, and foolishly call it depth.