

Response to Donald Robertson Question: "Was Thomas Jefferson More Stoic Or Epicurean?" (Answer: Epicurean!)

Post by "Eikadistes" of February 8, 2020 at 7:54 PM

Donald answered his own question in the conclusion of his essay:

"Jefferson did identify more with Epicureanism than with Stoicism...".

He puts a lot of emphasis on Jefferson's reading list, which included a lot of Stoic authors ... as are also on our *own* reading lists. We would be incomplete and uncommitted Epicureans to not have meticulously studied the works of Epicurus' opponents. In the same way that American atheists tend to have a more dedicated and complete knowledge of Christian history than Christians, Epicureans - as the underdogs of philosophical history - have also arrived at conclusions through being unconvinced by the literature of Academics, Peripatetics, Cynics, Skeptics, and Stoics.

Most of us are trained Stoics and Platonists without realizing it. Those philosophies "won" the battle of history, and the fruits of their literature (though largely spoiled from our perspective) have been subliminally woven into our upbringing. Anyone raised in a church (upwards of 70% of the American population) are familiar with Platonic hypotheses, without realizing that it was Plato (and not Christ Jesus) who contributed them to history. The word "stoic" is ubiquitous in our vocabularies, usually framed as an admirable quality; whereas the word "epicurean" has been relegated to mean "luxurious food-lover".

Jefferson also spent the time to re-write the gospels in accordance with materialism - by no means would we consider him to be a Christian. His interest and appreciation of Stoic works does not make him a Stoic anymore than his interest and appreciation of the Beatitudes makes him a Christian. He is an Epicurean, through-and-through.