

Linguistic Connection Between "Hedone" and "Eden" ?

Post by "Cassius" of June 26, 2019 at 8:19 AM

NB: I notice a linguistic connection between the ancient Greek word 'hedone' and the Hebrew word from which we derive 'Eden'. It seems that 'Eden' can be translated as 'Delight' and 'Pleasure'. (The Hebrew language provides different vocabulary to denote 'holiness', 'righteousness', or 'sanctity'). An Aramaic root indicates that which is "fruitful, plentiful," or that which is "well-watered", thus, linking the idea of 'that which is pleasant' to 'healthy, living beings'.

Prior to their adoption of monotheism, and before their monolatrist period of YHWH-privileged worship, did Hebrew populations explore philosophical materialism? I found one reference to 'pleasure' as being a desirable reward for following the precepts of the deity (Talmud Kidushin 82:b). We also find language in 'Ecclesiastes' and 'Song of Songs' that use sensual imagery to express religious belief.

I wonder how influential philosophical materialism was on early Judaism--at the same time, I remind myself that Hellenistic Jews demonized Epicurus and his followers (סורוקיפא or 'Epikoros') as irreligious heathens. However, it seems to me that their demonization was based on Epicurus' rejection of an afterlife, and necessarily on his hedonism. Of course, physical pleasure is not seen as the goal of Hebrew worship, just a bonus to worshipping correctly.

Still, I think the more important point is that we find 'pleasure' as a necessary starting point in every tradition, even those that try to avoid it. Throughout the Middle Eastern world, monotheists acknowledge that our ancestors were born into a natural paradise; those same monotheists continue to privilege this lush, fertile, pleasure-filled period as the golden age of humanity.

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(1) Dewitt's book talks about this connection, especially in connection with the Sadducees and the view that there is no afterlife. See attached graphic.

(2) This is focused on the christian texts rather than the jewish, but Thomas Jefferson's friend Thomas Cooper argued at length that materialism was the true premise of biblical theology <https://thomascoopermd.wordpress.com/the-scripture-...of-materialism/>

phy, there can be little doubt that this was part of his program. It is on record that a gymnasium was built in Jerusalem,²⁹ abhorrent to the orthodox Jew not only as an alien institution but specifically because of nudity in sports and the threat of sodomite practices associated with it. It signified also the virtual licensing of public teachers free of priestly control. That some progress was made in this direction is evidenced by the word *Ecclesiastes*, which means public teacher. Moreover, the book that goes under this name is abundantly sprinkled with atoms of Epicureanism; it was squeezed into the canon only by drastic and incongruous editing.

It derives its startling literary quality from the combination of luminous Hebraic imagery with the stark materialism of Epicurus. Consider, for example, the following, 9:4-5: "A living dog is better than a dead lion, for the living know that they shall die but the dead know not anything." Here we see transposed into the Hebraic idiom of thought the doctrine of the Garden that the most precious of all things is life itself and "that death is nothing to us"; it is anesthesia. The opinion has been expressed that the author was a Jewish physician of the time of Antiochus Epiphanes.³⁰

The hatred of the orthodox Jew for the heretical teaching is on record to this day in the rabbinical term *apikoros*, "unbeliever." Jewish students were exhorted "to study the Law and know how to make answer to an unbeliever [lit. "Epicurean"]."³¹

It may be added that, even apart from attempts at cultural regimentation, an opening had been afforded for the infiltration of Epicurean doctrines among the Jews by the division between Pharisees and **Sadducees**. The beliefs of the latter, as recorded by Josephus,³² including the denial of divine providence and the assertion of free will, exhibit an unmistakable coincidence with the teachings of Epicurus. This coincidence is the more noticeable because the reluctance of the Sadducees to hold public office is likewise mentioned. That Epicurus was in the mind

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of Josephus when penning his account of this sect, even if not mentioned by name, becomes the more probable when it is recalled that his defense of the prophet Daniel concludes with a spirited and extended diatribe against Epicurus and his views on the government of the universe.³³ On this occasion the arch-heretic is specifically named.