

Discussion Round-Up

Post by “Joshua” of December 31, 2019 at 5:21 AM

Quote

I think that, if we look back to Dr. Greenblatt's "the swerve", he states, I forget the page (anyone?) that Christian scholars did make an attempt to "reconcile" the philosophy of Lucretius (namely, Epicureanism) but couldn't because the Epicurean view that the soul dies with us, since it is dispersed into its constituent atoms when we die, is antithetical to Christian theology.

Greenblatt cites several examples. I don't have page numbers, but I can recall a few names.

Marsilio Ficino—Fifteenth century Florentine humanist. Wrote a commentary on Lucretius; but, seeing where it was leading him, he burned it. He devoted the rest of his life to translating Plato into Latin, and reconciling his philosophy with Christianity.

Thomas More—16th century cleric of the English Renaissance. After reading *The New World* by Amerigo Vespucci—a book that described the natives as "Epicureans", who "live according to Nature", and whose lives "are completely devoted to pleasure"—More used the conceit to explore an enlightened society beyond the edge of the map that was free of the social ills plaguing England at the time. And yet even in *Utopia*, one is barred from honor, office, and social status for two crimes; first, to believe that the soul likewise perishes with the body. And second, to believe that the Universe is the random sport of chance.

To paraphrase Greenblatt; More systematically builds up a more enlightened and Epicurean society, and then proceeds to carve its heart out.

There are also the obvious examples of Bruno and Gassendi.

Post by “Cassius” of December 31, 2019 at 6:52 AM

Oscar if I understand you correctly I completely agree with where you are going, and I do believe it relates to our current discussions.

I agree that erecting a viewpoint that a constant chaotic clash of ideas is a good thing is flawed, and it is probably the opposite of what Epicurus advised -- weighing and testing and then deciding what this process has confirmed and what it has invalidated.

It is one thing to always have an open mind toward new evidence, and being willing to immediately revise prior opinion to incorporate that new evidence. It is very different to say that it is never proper to consider any opinion to be confirmed, which is what I sense is the issue you are picking up.

From the point of view of the Christians there was good reason for them to banish discussion of Lucretius -- because Epicurean philosophy IS incompatible with Christianity (and all Abrahamic religion) and they cannot coexist in the same mind without huge cognitive dissonance and confusion.

That's why ultimately we have to stiffen our spines and make decisions and follow them as best we can, and I can't think of any reason more urgent to do that than the knowledge that we get only one shot at life and when our time is up it's over.

One more comment, on the word "mistake":

[Quote from Oscar](#)

I'm for open and free exchanges of thought when used to understand issues and solve problems, but to say open the doors, we're coming in and you need to accept our view is a mistake.

No doubt that for some people this view is indeed a "mistake." I do agree that there is a pleasure that many find (I know I find it myself) in trying to be considerate to everyone you come into contact with, and telling them that they have an "equal voice" and essentially attempting to implement some kind of "pure democracy" where everyone has an equal part in making every decision." That view has a basic attraction because people of good will value their friends, and they want to make their friends feel good, and so it has an immediate appeal.

But I think it is pretty clear that in many contexts allowing all decisions to be made by anyone and everyone would be a chaotic disaster, and I think that result is so clear, even in the context of ideas and academia and the like, that I don't think we should conclude that everyone who pushes ideas like this is "mistaken."

As you were alluding in the other thread, Oscar, I think in many cases people are "responsible" for the things they do and positions they take, and they know full well what the natural and normal consequence of their actions is going to be.

So I think that we should be of good will and forgiving for anyone who mistakenly, presumably out of the best of intentions, advocates an organizational scheme that would lead to chaos. But I think there are definitely those also who realize that the maintenance of chaos is an opportunity for exploitation of those who do not know better, and I think we have to firmly and confidently stand up against that advocacy.

So another example would be that even as we debate in other threads the accurate meaning of Epicurean doctrines, the only reason we can allow that liberty to do so is that we firmly keep an eye out and exclude disruptive discussion that is not in good faith and clearly outside the scope of the overall goal of the group.