

# Pío Baroja, Spanish Novelist and Epicurean

Post by "Joshua" of June 2, 2020 at 1:21 PM

Another new friend!

[Pío Baroja](#) (1872-1956) was a Spanish novelist of the last century who wrote the following in a text called *Juventud, Egoatría* (*Youth and Egoatry*):

## **Epicuri de Grege Porcum**

I am also a swine of the herd of Epicurus; I, too, wax eloquent over this ancient philosopher, who conversed with his pupils in his garden. The very epithet of Horace, upon detaching himself from the Epicureans, *Epicuri de grege porcum*, is full of charm.

All noble minds have hymned Epicurus. "Hail Epicurus, thou honour of Greece!" Lucretius exclaims in the third book of his poem.

"I have sought to avenge Epicurus, that truly

holy philosopher, that divine genius," Lucian

tells us in his *Alexander or the False Prophet*.

Lange, in his *History of Materialism* sets down Epicurus as a disciple and imitator of Democritus.

I am not a man of sufficient classical culture to

be able to form an authoritative opinion of the merits of Epicurus as a philosopher. All my

knowledge of him, as well as of the other ancient philosophers, is derived from the book of Diogenes Laertius.

Concerning Epicurus, I have read Bayle's magnificent article in his *Historical and Critical*

*Dictionary* and Gassendi's work, *De Vita et*

*Moribus Epicuri*. With this equipment, I have become one of the disciples of the master.

Scholars may say that I have no right to enroll myself as one of the disciples of Epicurus,

but when I think of myself, spontaneously there comes to my mind the grotesque epithet which Horace applied to the Epicureans in his *Epistles*, a characterization which for my part I accept and regard as an honour: Swine of the herd of Epicurus, *Epicuri de grege porcum*.

[Translated from Spanish By JACOB S. FASSETT, Jr. and FRANCES L. PHILLIPS, in an edition presented by H.L. Mencken]

There are a few items of concern here. The word 'detaching' with reference to Horace is curious, but that may be a problem of translation.

And his praise for Gassendi's work is notable as well. Nevertheless, it's evident that he read Diogenes Laertius as well as Lucretius and Lucian, so that's enough to be getting on with.

I haven't read any of his novels, but Hemingway praised him very highly, suggesting to him that he (and not Hemingway) should have won the Nobel prize in literature.

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### **Post by “Joshua” of June 2, 2020 at 1:44 PM**

One of his novels is called *City of the Discreet*, and its protagonist Quentin is a young man who thinks of himself in his private thoughts as an Epicurean. Might be a good place to start!

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### **Post by “Cassius” of June 2, 2020 at 1:50 PM**

#### [Quote from JJElbert](#)

Concerning Epicurus, I have read Bayle's magnificent article in his Historical and Critical Dictionary and Gassendi's work, *De Vita et Moribus Epicuri*. With this equipment, I have become one of the disciples of the master.

OK this is a point we don't want to overlook. We now have access to the thomas stanley translation of Gassendi's work, so that is accessible.

But I have never heard, found or read "Bayle's magnificent article."

We need to go looking for that and presumably it will merit its own thread or subforum.

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### **Post by “Joshua” of June 2, 2020 at 1:57 PM**

Quote

But I have never heard, found or read "Bayle's magnificent article."

Pierre Bayle is the gentleman in question. France, 1647-1706. More in Charles' line, but I can look later as well.

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### **Post by “Don” of June 2, 2020 at 1:57 PM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

But I have never heard, found or read "Bayle's magnificent article."

We need to go looking for that and presumably it will merit its own thread or subforum.

<https://books.google.com/books?id=bsuWr...picurus&f=false>

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### **Post by “Cassius” of June 2, 2020 at 3:41 PM**

THANKS DON! A quick scan is a little disappointing and sounds like a religious apology for Epicurus, but i will read the whole thing ASAP.

it's always good to find "encyclopedia" style articles on Epicurus that can serve as introductions, but most of them have unfortunate huge flaws on major issues, at least from my perspective.

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### **Post by “Charles” of June 2, 2020 at 8:18 PM**

I came across Bayle some time ago, I remember his Dictionary to be disappointing and his mentions of Epicurus is usually in response to religion, such as conflating his defense of Epicurus as a means to target Nicolas Malebranche, a theologian during his time (as well as his work on King David). It seems that when discussing Epicurean Philosophy from the Enlightenment, there are three categories: materialist physics, ethics, Epicurus as a living

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1586-p%C3%ADo-baroja-spanish-novelist-and-epicurean/>

weapon against religion. The bulk of this comes from the 18th century, though less focused on the physics (England in the 19th century would take that route) and more so on ethics of pleasure and embracing atheism.

It's also very important to discern whether or not these authors throughout history were *actually* Epicurean. For a while I had been convinced that Jean Meslier had some Epicurean influences, as it was a common subject to learn about in France. But, I came across some papers and it was made clear that in his private bookshelf there had been no copies of Lucretius or of Laertius. The point is that we look at those who very clearly espoused Epicurean ideas before determining how useful their works are, though the micro-discoveries we make on here are enough to make it all worth it.

Pío Baroja seems promising, since I keep seeing Spanish translations of Epicurus all the time (Epicuro). I'm not familiar with Spain and its history with Epicurean Philosophy but I know a link exists, perhaps with writers during the time of Bourbon Spain. Nice find!