

Historical References on the School of Epicurean Philosophy - Notable Epicureans From The Ancient World To Today

Post by "Cassius" of February 1, 2022 at 8:34 AM

For some reason I woke up thinking about this today. Although I am not interested in seeing us "play to the crowd," most of us live and work among people who are almost exclusively non-Epicurean, and know little about Epicurus.

At some point it becomes a logical and reasonable question for them to ask:

"I've never really heard of Epicurus, or anyone who said that they were Epicurean. Those views you are talking about sound pretty underground to me and actually bordering on evil. Of course I know you and I like you, but can you name me one reputable person over the last three hundred years who has labelled themselves an Epicurean? Hopefully you can name more than one obscure name, but if you can't, maybe we better talk about getting you some medical help. I know this great counselor who specializes in Dialectical Behavior Therapy!"

My comment to that:

I've heard people suggest names like Christopher Hitchens and all sorts of people who have said one or two good things about Epicurus, but there are very few who come anywhere close to embracing his entire philosophy, much less actually committed to writing "I too am an Epicurean."

I think this is a legitimate conversation topic with the outside world, so I think we need to work on our response. I know Nate has produced a very good list of historical Epicureans, and I think Don has done something similar in terms of a time frame or time line analysis.

I will start a new thread and link to those two sets of materials and let's see what we can do to expand this.

Nate's Research Discussion Thread: [RE: Early Epicurean Community - Listing of Known Epicureans Throughout History](#)

Nate's Research Consolidated For Publishing: [Epicurean Philosophers by Nathan H. Bartman](#)

Don's Timeline: [Updated Alternative Timeline of Epicurean History](#)

New Page Devoted to this in Lexicon:

Post by “Cassius” of February 1, 2022 at 9:58 AM

One aspect of this we need is:

(1) Notable "living" people who identify with Epicurus (and again I would exclude here our current internet-based people like this website, or Society of Epicurus, or the Greek Gardens), because we're looking for "notable" that the public might recognize. As per my prior comments I don't think Christopher Hitchens (who is now dead of course, but alive fairly recently) really qualifies.

(2) As to "scholars" who might not be notable but would have a reputation in the academic community, I note that Nate's list doesn't include scholars such as DeWitt. That's to be expected, because to my knowledge DeWitt himself never proclaimed that he himself was an Epicurean, and the fair assumption is that DeWitt was probably some form of Christian. However it's notable that DeWitt appears to have been one of the most recent people to have devoted his professional career to the study of Epicurus, and DeWitt's works are probably some of the few that are not filled with dismissals and efforts to point out Epicurus' alleged errors. I doubt we could consider Sedley or Tsouna as people who are primarily devoted in their professional career to promoting Epicurean views sympathetically. We might possibly consider Bailey, given the amount of work he put into both Lucretius and Epicurus, but Bailey seems to me to be mostly hostile to Epicurus's ethics and probably other parts of his philosophy as well. Another name to consider would be Martin Ferguson Smith, who I would place somewhere between Bailey and DeWitt.

Post by “Godfrey” of February 1, 2022 at 11:35 AM

Catherine Wilson seems to be a dedicated Epicurean.

Post by “Cassius” of February 1, 2022 at 11:44 AM

That's someone definitely to consider. She's certainly writing a lot of books and articles. But I wonder to what extent she says she agrees with it herself? (And of course that leads to the question of what kinds of caveats to include.) Same question would likely apply to Sedley, Tsouna, and probably several others. Are they academics and/or commentators or actual "promoters" of Epicurean philosophy, and what are their caveats?

Post by “Godfrey” of February 1, 2022 at 11:51 AM

She seems to me to be a promoter as well as a philosopher, even if some of us don't accept all of her approach.

Post by “Cassius” of February 1, 2022 at 11:55 AM

Yes I agree. She seems to be more of a "writer" than an academic too. Almost in the category of Greenblatt (the swerve) who probably deserves mention but is less clear in status as a promoter.