

Another Example Why I Don't Accept The Term "Hedonism" to Describe Epicurean Philosophy

Post by "Cassius" of October 14, 2018 at 8:55 PM

Tonight a friend forwarded me [a review that George Orwell wrote in 1940 of Adolf Hilter's "Mein Kampf."](#)

Take a look at the last paragraph, which I will reproduce below. All I would say for now that when a highly reputable Englishman's definition of "hedonism" can be compared unfavorably to Hitler's Germany in 1940, then there are deep issues to be unwound. Let the professional philosophers categorize as they wish, and let those who want to defend "hedonism" defend it all they like. I don't observe that the ancient Epicureans called themselves "hedonists" - they called themselves Epicureans! And that's why I don't apply the term to myself or to Epicureans today.

Here's Orwell's final paragraph:

"Also he [Hitler] has grasped the falsity of the hedonistic attitude to life. Nearly all western thought since the last war, certainly all 'progressive' thought, has assumed tacitly that human beings desire nothing beyond ease, security and avoidance of pain. In such a view of life there is no room, for instance, for patriotism and the military virtues. The Socialist who finds his children playing with soldiers is usually upset, but he is never able to think of a substitute for the tin soldiers; tin pacifists somehow won't do. Hitler, because in his own joyless mind he feels it with exceptional strength, knows that human beings don't only want comfort, safety, short working-hours, hygiene, birth-control and, in general, common sense; they also, at least intermittently, want struggle and self-sacrifice, not to mention drums, flags and loyalty-parades. However they may be as economic theories, Fascism and Nazism are psychologically far sounder than any hedonistic conception of life. The same is probably true of Stalin's militarised version of Socialism. All three of the great dictators have enhanced their power by imposing intolerable burdens on their peoples. Whereas Socialism, and even capitalism in a more grudging way, have said to people 'I offer you a good time,' Hitler has said to them 'I offer you struggle, danger and death,' and as a result a whole nation flings itself at his feet. Perhaps later on they will get sick of it and change their minds, as at the end of the last war. After a few years of slaughter and starvation 'Greatest happiness of the greatest number' is a good slogan, but at this moment 'Better an end with horror than a horror without end' is a winner. Now that we are fighting against the man who coined it, we ought not to underrate its emotional appeal."