

Drowning Democritus

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I am not a violent man.

I have never shot anyone in Reno just to watch them die.

But as I sit cross-legged on my raincoat, next to this peaceful creek; in this cool, damp, green spot; in this place of observation, of healing, of good intentions; I want to maim, torture, kick some ass.

All that I want to do is drown Democritus.

I spy the spot where I'd do the deed. A Ferrari-sized pool on the other side of the river, framed by a steep rock face and maidenhair fern.

I grab the philosopher by the scruff of his Ancient Greek neck and lead him to the river, drag him across the current, force him to his chubby knees, and roughly shove his head under water, making sure that his nose is scraped by the gravel bottom, hoping that a rough-skinned newt comes along and bites his ear.

I let him up and I speak harshly through clenched teeth, "It all went wrong with you." "When you reduced the world to tiny bits of solid particles, to atoms, you broke the chain." "We weren't just looking for the underlying structure of the world, we were in search of the divine, the sacred." "You stripped that away." "You made the world profane." "And the world has become just that."

SPLASH!, his head goes under, and he twists and shakes.

But my dander's up, I'm righteous and pissed-off, and he's not going anywhere.

I pull his head out of the water and he sputters, "I did not do that, I did science; I gave you a gift, a completely reducible, quantifiable, understandable, predictable, world." "I gave you a world without all of those messy gods." "But, ha, you still have them, and look at the trouble they cause you." "You invented the tools of mass destruction, and you used them."

"What you gave us," I snarl through flared-nostrils, "was a world ripe for manipulation, and we manipulated, we obsessively manipulated." "You gave us a disconnected world, you gave us a vision that we enacted; without your vision we would have enacted something different." "You made the world inanimate, lifeless, degraded."

And SPLASH!, he's under water and I can't help but wonder if this man nicknamed "the laughing philosopher" is laughing now.

I graciously, yet unkindly, let him up again.

"You should be blaming Aristotle," his eyes now huge and twitching, "all that stuff about independence and autonomy; or what about Descartes, that dualism-advocating-vivisectioning sicko, he obsessed about human uniqueness; or Pythagoras, he's the one that drew the sharp line between humans and nature, he started it all."

SPLASH! again, he's under and I think quick, hell, I've got another hand, and I'm strong and raging at this point, I could hold another pasty philosopher under.
In a flash I recall a thick cable on the shore, I could string the whole lot together.

I jerk him up and shout in his ear, "Right, don't blame Maxxam Pacific Lumber, you buy the 2x4s, it's market driven," I mock, yet this smarts a bit.
In a web of cause and effect, blame is tough to pin and easy to evade. Responsibility is Teflon-coated, it shifts so readily that it sticks to nothing. No fault, no blame, just keep on truckin'.

This goes on for awhile, you know philosophers.
He thrusts and I parry, he smirks and I dunk.

In the end, I let Democritus go; I let him get up, float downstream, or sit in his own stew.
And I turn away and begin to make my way upstream.