

AFDIA - Chapter Three - Text and Discussion

Post by “Cassius” of February 12, 2022 at 7:57 AM

Major Philosophical Questions Include:

1. Is the life of virtue steep and difficult or steady and smooth?
 1. See to that luminary! lovely and glorious in the dawn, he gathers strength and beauty to his meridian, and passes in peace and grandeur to his rest. So do thou, my son. Open your ears and your eyes; know, and choose what is good; enter the path of virtue, and thou shalt follow it, for you shall find it sweet. Thorns are not in it, nor is it difficult or steep: like the garden you have now entered, all there is pleasure and repose.”
2. Are the Stoic and Epicurean paths open equally to everyone?
 1. “The doctrine of Zeno,” replied the sage, “is sublime: many great men shall come from his school; an amiable world, from mine. Zeno has his eye on man — I, mine on men: none but philosophers can be stoics; Epicureans all may be.”
3. Is there more than one virtue? Are the goals of the schools the same?
 1. “No, but men clothe her differently; some in clouds and thunders; some in smiles and pleasures. Doctors, my son, quarrel more about words than things, and more about the means than the end. In the Portico, in the Lyceum, in the Academy, in the school of Pythagoras, in the Tub of Diogenes, the teacher points you to virtue; in the garden he points you to happiness. Now open your eyes, my son, and examine the two Deities. Say, are they not the same? virtue is it not happiness? and is not happiness, virtue?”
4. What is the relationship between virtue, good, and evil vs pleasure and pain?
 1. I shall say, that I feel myself virtuous, because my soul is at rest.”

“If this be your criterion, you should with the stoics deny that pain is an evil.” “By no means: so much the contrary, I hold it the greatest of all evils, and the whole aim of my life, and of my philosophy, is to escape from it. To deny that pain is an evil is such another quibble as the Elean’s denial of motion: that must exist to man which exists to his senses; and as to existence or non existence abstracted from them, though it may afford an idle argument for an idle hour, it can never enter as a truth, from which to draw conclusions, in the practical lessons of a master. To deny that pain is an evil seems more absurd than to deny its existence, which has also been done, for its existence is only apparent from its effect upon our senses; how then shall we admit the existence, and deny the effect, which alone forces that admittance? But we will leave these matters to the dialecticians of the Portico. I feel myself virtuous because my soul is at rest. With evil passions I should be disturbed and uneasy; with uncontrolled appetites I should be disordered in body as well as mind — for this reason, and for this reason only, I avoid both.” “Only!” “Only: virtue is pleasure; were it not so, I should not follow it.”

2. "The masters who would have us to follow virtue for her own sake, independent of any pleasure or advantage that we may find in the pursuit, are sublime visionaries, who build a theory without examining the ground on which they build it, who advance doctrines without examining principles. Why do I gaze on the Cupid of Praxiteles? because it is beautiful; because it gives me pleasurable sensations. If it gave me no pleasurable sensations, should I find it beautiful? should I gaze upon it? or would you call me wise if then I gave a drachma for its possession? What other means have we of judging of things than by the effect they produce upon our senses? Our senses then being the judges of all things, the aim of all men is to gratify their senses; in other words, their aim is pleasure or happiness: and if virtue were not found to conduce to this, men would do well to shun her, as they now do well to shun vice." "You own then no pleasure but virtue, and no misery but vice?" "Not at all: I think virtue only the highest pleasure, and vice, or ungoverned passions and appetites, the worst misery. Other pleasures are requisite to form a state of perfect ease, which is happiness; and other miseries are capable of troubling, perhaps destroying, the peace of the most virtuous and the wisest man."
5. What is the point of the extended discussion about Metrodorus' painting of Leontium?
 1. "Pray, young man, if you want to be a philosopher, never find an eye for painting, a finger for music, or a brain for poetry. Any one of these will keep a man from wisdom."
 2. "Much more than common: — It is your Master's self. The dignity of his figure, the grace of his attitude, the nobility of his features, the divine benignity of his expression. Had we not the original to worship, we might worship your copy."