

# Tetrapharmakos in Philodemus's On Choices and Rejections

Post by “Don” of February 25, 2022 at 5:13 PM

Okay, so here's my first draft of the translation from the French. I ended up typing large swaths into Google Translate after trying to take a photo and do it "automatically." That worked for part but needed, let's say, tweaking. I'm including the link to the papyrus again as well.

Note! It's not easy to read and there are a lot of "missing" words and lines. But there's enough there to get some inspiration. I especially liked the haven of philosophy and the ending bit as well.

Enjoy!

Philodemus

[DCLP/Trismegistos 62463 = LDAB 3639 \(papyri.info\)](https://papyri.info/ldab/3639)

[ON CHOICES AND REJECTIONS]

1. [1] [missing 6 lines] pleasure, [it is right to] reply to those who, among the supporters of contrary doctrines on the questions just mentioned, claim that [even] without philosophy [it is possible] to carry out actions correctly. In fact, as we know, access is easy precisely to the polemical writings in which we see them speaking ill of us. And, if we quote some of them [missing 1 line] briefly [missing about 20 lines].

[2] [missing 3 lines] and in proportion [missing 2 words]. And they postulate that in reality nothing is first, because they are convinced that the [missing 1 word] of the soul relates to the [missing 1 word] and that we [proceed] to our choices and our rejections by such [comparative estimation], considering both at the same time. In fact, we cannot even have good hope that the joys [are born in us] in a similar way (all at once, lest] they engender for themselves disagreeable embarrassments [caused by certain] very great [affections] [missing 2 words] of what has been prepared by nature] with a view to reasoning [missing 2 words] without trouble [missing 20 lines approximately].

[3] [missing 1 line] and some even [claimed] that it is impossible for us to know anything, adding that we should not do everything from [choices] immediately, in the absence of a necessary point of support [for this]. Others, by explaining that the affections of the soul are ends (τέ[λ]η τὰ πάθη τῆς ψυχῆς), precisely without their further need for judgment, which is based on other [criteria], have given everyone full license to say that they derive joy from whatever they want, and from doing what tends towards that goal. Finally, the others have maintained the thesis that the words sorrow and joy -- which we certainly use, for our part -- are

totally empty, given the indeterminacy that manifests itself [missing 20 lines]

2. [4] [Epicurus teaches us that good is easy for us to procure] and that evil is [not] only limited by precisely because it is useless to have defined the good (τὰγαθόν), if it is difficult, if not impossible, for us to attain, nor to have fixed limits to evil, if it is difficult to bear because of its long duration. This knowledge has the effect of prohibiting both the pursuit of any [good] which is not by nature capable of eliminating pain - such are, most of the time, the [goods] which have motivated a search eager in humans -, and let none be discarded which does not prevent having pleasure -- that is how one must [conceive] most of [those which are acquired] gradually. And, in reverse, for [missing approximately 20 lines]

[5] [missing 3 lines] After that, it is also necessary to take into account the differences that present the desires (ἐπιθυμ[ιῶ]ν) relating to the pleasures and to what produces them, since precisely the lack of discernment on this subject gives rise to serious errors concerning the choices and the rejections. It is indeed because they regard as what is most necessary the goods which are most external to them, I mean a sovereign power, a dazzling fame, an exceptional wealth and sources of pleasure of this sort and other similar ones that they are in charge of the most painful evils; and that, conversely, [they remain deaf to their most necessary appetites] (ἀναγκαιοτάτων), because they take them for what is most exterior to them [missing about 20 lines].

[6] [Indeed, for Epicurus], [desires are partly necessary, [and partly unnecessary]. Among the first, [those which are] necessary, [there are those which are necessary for] life, those which are necessary for the maintenance of the body in good health and those which are necessary for a happy life (τὸ μ[α]καρίως [ζῆ]ν), to take [at least] the cases in their diversity, is not [all at once.]

[There are also] various [cravings]. Some, it seems, provoke in [the soul] terrible hurricanes, and others do not. Some remain unsatisfied because of certain lackings, others result from specific feelings for those who experience joy. There are also some which result from habits, and others which are precisely independent of them. If some find their starting point in us, others [appear] as a result of a kind of injury, inflicted by external objects or even by things that deprivation makes you want to possess, just to think about them. Still others [missing 20 lines approximately]

3. [7] [missing 2 lines] of the gods [missing 2 lines] not only [missing 1 word] fear and trouble [inspired by the gods themselves], but also [missing 1 word] of [appetites], even if they have that too. One must, moreover [to carry out righteous actions], follow good directions, because beings who know supreme bliss eternally are far from [the burden] of these matters.

However, in truth, that opinions of this kind are the causes of thousands of errors, it is easy to observe. And in fact, they indulge themselves to the point of taking advice from no one in the world, in their conviction that nothing depends on man, but that all things are arbitrated by divinity. Subsequently, they experience all of a sudden the misfortunes that a lack of prior advice quite naturally inflicts on them [missing 20 lines approximately] [8] [missing 2 lines] [For

it is not] profitable to [missing 2 lines], while others use [missing 1 word]. It should also be emphasized that [not only] they head for irremediable misfortunes, but that sometimes they even precipitate their own city into evils. And even if, in truth, they [are [not] defeated by the logic of facts or even if chance makes the omens agree with what must happen, the idea that they risk committing an act going against the will of the gods leads them in the opposite direction: they procrastinate and postpone their actions until later. And their troubles, effectively insurmountable, make them [neglect] [missing approximately 20 lines] [9] [missing 2 lines] errors [missing 1 word]; in many people misfortunes [many] and sizeable, of course, occur when they follow the harmful assumptions of men [incapable of thoughts/reflection], and are avoided when they follow their [desires]. Besides, each one puts forward different considerations, holding them for what is most important: this is precisely what is sketched out in these discussions.

Moreover, they believe, men will owe what happens to them, through the agency of the gods and other powers, evils [unceasing] after their death, much greater than the goods which they will have had during the time of their life. And it is for this reason that [missing 20 lines approximately] [10] [missing 6 lines] [by] them to the gods. This is why, [in truth], the wretched lament [precisely when they are victims] of evils very similar to those caused by ingratitude towards both individuals and country, and also, for that matter, towards the evils caused by the superstition of the fact that god is supposed to be responsible for both death and life -- even if the other evils, of course, are very great indeed. And the pain that grips them at the idea of dying makes them irascible, never happy or in a good mood [missing 20 ca] 4. [11] [missing 2 lines] and for this reason, it is clear, apart from these misfortunes, they are very [miserable].

[And] we say what we have just said about the four maxims (τῶ[ν] τεττάρω[ν]), because the important contribution made to effective choices and rejections by understanding and remembering the most important points of doctrine, it is considered that it amounts not as some have wanted to understand in their rusticity - to relate some of the choices and rejections to the absence of trouble on these questions, but to operate these latter in a correct way, on the condition of measuring them by nature's ends, and number of [missing about 20 lines].

[12] [missing 1 line] [the multitude] [knows] clearly ..., although they do not have the [fundamental ideas (ἀξιοῦμεν ὑπο[λή][ψ]εις)] that we are talking about. And what leads him instead to upright behavior are the laws, which brandish threats over his head: death, punishments of divine origin, as well as punishments considered very difficult to endure and deprivation of certain things which are said to be difficult to obtain. This is partly explained by what was discussed at the beginning and, partly, because it is against fools, people whom truthful precepts cannot persuade, that these threats are brandished; because these only have the effect of holding them back for a short time; and because obviously the suppositions [missing about 20 lines].

[13] [missing 1 line] they [remain in mind] the means of getting out of it, [because they have welcomed these [four maxims] as contributing by themselves to the practice. Moreover, these also establish the principles of philosophy - which alone allows for righteous actions - and also,

it is clear, the ends attached to our nature, which are of course carriers of the clearest evidence and by the yardstick of which we measure what is to be chosen and rejected. As for ethical reasoning on the choices and rejections, they too must in any case be drawn from the study of nature so that they are complete: if to say that "nothing is accomplished independently of a cause" is nothing (that) "there is no change" [missing about 20 lines] [14] [It is not possible to lead a pleasant life] that is not prudent, beautiful, and just, and still courageous, self-disciplined (French: maitresse de soi - Original papyrus: ἐγκρατῶς > LSJ: master of oneself, self-controlled; self-disciplined), magnanimous, open to friendship, full of humanity and generally [accompanying] others more consequential in terms of choices and rejections when certain people, believing the opposite, are for this reason overwhelmed by their vices in each of their acts.

However, in truth, one must not denounce as a sycophant (συκοφαντητέον; LSJ: common informer, voluntary denouncer (there being no Public Prosecutor)) the transmission of the elements [of the doctrine], saying that it is only a question of the intertwining of some of them with others and of all the ways they have of linking themselves together. In fact, desires sometimes [missing 20 lines approximately] [15] [missing 3 lines] and it is in view of [missing 2 words] that we encourage [missing 2 words], and then in the actions [missing 1 line]. It should [surely] be kept in mind also that if careful study beforehand -- about the things which, in detail, are able to produce the goods which are external to us, such as a luxurious lifestyle, beauty, wealth generally speaking, [marriage] and the like -- of the relationships they have with us no doubt also contributes to aiming straight ("a viser juste"), their contribution is weak, compared to that of the most important [maxims] that we have recalled (οἶον πολυτελείας καὶ μορφοῦ καὶ πλούτου κοινῶς καὶ γάμου καὶ τῶν ὁμοίων - Note that "marriage" γάμου is reconstructed). It is moreover for this reason that in the [Principal Doctrines](#) (Κυρίαίς Δόξαις) precisely these have been placed in this order, and at the beginning, even if one can say that [missing approximately 20 lines].

[16] [Lac 1 line] [The unwise assert] rashly: "It is not possible for anyone to know in advance -- the precise moment, at least, no one knows -- what day [death] will come, any more when one is old than in the case of a premature disappearance. Also, instead of it being like when someone clearly recognizes the imminence of his death, we don't constantly think that we will die (we have time to spare!); and, because it is difficult to set an end to life, we incline sometimes to quickly stretch it out so that it is as long as possible, sometimes not to be unable to leave it, precisely out of reverence towards the gods.

Under these conditions, it is against what is suitable that some [missing 20 lines approximately] 5. [17] [missing 1 line] They are not ready, for insignificant gain, [both] to say goodbye to the only things that can give pleasures, and to bear sorrows in vain -- indeed, they also turn away entirely from philosophy, each saying: "Am I now going to start giving myself endless pain only to then get thrown like a disc halfway through?" -- even to share anything because, they believe, it is up to the immortals to do so, or to those who wait to be thanked. And they show themselves ungrateful in their turn towards everyone, each time exclaiming with a sneer: "Not the slightest gift for those who died!" And indifferent to all [missing approximately 20 lines]

[18] [missing 3 lines] they exclaim: "Isn't it true that in life I behave well and [act godly], and respect the laws of men? When I reach the end, I will be immortal." And what concerns everything that would improve their existence they disregard, like those condemned to death. And naturally they also disregard anything related to their health, adding: "Yes, whatever torments I have to endure, I will give myself three hours of good time! ('ἐγὼ πόσα δὲ ὑπομενῶ' προστιθέντες, 'εἰ τ]ρυφήσω τρεῖς ὥρας;')"; and here they are again fainting at the thought of illnesses! And as they imagine in advance eternal evils after death, they are prey to limitless troubles. Also, evil [deeds], for precisely these reasons, they [commit many] [missing approximately 20 lines] [19] [missing 4 lines] And as they imagine in advance eternal evils after death, they are prey to limitless troubles. Also, evil [deeds], for precisely these reasons, they [commit many] [missing approximately 20 lines] [19] [missing 4 lines] [some are struck by misfortune, whereas they believed?] to protect themselves from it thanks to their piety, as legends have passed down about a few.

But, as they have this way of seeing things and as, in its suddenness, this unexpected blow knocks them out [in truth], they change their language. They begin, moreover, by depriving themselves of all enjoyment in order, assuredly, to always have enough of what is necessary to subsist, and live in postponement, as if it were possible for them to have their share of goods later; and, thereafter, they pass their existence in total incoherence and impose [numerous] penalties on themselves [lac, 20 lines approximately] [20] [missing 1 line] they have made and will do new things in order to repel the terrible events more quickly which could always everywhere swoop down on them until they die.

And the fear of one day running out of necessities makes them very reluctant to share and they refuse to return benefits. Moreover, when they lose their fortune, they endure the tortures of Tartarus, and enter into angers and hatreds which have nothing human about them; and they become arrogant as much by summons as by orders and threats. Moreover, unable to come to terms with their relatives, and to feel sympathy for them, just as they cannot [missing about 20 lines].

6. [21] [missing 1 line] For his part, [the wise epicurean] does not [need to accumulate [a lot] of money, and "treats the present well", seeing nothing incongruous in this.

Furthermore, while having come to know well among the [public activities] those which bear fruit, he cultivates them with relative carelessness ("une relative insouciance"), unless it is for friends; and, because he is -- more than anything -- spare his time, whenever necessary, he counts only on himself; and, since his tender childhood, he never neglects the havens of philosophy (φιλοσοφία[ς] ὄρμους). moreover, fully reassured by the idea that everything [will be sufficient] for the duration of his life, however long it may be, he goes so far as to share, after having reserved just enough to live on, everything that he has left. [And] [lake. about 20 lines] [22] [missing 2 lines] of men, when he was in charge.

Moreover, as it is without paying attention to it that he [sees his end coming], he is active because of the [doctrine] which goes hand in hand with the notion he has of the preservation of

goods (i.e., property, “des biens”). And, Because he does not seek to put an end to his existence when it lasts a long time, he always throws himself into new activities, which attract friends to him, and he is interested in the way in which it will be possible to manage his personal affairs.

Moreover, he cares about what he has known before, because he tells himself that it may concern him in the future; and he is full of attentions for the greatest possible number of human beings, at the same time he is grateful for those who have shown him friendship, precisely because he hopes that he will be able to share certain things with them, and also to receive from them some good treatment in return, although [missing about 20 lines] [23] [missing 1 line] [because of] the long [duration] of its [existence]. And, in seeking out anything that offers some improvement in his health, he spares no effort to restore it because he expects to live again. He provides especially, yes, for his health; and, fully reassured on the subject of problems of health and death, he energetically takes the measures which can keep them at bay.