

Tetrapharmakos in Philodemus's On Choices and Rejections

Post by "Cassius" of February 26, 2022 at 9:26 AM

Oh you know one more thing that I think points up the benefit of the forum method of study.

When we had the prior discussion of the Tetrapharmakon mentioned above, I don't remember being focused on the issue of how closely we should follow the "Greatest Good" formulation in Torquatus.

Now that we've been through that, and discussed issues like Scott raised in the last AFDIA book review, I think my issues with the Tetrapharmakon are very similar to those which I have with the "greatest good" formulation:

It's possible to summarize or to abstract too strongly to the point where essential details get left out, and that's what I think is defective in both of these two formulations.

I am a big fan of outlining and I love to do it, but part of the trick of doing it right is to distill the elements down to the essentials without cutting too much, or without cutting too little.

We've discussed my issues with the Tetrapharmakon above, but those are pretty exactly my issues with the "Greatest good" --- those two words themselves are full of ambiguities and questions, and the statement "the greatest good is pleasure" can be handy but is dangerously thin on specifics. Taken out of context of Epicurean philosophy as a whole the slogan "the greatest good is pleasure" is dangerously incomplete and would lead to a very incorrect interpretation of the philosophy.

While we have formulations that are somewhat similar from Epicurus and Lucretius, we don't have those exact formulations, and probably for good reason. Neither the Tetrapharmakon or the "greatest good is pleasure" seems to have been written directly by either one of them, and I think this current discussion points out reasons why that might be the case.

But at any rate, the point of this post is that it is an essential point in "summaries" to include all the important aspects.

Quote

But those also who have made considerable progress in the survey of the main principles ought to bear in mind the scheme of the whole system set forth in its essentials. For we have frequent need of the general view, but not so often of the

detailed exposition. [36] Indeed it is necessary to go back on the main principles, and constantly to fix in one's memory enough to give one the most essential comprehension of the truth. And in fact the accurate knowledge of details will be fully discovered, if the general principles in the various departments are thoroughly grasped and borne in mind; for even in the case of one fully initiated the most essential feature in all accurate knowledge is the capacity to make a rapid use of observation and mental apprehension, and this can be done if everything is summed up in elementary principles and formulae. For it is not possible for anyone to abbreviate the complete course through the whole system, if he cannot embrace in his own mind by means of short formulae all that might be set out with accuracy in detail.