

The Garden Then -- and the Garden Now

Post by "Kalosyni" of April 25, 2022 at 8:07 AM

We can only imagine what things might have been like back in the time of Epicurus. And now here we are, only in the beginning stages of imagining and creating an Epicurean Philosophy Garden. The current task has many challenges, but we must continue to press forward. We have this little corner of cyberspace in which to build our online Garden, and from this we can move out into the world to create something even more pleasurable.

Last night, feeling some ability to write...first a quote of some study material and then some of my thoughts follow:

The Garden as Refuge

Quote:

"I grant that although mental pleasure brings us joy and mental pain brings us trouble, yet each feeling takes its rise in the body and is dependent on the body, though it does not follow that the pleasures and pains of the mind do not greatly surpass those of the body. With the body indeed we can perceive only what is present to us at the moment, but with the mind the past and future also. For granting that we feel just as great pain when our body is in pain, still mental pain may be very greatly intensified if we imagine some everlasting and unbounded evil to be menacing us. And we may apply the same argument to pleasure, so that it is increased by the absence of such fears."

--Torquatus section, from Cicero's "On Ends"

Let us imagine the community of philosophers at the time of Epicurus. It most likely was not like a commune, but rather more like a daily meeting place. Everyone was fairly certain that they would see their fellow Epicurean students on a regular basis, and perhaps on a daily basis. This anticipation for the comradery was a kind of pleasure in itself. There also was the sense of near certitude that Epicurus the teacher would also be present, and his guiding words would bring new insights. All this would create a sense of community, and a sense of refuge and reliance on each other's friendships, as well as the enjoyment of on-going discussions.

In this way, going to the Garden itself was a kind of medicine, as each person could count on the sense of friendship and engagement that could daily be found within it's gates. So the followers of Epicurus were freed from the fear of abandonment and the fear of loneliness, and freed from the anxiety of uncertainty as to when next they might see their friends, for they knew they would easily and soon renew their joy of their shared presence, happy discussions, and shared mutual worldviews.

I can imagine the following being words of a student back in the time of Epicurus:

What primordial urges we hide within ourselves, and deny their very existence. Our natural humanity has this tender craving for friendship, and now here we can come to find a refuge and a medicine to satisfy our long-lasting thirst. And some may feel this more strongly than others. This feeling is difficult to describe, but reflected in the very nature of infants and animals. Just as the helpless infant continually seeks for the face of its mother to feel safe and secure, and just as the loyal dog wines to be reunited to the presence of its owner, so too within our own hearts we hear that secret hidden calling to be with those we love, and we feel a yearning for our fellow students, and most of all for our great teacher Epicurus.

I invite anyone to share thoughts, reactions, ideas, Epicurean quotes, art, etc. that come up regarding this 😊