

Promising New Book ("Living For Pleasure") and Great New Article ("Are The Modern Stoics Really Epicurean?") Both By Emily Austin

Post by "Cassius" of November 19, 2022 at 7:14 AM

Yes her analysis is far better than we generally get. Might she have gone even further? Echoing Kalosyni's concerns about extravagance, I recall this from Menoecus:

"We must consider that of desires some are natural, others vain, and of the natural some are necessary and others merely natural; and of the necessary some are necessary for happiness, others for the repose of the body, and others for very life."

Focusing on that language, does "extravagance" advance the ball as far it is should go? When you look at the variations of "necessary" from "necessary for very life" vs "necessary for happiness" that is a huge degree of separation.

Sure romantic love might not be "necessary for life" but for a lot of people it might well be "necessary for happiness."

So if "extravagant" is elevated to a title in itself, where does romantic love fall? If it is necessary for happiness for a lot of people then it's not "extravagant."

So to repeat her analysis is a lot better than we generally see, but there's room for making these issues more clear. We can't blame Epicurus himself for this ambiguity -- he makes it clear in Menoecus that "necessary" itself has a context, and he doesn't (in a letter of general advice) start giving us a long detailed list of where things should fit.

Just as Austin says that Epicurus didn't write something as condensed as the tetrapharmakon, but that his followers wanted it, I think we have to be very careful with natural and necessary talk not to condense Epicurus too far and thereby muck things up.