

Epicurean Verse For When You're Feeling...

Post by "Cassius" of March 7, 2023 at 9:16 AM

Nate I think you are right that Kalosyni's comment are calling up what you are saying: There are different levels of "absoluteness" going on here.

In physics, as in the letter to Herodotus, we are being "absolute" -- NOTHING exists eternally the same except atoms and void. That doesn't change for anyone no matter what their circumstances. Implicitly death is the same way - we all die.

But in the letter to Pythocles Epicurus points out that we don't have clear vision at a distance, so in regard to taking opinions about the skies and stars we have to keep open multiple possibilities if all of them comport with the evidence and none are contradicted.

Then further in distinction to physics, where we are at times talking about unchanging properties and sometimes talking about emergent qualities, in ethics questions of "how to live among other people" was are ALWAYS talking about emergent and changing qualities, and ALL our statements are contextual. This section of the Fish article "Not All Politicians Are Sisyphus" points that out very well I think (underlined section):

It is no accident that the most direct and proverbial proscriptions against politics attributed to Epicurus are short fragments preserved in secondary sources, and not part of either the *Key Doctrines* or any entirely extant letters.⁹⁹ Rather than being intended for general consumption, 'maxims' like λάθε βιώσας and μή πολιτεύεσθαι may well have been excerpted from letters addressed to individuals covetous of social connections or status that they lacked.¹⁰⁰ The likely result of such people's eagerness to win renown would be an unhappier life than before.¹⁰¹ A fragment from Metrodorus preserved by Plutarch contains similar advice to someone concerned about being uneducated: 'Do not be disturbed, because, as you say, you do not know on which side Hector fought, or the first lines of Homer's poem.'¹⁰² Instructions on the subject of political prominence, like those regarding education, must have been situational rather than dogmatic.¹⁰³ That is to say, they were not *maxims* at all. Their basic message was that individuals born into obscurity should be grateful for that fact and should not strive for fame or attract unnecessary attention to themselves. The kind of person at whom this message was directed would have been quite opposite to someone who, to borrow a phrase from Cicero, had been 'consul-designate from birth'.¹⁰⁴ The Epicureans had advice for both kinds of people, and a method for evaluating options that promised to maximize happiness whatever the relevant circumstances. There is no suggestion in any surviving source that a person born to the kind of station referred to by Cicero would be expected to go through the tumultuous process of trying to dismantle all of his inherited privileges and responsibilities. Wealth offers

This kind of contextual nature is probably a good idea to add to sort of an introduction, and then discuss in relation to each quote to develop the context.

I suggest that, of course, only for consideration when you have unlimited time, because you've already sunk a lot of time into the collection, and context will determine how much more time makes sense and how to spend it!

I REALLY like that last underlined sentence, and I think we need to find ways to highlight that on the forum:

Quote

The Epicureans had advice for both kinds of people, and a method of evaluating options that promised to maximize happiness whatever the relevant circumstances.

The only way it appears to me to make that sentence better would be to generalize it by saying "ALL" instead of "BOTH."

or maybe for our current usage:

"The Epicureans have advice for all kinds of people, and a method of evaluating options that promises to maximize happiness whatever the relevant circumstances."