

Philodemus - On Frank Speech

Post by "Don" of September 17, 2023 at 4:24 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

in Lucretius honey is put onto the cup of wormwood (which would be to emphasize a pleasant way of speaking).

It seems to me that Lucretius is using the honey/wormwood as a metaphor for administering medicine to a sick patient. Frank criticism is often compared to medicine as well. This is in the commentary to Philodemus' work:

Not only is frank speech "akin to friendship," it is the "language of friendship" and the "most potent medicine in friendship," to be employed in mutual moral reform among friends.

Lucretius uses a pleasant method of delivery (poetry) to administer what some see as bitter medicine (no afterlife, no gods looking over us, etc.). Once administered, however, the philosophy does the person good, in fact cures them of fear and anxiety etc. Frank criticism is another tool to administer medicine.

Here are some quotes from On Frank Criticism talking about treating (θεραπεύειν *therapeuein*) patients/students:

Col. XVIIa: ...but when they observe that their character is prone to error, they are stung. And just like those who call skilled doctors to an operation when they apply the scalpel to those who are ill, so too when what is stinging in frank criticism meets the eye of these people and they believe that they will commit no error, or that they will escape notice even if they have erred many

times, they call upon {their teachers} to admonish...

Fr. 40: ...for it is necessary to show him his errors forthrightly and speak of his failings publicly. For if he has considered this man to be the one guide of right speech and [action], whom he calls the only savior, and {to whom}, citing the phrase, "with him accompanying {me}," he has given himself over to be treated, then how is he not going to show to him those things in which he needs treatment, and [accept admonishment]?

Fr. 79 (=81 N): ...{so that} he can be treated either by us or by another of his fellow-students, and not to do it {i.e., criticize frankly} continually, nor against everyone, nor every chance error, nor {errors} of those whom one should not {criticize} when they are present, nor with merriment, but rather [to take up the errors] sympathetically [and not to] scorn [or insult] on..