

Tetrapharmakos in Philodemus's On Choices and Rejections

Post by “Don” of October 6, 2024 at 8:29 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

The big criticism of [PD04](#) is that it takes severe circumstances too lightly. Chronic long-term illness, terminal illness: these must be boldly met.

I've tried to rationalize [PD04](#) in the past as "Epicurus was writing in a different time. Wounds or illnesses that would be curable now were fatal back then. PD just needs updating to our time.... Etc." But if I remember correctly, even Cicero had the same criticism we do of the sentiments of [PD04](#):

2.29.94 On Ends: As for your maxim that severe pain is short and prolonged pain light, I cannot make out what it may mean. For I see pains that are at once severe and considerably prolonged; and the truer way to endure them is the other method, which you who do not love moral worth for its own sake are not able to employ. Courage has its precepts and its rules, rules of constraining force, that forbid a man to show womanish weakness in pain. Hence it must be considered a disgrace, I do not say to feel pain (that is sometimes inevitable), but that 'rock of Lemnos to outrage' with the cries of a Philoctetes,

Till the dumb stones utter a voice of weeping,

Echoing his wails and plaints, his sighs and groanings.

Let Epicurus soothe with his spells, if he can, the man whose

Veins and vitals, from the viper's fang

Envenom'd, throb with pangs of anguish dire

in this way: 'Philoctetes! If pain is severe, it is short.' Oh, but he has been languishing in his cave for these ten years past. 'If it is long, it is light: for it grants intervals of respite.' In the first place, this is not often the case; and secondly, what is the good of a respite embittered by recent pain still fresh in memory, and tormented by fear of pain impending in the future? Let him die, says Epicurus. Perhaps that were the best course, but what becomes of the maxim about 'a constant preponderance of pleasure'? If that be true, are you not guilty of a crime in advising him to end his life? Well, then, let us rather tell him that it is base and unmanly to let pain demoralize, crush and conquer one. As for the formula of your sect, 'Short if it's strong, light if it's long,' it is a tag for copybooks. Virtue, magnanimity, endurance, courage — it is

these that have balm to assuage pain.

I'll have to go back and listen to the podcast episode(s) that tackle those sections.

Thread

[Episode 219 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 26 -Cicero Continues His Attack On Epicurus' Position On Pain](#)

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Cassius

March 10, 2024 at 2:30 PM

However, even Cicero's last line - *Virtue, magnanimity, endurance, courage — it is these that have balm to assuage pain.* - I don't know if Epicurus would disagree. Can pain be endured boldly by leaning on courage and being generous and kind to others who genuinely want to help, living virtuously? Does that path eventually lead to a "preponderance of pleasure"?