

Recent / New Edition of Diogenes Laertius - And Problems With it!

Post by "Cassius" of January 27, 2020 at 8:53 PM

This reliability issue is a huge issue for me too Mike. I firmly believe that in a case like this, Bailey is the preferred translation. I'm not going to go so far as to say that I respect scholarship in classical matters 100 years ago across-the-board more than I do today, but I get the strong idea that standards in the academy in social sciences have fallen dramatically.

Now sometimes there will be more recent discoveries that can justify a change, but so far as I know there is absolutely no claim whatsoever that anything new was discovered to make the older versions untrustworthy.

This is why I defer to Bailey and even more so to Munro whenever possible - I believe that especially Munro to be much more "in tune" with Lucretius than modern scholars.

Now as to this version, I know I have seen notes saying that this text appears to be corrupted, but at the very least the translators ought to say so rather than leave it unnoted.

Yonge said the opposite of Bailey, here: <https://archive.org/stream/TheLive...e/n477/mode/2up>

Hicks agreed with Yonge, here: <https://archive.org/stream/livesof...ge/644/mode/2up>

Now which is correct? To me the answer has to come from putting yourself in the place of Epicurus and rigorously applying his views from the ground up, with a view of pleasure uncorrupted by Stoicism. I will go on record saying that even though I have no children myself, and even though I am fully aware that raising children can go awfully wrong, from a general perspective the raising of children is something that can be one of the most rewarding things (in terms of pleasure, the only real meaning of "reward") in life, and therefore it is something that Epicurus would never flatly rule out.

Even if we read these "wise man" passages narrowly as if he intended them to apply only to dedicated teachers like himself (which I don't think is likely to be what he intended) it's inconceivable to me that he would lay down a flat rule against marriage.

Much more likely is that marriage, like any other human activity, is something that he would judge entirely by its practical results, as even the Yonge and Hicks versions appear to admit when you read the passage in its entirety and consider the reference to circumstances.

I am being called away so can't write longer right now, but my view is that in general whenever a translator or commentator is pushing the idea that Epicurus held a "bright line" rule against any type of pleasure, that commentator is letting their Stoicism show, because Epicurus has

clearly stated that all pleasure is good and therefore desirable, and the choice of whether to engage in any activity is always going to come down to individual circumstances.

So while I do doubt Bailey's support of Epicurus in a significant number of instances - he was very clear that he thought Epicurean ethics were deficient - I think that this is one passage that Bailey's version is to be preferred.