

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

Post by "Cassius" of January 28, 2020 at 8:14 AM

So in my view while Chilton's conclusion is wrong, his info on what the text really says is helpful, and it is easy to explain why he is so eager to follow Gassendi and emend the text. Why? Here it is! Chilton is a devotee of the "freedom from pain" through a life lived as a minimalist school!!!

Mike this is the never-ending theme. if you think Epicurus was a coward leading the charge to escape all pain, then you will interpret him one way. If you think he was a courageous conqueror leading the charge against false religion in the pursuit of pleasure as nature teaches it, then you interpret him totally differently.

Scratch the surface of any negative portrayal of Epicurus and you'll find this 'absence of pain' / ataraxia analysis. Of course in the eyes of the people making this argument, they think this is a Positive! How do we take sides? How can we logically decide which course of life is correct? The answer isn't found in logic - the answer is found in **feeling**!

But here is Chilton taking the same old minimalist perspective calculated to appeal to the stoic-minded disposition:

of the present and our hopes for the future, by pursuing self-sufficiency (*αὐταρκεία* – *Sent. Vat.* 77), and by refusing to give hostages to fortune (*Sent. Vat.* 47). It would certainly seem more consistent with this attitude

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to recommend abstention from marriage and the responsibilities of fathering a family than to advise assuming them – especially for the σοφός. It may be admitted that there is evidence that Epicurus himself was very fond of children (though the famous letter to[N]απεία may not be his after all); *Sent. Vat.* 61 may be a mild word of praise for the security of family life, and *Sent. Vat.* 62 contains shrewd advice to children on how to keep the peace when parents are annoyed. But *Sent. Vat.* 51 is a bitter attack on sex, and the concluding sentence of it, slightly altered, are the words immediately preceding this present passage: *συνουσίη δέ, φασίν, ὤνησε μὲν οὐδέποτε, ἀγαπητὸν δὲ εἰ μὴ καὶ ἐβλάψε.*

I am aware of another article on this point by Tad Brennan, of King's college, London (he is a Brit so you know where this is going - toward the Stoic view). Brennan follows Gassendi and says the text should be changed to suit his disposition toward Epicurus, but here is the final paragraph, where he admits that even though he agrees that the first sentence should be changed so as to have Epicurus advise against marriage and children generally, he (Brennan) also admits that "nothing in the structure of Epicurean hedonism could justify the blanket prohibition." Too bad he didn't follow that observation in the rest of his article!

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The evidence of the will thus coheres with our emendation of the text, and with the earlier alteration of Καὶ μὴν to Καὶ μηδέ or Οὐδέ μὴν. All of these passages support the view that Epicurus was on record as advising, in general, against marriage and childrearing. But he also clearly thought that there were exceptions that justified both institutions, at least for certain Epicureans. And he was on record as saying this, too—perhaps in explicit comments in theoretical treatises, but at least through the contents of his will—so that later Epicureans had to incorporate this into their account of the master's views. I think that they were right to do so; nothing in the structure of Epicurean hedonism could justify the blanket prohibition.¹⁹

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So he ends up realizing that nothing in the structure of Epicurean hedonism could justify a blanket prohibition on marriage and children, yet he is willing to change the text to put virtually exactly those words in the mouth of Epicurus!

THIS, Mike, is what we are facing, and why we have to dig into the text background ourselves.