

VS11 - Translation and Commentary: VS 11

Post by "Don" of March 12, 2020 at 12:28 AM

τῶν πλείστων ἀνθρώπων τὸ μὲν ἡσυχάζον ναρκᾶ, τὸ δὲ κινούμενον λυττᾶ.

This is an interesting fragment. It's import, at least for me, was not initially apparent. Then I read the other thread in this topic and became intrigued. If we dive into the original Greek, we find some interesting things. To take the first phrase:

τῶν πλείστων ἀνθρώπων

simply means "the greatest number of people" or "the majority of people." So, what we're going to be discussing are most people, not a select few, i.e., not sages, not Epicureans, but the hoi polloi.

μὲν and **δὲ** simply connect phrases and can in some senses be translated something like "On the one hand... on the other hand..." or just "but." It sets up a contrast. So, let's take the other two phrases without them.

τὸ ἡσυχάζον ναρκᾶ

"Being still, being at rest, being quiet is '**ναρκᾶ**'" which means "numbness, deadness, to be in a stupor." Consider that **ναρκᾶ narka** is related to English "narcotic" and "narcolepsy."

τὸ κινούμενον λυττᾶ.

Consider the meanings of **κινούμενον**, the participle form of the verb **κινέω**:

- to set in motion, move, remove
- (grammar) to inflect
- to meddle
- to change, innovate
- to begin, cause
- to urge on, stir on
- to arouse, exasperate, anger, taunt, abuse
- (passive) to be moved, to stir, to move

So "being in motion, moving (contrasting with **τὸ ἡσυχάζον**) is '**λυττᾶ**'" which connotes "rage, fury; mania, raging madness; fanaticism" or even "rabies (of dogs)!" Again, this sets up a contrast with **ναρκᾶ**.

So, an alternative translation could be:

For the majority of people, being at rest is to be in a stupor and numb; but being active is to be raving like a rabid dog.

It seems to me to be saying that there needs to be a balance in rest and activity or that stillness isn't seen to be important by most people. Implying that stillness and rest *are* important for the Epicureans. "Most people" think being still is like being under the effect of a narcotic (to put a modern twist on it). Additionally, when "most people" are active, they're just running around raving in a mania to be just simply doing something, they can't be alone with their own thoughts, they can't be still and taking pleasure in rest. Likewise, they can't take pleasure in activity either. They're just raging around manically like they have an advanced case of rabies!

[The Epicurus Wiki also has a good commentary on this saying.](#)