

Gosling & Taylor, The Greeks on Pleasure.

Post by "Don" of June 24, 2020 at 7:21 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

The more I read this Aristippus material, and our discussion of it, the more concerned I am about relying on the face value of Diogenes Laertius' interpretations...

While the additional details are interesting for us to know, they should not be allowed to take our eye off the main focus and things that ought to always be the main focus. For example, what did the Cyreniacs hold about:

1 = is there an afterlife?

2 = is there a supernatural creator / ruler?

3 = is there an absolute virtue?

4 = what did they teach about the senses and the nature of "truth" and "knowledge" and platonic forms or essences?

5 = is the universe infinite and eternal, is the earth at the center of it, is there life elsewhere including higher beings?

... but the answers to these questions will have at least as much practical impact on general view of life and ways to pursue pleasure as will issues such as whether memories are pleasurable.

Display More

I think I see where [Cassius](#) is coming from, but I have almost the opposite reaction to Aristippus's chapter in DL.

I've always found it interesting that DL ends his entire work with Epicurus's [Principal Doctrines](#). He even writes:

Quote

Come, then, let me set the seal, so to say, on my entire work as well as on this philosopher's life by citing his *Sovran Maxims*, therewith bringing the whole work to a close and making the end of it to coincide with the beginning of happiness.

which suggests to me that DL was either positively inclined toward Epicurus or was at least not hostile. My impression had always been that DL is basically a compiler, pulling in anecdotes

that interest him from disparate sources with an editorial sentiment similar to Herodotus (the historian, not the recipient of Epicurus's letter) with a "some people say this, others say that..." way of reporting his findings. Overall, I don't see a Stoic/Platonic bias. I admit I need to be read more DL chapters, so please feel free to point me to passages that reflect that if I miss them.

The other thing I think is interesting about the Aristippus chapter (Note: DL gives Epicurus a whole *book*) is that it compares and contrasts two philosophies giving paramount importance to pleasure. Seeing how Aristippus prioritizes pleasure gives us a window into what Epicurus was up against when he was formulating his own philosophy. What did he agree with Aristippus about? What did he disagree? I think this is important to understand how pleasure fits into each of their worldviews. Maybe some of us are actually Cyrenaics? Maybe seeing Aristippus's perspective strengthens our commitment to Epicurus's novel approach (at the time) in seeing memories as part of pleasure?

The five details that [Cassius](#) lays out are important, but I think understanding what role pleasure had in each of these two philosophies is even more important. This was an argument taking place at the founding of the philosophy of life we purport to follow. Knowing how that philosophy came to be - and how its tenets were formed - is the most important thing in my opinion. DL provides a window - ever so slightly open - into that foundation and history.