

The Tetrpharmakon - Sound Epicurean Doctrine, or Oversimplification?

Post by "Cassius" of December 8, 2020 at 3:41 PM

Yes it does look promising - it at least seems to entertain that the formulation is "simplistic" -- I too will see what I can do with Google Translate:

1245 / 5000

Translation results

The hypothesis of the orthodoxy of the tetrpharmakos, which is based on the proximity of these four elements to the content of Men. 133 and MC I-IV, is almost universally accepted today; most editors, translators and commentators on Epicurus spontaneously reconcile these different testimonies and assume that the tetrpharmakos is well understood directly, as well in Men. 133 than in MC I-IV18. Comparetti¹⁹, Usener²⁰, Crönert²¹ and Bignone²² are probably at the origin of this reading, because, from the appearance of the first critical ecdotic works on Epicureanism, they defended not only the hypothesis of an orthodoxy of the tetrpharmakos, but that of an invention of the formula by Epicurus himself. However, according to Sbordone, the only dissenting voice, it is on the contrary an oversimplification operated by little seasoned Epicureans, who are in the text of the PHERC. 1005 the adversaries of Philodemus 23. This uncertainty is linked to the very poor condition of the papyrus concerned, and in particular to the enormous gap in the title; from this gap, a Sbordone will thus have postulated a Against the Sophists, where Marcello Gigante and his suite Anna Angeli rather suppose an Aux Amis de l'Ecole²⁴.

The consensual reading of the text, since the edition of Anna Angeli²⁵, is based on two elements: on the one hand, the fact that Philodemus himself does not attribute the tetrpharmakos to Epicurus; on the other hand, and contrary to what Sbordone supposed, the hypothesis which he defends in the Πρὸς τοὺς [... the thesis according to which it remains a correct and exact formula, in accordance with the spirit of the ethics of 'Epicurus. The claim made by Philodemus, to which he does not seem absolutely hostile, is a claim of orthodoxy; In any case, this is strongly suggested by the legible elements in the whole of the preserved part of the treaty²⁶. It is then necessary to understand with a little more subtlety what makes Philodemus cautious with regard to this statement. The question, as we will see, is not so much content as it is method; and it will shed suggestive light on the very teaching of ethics within the Garden, and on the question of the relationship between short speeches and long speeches.

The Πρὸς τοὺς [...] is probably addressed or alluded to Epicureans who do not commit errors, strictly speaking, but who do not have a very clear conception of the relation which unites the abstracts of the doctrine to its full developments. It is therefore a question of inviting them to make fair use of each of these media, that is to say to start not being satisfied with the abstracts; but it also means knowing how to use them without fear when the opportunity arises, and not to doubt them. Epicureanism is working and deepening; a true epicurean cannot therefore be satisfied with the tetrpharmakos or any other epitome and must only resort to it when the case presents itself without risk of caricature or confusion. Philodemus thus allusively reports controversies created by ignorance of the details of the Epicurean doctrine; to be able on the one hand not to be intimidated by incomplete refutations, on the other hand to respond effectively, research in books is essential.

This kind of controversy seems to have blossomed during an important part of the Garden's life, as an echo of this disputed practice of abstracts is found in another scroll in Herculaneum's library, the PHerc. 1044, which alludes to the activity of a certain Philonides who is said to have produced a large quantity of these summaries. To take up the completely suggestive but perhaps somewhat forced translation of Koch Piettre²⁷, these books are supposed to have been composed "to serve lazy young people" (νεοῖς ἀργοῖς ὠφελίμους).

Mais, dans le Πρὸς τοὺς [...] de Philodème, on lit également ceci:

(col. XVI) [- - -] δ [ύ] ναῦ [ται] μ [έν] τοῖς [β] υβλίοις παρακολουθεῖν οἱ καὶ τετυ [χ] ὅτες ἀγωγῆς Ἑλλησι καὶ [ο] ὑ [Πέρσαις] πρεπούσης καὶ παι [δευθέ] ντες ἐν μ [α] θημασι, δι [δά] σκουσι καὶ [τ] ἀ τῶν ἐπιτετηδευκότων ἀσάφειαν ἐξευρίσκειν καὶ ὁμοειδῆ γ ', εἰ μηδὲν ἕτερον, ἐκ παιδίου μέχρι γήρωσ φ [ι] λοσοφήσαντες καὶ τοσαῦτα καὶ τοιαῦτα ταῖς ἀκριβεῖαις συντεθεικότες · ο [ι] δὲ δουλεύσαντες ἐργατικῶς ἢ ἀνάγ [ω] γοι καὶ γράμματα μὴ μ [α] θόντες [---

28 Πρὸς τοὺς [...] col. XVI, trad. Delattre & Monet 2010, p. 739.

Women are more likely to pay attention to books, as they are, because they have the opportunity to attend a school that is owned by the Greeks, not by [...], and are formed in school disciplines, explicitly just for men who are occupied by the elixir which is obscure. It has been studied by philosophers - from infancy to life - from similar observations of the moon, to the choice of others, or to the composition of very numerous and very interesting scripts by their precision. In revenge, those who are enslaved and accomplished through work, or who are deprived of education, and who are not free to write and write, [...] 28.

This passage may be the start of a well-reasoned defense of the use of abstracts for a certain type of audience. Philodemus distinguishes here, not two categories of philosophical texts, but two categories of people: the scholars, who having studied "as philosophers" - and it will be noted that here the philosophical activity is defined as a school activity - are in able to make useful use of the vast developments which elucidate what is obscure in a detailed fashion, and laymen who, due to their condition of laborious existence, cannot have any bookish approach. Such a distinction can open the way to two kinds of argument: an apologetic argument, which will take the defense of the type of philosophical support adapted to this second uneducated public - the summary or the memorizable and simple formula being all indicated for the slave who does not know how to read but who nevertheless has the right to access a happy life; or

else an aristocratic argument intended to limit philosophy to this first cultivated public, the only one capable of understanding it - and which in the context of Πρὸς τοὺς ... leads to ridicule those who, although having by education and social status the possibility to read and study philosophy at school, refuse to do so - to be honest, the young idle smokers denounced according to Koch Piettre in the PHERC. 1044. This second argument is possible - and it is the one retained by the most recent French translators of this text, Daniel Delattre and Annick Monet; it nevertheless seems a bit problematic to us if we take into account the general posture of Epicureanism, a philosophy that aims to be popular and which is being built in the mouth of Epicurus against the training program of classical paideia²⁹. We should therefore see perhaps a little irony in this passage from Philodemus, and in the description of these apprentice philosophers bent over their grimoires and strictly occupied in understanding the letter of an obscure text. In reality, the full argument of Philodemus's text is very subtle, since what we can read about it indicates at least three demonstrative tracks:

the need for a real deepening of the doctrine (not to be satisfied with anthologies or summaries);

the defense of the texts of the first Epicureans, even though their detail would contradict recent philosophical developments, and the need not to question the entire corpus because some books appear doubtful; ³⁰ Cf. the different occurrences of συμμετρία, Πρὸς τοὺς [... col. XVIII, 3 and XX, 4.

taking into account the different social and intellectual situations, which gives its proper place to each type of writing, summary or detailed. From this perspective, the abstracts are valid "to a fair extent³⁰" as long as they are used wisely and without claiming to replace the developed texts.

²¹The tetrapharmakos, despite its extreme concentration, then remains a valid statement if and only if it can be linked at one time or another in philosophical practice, or to the already somewhat more consistent form it takes in the Maxims, or, even better, to a complete and reasoned ethical presentation. But, for want of anything better, it remains a solid basis for Epicureans who are temporarily in situations that are not very appropriate for a school philosophical practice.

I am going to tag [Charles](#) here to be sure he catches this part of the article.