

The Tetrpharmakon - Sound Epicurean Doctrine, or Oversimplification?

Post by "Cassius" of December 12, 2020 at 8:14 AM

This point of Don's stuck in my mind and I want to come back to it:

[Quote from Don](#)

Sbordone tries to say the title of PHerc 1005 is Pros Tous Sophistas "Against the Sophists" but he is blue-skying that last word. The final word of the title on the papyrus is missing, torn off. All that's there is Pros Tous... ΠΡΟΣ ΤΟΥΣ... "Against/To The..." To imply otherwise is disingenuous. Angeli leaves the title alone if I remember correctly. That's why I'm a little mistrustful of Sbordone.

As to Sbordone's use of "Sophists" -- I've never been able to get my mind around just what is meant by "sophists." The word and usage seems all over the board, and I get the impression that "sophism" has come to be a catch-all label for anyone a writer disagrees with. For example, this from the sophism page at wikipedia says Socrates was labeled a sophist:

Criticism

Many sophists taught their skills for a price. Due to the importance of such skills in the litigious social life of Athens, practitioners often commanded very high fees. The sophists' practice of questioning the existence and roles of traditional deities and investigating into the nature of the heavens and the earth prompted a popular reaction against them. The attacks of some of their followers against [Socrates](#) prompted a vigorous condemnation from his followers, including [Plato](#) and [Xenophon](#), as there was a popular view of Socrates as a sophist. For example, in the comic playwright [The Clouds](#), [Aristophanes](#) criticizes the sophists as hairsplitting wordsmiths, and makes Socrates their representative.^[9] Their attitude, coupled with the wealth garnered by many of the sophists, eventually led to popular resentment against sophist practitioners and the ideas and writings associated with sophism.

My point in posting this is that Sbordone may be blue-skying the title of the work, but it *would* be useful for us to have an acceptable name for the scroll. It sounds like indeed that the topic was something about being against those who misunderstand or misapply Epicurus, so what would be a good way to refer to this one other than perhaps by number so that we can carry on an ongoing discussion about it in the future? If not "Against Sophism" (and I agree that is probably not a good idea given the ambiguity of the word) then what? I would expect that using

"Sophists" misleads us into thinking that he is attacking primarily members of another school, when in fact it sounds like the topic is an "attack" - some of which is probably friendly - on Epicureans who he thinks could be doing a better job teaching the philosophy.

Given that the work indeed seems to be attacking errors in Epicurean philosophy, that would be something important to know about the source of the "tetrapharmakon."

For example it seems to me this is a fair sentence: "The only known source for the tetrapharmakon is a work by Philodemus which attacks oversimplifications and misapplications of Epicurean philosophy."