PD10 - Interpretations of PD 10 Discussion

Post by “Don” of January 16, 2021 at 9:20 PM

Here is my initial response to your posts above. Please let me know if I misunderstood or misinterpret anything you wrote :

I think this Doctrine is neither counterfactual nor hypothetical. I think Epicurus is saying exactly what he means to say.

I interpret it to be Epicurus's concrete observation as to the inadequacy of pursuing a life of "sex, drugs, & rock n roll" (to use a shorthand) if one wants to lead a pleasurable life. The "profligate" life provides momentary pleasure but will lead to multiple pains in short order. You are welcome to pursue those pleasures, but Epicurus is not going to encourage or sanction your choice. Not all pleasures should be chosen.

I believe this Doctrine was also a direct counter to any criticism of his school of just being Cyrenaic. He needed to give a firm rebuttal to those who painted the Epicureans with the same brush as the Cyrenaics. It is also my contention that this is the purpose of the Letter to Menoikeus section:

> Quote
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> So when we say that pleasure is the goal, we do not mean the pleasures of decadent people or the enjoyment of sleep, as is believed by those who are ignorant or who don't understand us or who are ill-disposed to us, but to be free from bodily pain and mental disturbance. For a pleasant life is produced not by drinking and endless parties and enjoying boys and women and consuming fish and other delicacies of an extravagant table, but by sober reasoning, searching out the cause of everything we accept or reject, and driving out opinions that cause the greatest trouble in the soul.

This again is Epicurus saying exactly what he means to say: "*We do NOT mean the pleasures of decadent people (ἄσωτος).*" He uses the same word to refer to those people in both the Letter and PD 10. He clearly says "a pleasant life is produced NOT by [that lifestyle] but by sober reasoning, searching out the cause of everything we accept or reject, and driving out opinions that cause the greatest trouble in the soul." In the Letter, "sober reasoning" translates νήφων λογισμὸς "nēphōn logismos" where nēphōn literally means “to be sober; to drink no wine; to be self-controlled.” That he uses drinking to say what does not produce a pleasurable life, then says being sober does produce a pleasurable life seems to link those two opposing clauses together. One negative, one positive.

To address Elayne specifically, I'm not saying Epicurus is advocating a middle path. I don't believe he has any problem with drinking per se (he wrote a book entitled Symposium after all) but just getting drunk and acting there fool, or with sex (he cannot conceive of the good without it), etc. But a life consisting solely of these specific decadent pleasures taken to extremes will not teach one to lead a pleasurable life.

> Quote from Cassius
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> Anyone who looks at PD10 and insists on saying that the profligate man "cannot" be successful, and analyzing it that way, is in my view not accepting this as the hypothetical it seems clearly intended to be.

So then to finally address your quote here, Cassius , I do not accept that this is a hypothetical and don't believe it should be interpreted that way.