

Epicurean philosophy vs. Stoicism in public popularity

Post by "Cassius" of March 20, 2021 at 1:24 AM

Yes welcome to the conversation Protonus....! You're dropping in as you can probably tell on a long-running sparring over some of these issues, even though I think we are very largely in agreement.

However I pick out these two quotes to make a particular point:

[Quote from Don](#)

Virtuous activity and the degree to which it's carried out is always relative to the situation and context. Stoics would say that.

[Quote from Don](#)

Anyone who says that being 100% truthful at all times is living in a utopian fantasy.

I certainly agree with the second, but I do think that that is exactly what the Stoics would urge, and thus that the first of these two quotes is not historically correct. It is my understanding of the Stoics that they DID view virtue as something that was absolute, and thus to be applied regardless of context. It's my understanding that they thought that there was a way to define all of the virtues, especially courage, wisdom, justice, etc -- in a way that did apply to everyone all the time and everywhere, regardless of circumstance. Of course I believe it's pretty easy to show that that is foolish (as in the example of lying to the burglar or murderer) but it's my understanding that they took the position that one would not lie even under those circumstances. They (and I think the Platonists and Aristotelians too) did seem to think that due to their theological view of the universe that it was possible to identify virtue as an absolute ideal, and so this is a stark and important point that has to always be kept in mind.

Unless I am shown that I need to revise my understanding of the Stoics or others on this point I think that I'm probably correct, and this isn't just a minor point but perhaps why we keep sparring over [PD10](#). Truly I think that Epicurus held that the word virtue and all of its particular instances has NO MEANING unless it actually leads to pleasure, so he basically held the word to be without content except as defined in a particular circumstance, which is exactly what the Stoics et al fought against --- they refused to accept modifications of their ideals based on context, and would have considered the very idea to be blasphemous.