

Diogenes Laertius on Epicurean Ethics

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 1, 2021 at 1:36 PM

Has there been any analysis on Diogenes Laertius section on Ethics? I found a translation that is different than one you have here on the forum.

Quote

Epicurean ethics

But as to the conduct of life, what we ought to avoid and what to choose, he writes as follows. Before quoting his words, however, let me go into the views of Epicurus himself and his school concerning the wise man.

There are three motives to injurious acts among men—hatred, envy, and contempt; and these the wise man overcomes by reason. Moreover, he who has once become wise never more assumes the opposite habit, not even in semblance, if he can help it. He will be more susceptible of emotion than other men: that will be no hindrance to his wisdom. However, not every bodily constitution nor every nationality would permit a man to become wise.

Even on the rack the wise man is happy. He alone will feel gratitude towards friends, present and absent alike, and show it by word and deed. When on the rack, however, he will give vent to cries and groans. As regards women he will submit to the restrictions imposed by the law, as Diogenes says in his epitome of Epicurus' ethical doctrines. Nor will he punish his servants; rather he will pity them and make allowance on occasion for those who are of good character

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Epicureans do not suffer the wise man to fall in love; nor will he trouble himself about funeral rites; according to them love does not come by divine inspiration: so Diogenes in his twelfth book. The wise man will not make fine speeches. No one was ever the better for sexual indulgence, and it is well if he be not the worse.

Nor, again, will the wise man marry and rear a family—so Epicurus says in the *Problems* and in the *On Nature*. Occasionally he may marry owing to special circumstances in his life. Some too will turn aside from their purpose. Nor will he drivel, when drunken: so Epicurus says in the *Symposium*. Nor will he take part in politics, as is stated in the first book *On Life*; nor will he make himself a tyrant; nor will he turn Cynic (so the second book *On Life* tells us); nor will he be a mendicant.

But even when he has lost his sight, he will not withdraw himself from life: this is stated in the same book. The wise man will also feel grief, according to Diogenes in the fifth book of his *Epilecta*. And he will take a suit into court. He will leave written words behind him, but will not compose panegyric. He will have regard to his property and to the future.

He will be fond of the country. He will be armed against fortune and will never give up a friend. He will pay just so much regard to his reputation as not to be looked down upon. He will take more delight than other men in public festivals.

The wise man will set up votive images. Whether he is well off or not will be matter of indifference to him. Only the wise man will be able to converse correctly about music and poetry, without however actually writing poems himself. One wise man does not move more wisely than another. And he will make money, but only by his wisdom, if he should be in poverty, and he will pay court to a king, if need be. He will be grateful to anyone when he is corrected.

He will found a school, but not in such a manner as to draw the crowd after him; and will give readings in public, but only by request. He will be a dogmatist but not a mere skeptic; and he will be like himself even when asleep. And he will on occasion die for a friend.

The school holds that sins are not all equal; that health is in some cases a good, in others a thing indifferent; that courage is not a natural gift but comes from calculation of expediency; and that friendship is prompted by our needs. One of the friends, however, must make the first advances (just as we have to cast seed into the earth), but it is maintained by a partnership in the enjoyment of life's pleasures.

Two sorts of happiness can be conceived, the one the highest possible, such as the gods enjoy, which cannot be augmented, the other admitting addition and subtraction of pleasures.

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