

Why Parrhesia is Necessary

Post by “Matt” of December 29, 2021 at 2:06 PM

When dealing with friends, family and even philosophical adversaries alike, it is sometimes important to employ parrhesia. This doesn't mean that we use it unnecessarily but rather with prudent judgment.

Parrhesia is coupled with suavity, suavity can help make the “bitter medicine” go down. But many times it is important to be frank about certain matters to avoid confusion.

Say for instance you know that a person's cherished beliefs or behaviors will lead them into danger or error, is it better to obfuscate the situation by non-confrontational speech? Or would you be direct? Depending on the immediacy of danger you may need to be very direct. Coupling parrhesia with suavity will help this situation in that explaining that though the discussion may be direct and harsh, you do this because you “care for or love” the person involved and you let them know this fact.

Again we don't use parrhesia all the time and for every situation. We do however use it often against antagonistic philosophical adversaries. In this realm suavity is still recommended to preserve a person's standing and perception, however it's not required. If an adverse person continues to harangue you with their position, you have every right to be “frank” with them. This is why it is again to have prudent judgement in that you know which battles to get into and what hills you are willing to die on. Many arguments are not fruitful and not worth the energy and will only be unpleasant. But there are times that an Epicurean will run up against a staunch religionist, stoic or any myriad of believer in other philosophies and that Epicurean will need to defend their position.

Going head first into a fight with stoics, Buddhists, Vedantists, Islamists, etc. isn't wise especially if you are the one in the minority, but sometimes it can be a good way to spread Epicurean thought among those who have never heard of Epicurus. But sloggng it out online isn't usually fruitful and the effort will be wasted.

Just like the ancient world, the modern world is not always friendly and pleasant place. There are always people that will hate your philosophy for what it represents, it's been this way for over two millennia. It's critical to know how and when to defend it. Be brave, be wise and use prudent judgement. Parrhesia is a hard fought freedom use it well!