

AFDIA - Chapter Two - Text and Discussion

Post by “Cassius” of February 5, 2022 at 7:48 AM

Chapter Two Philosophical Highlights:

- Epicurus jokes with his friends that he himself likes Theon, but when they immediately say that Epicurus' opinion is enough for them, he rebukes them and says they are fools if they don't use their own eyes ears and understandings rather than trusting his. All this is said in good humor.

- Introduction of Leontium as a mature woman rather than paragon of youthful beauty. She is reading a treatise of Theophrastus, leader of the Aristotelian school, and she is not happy with it and wants to answer it. She remarks that she resists it because she finds it overbearing.

"For, indeed, the mode of delivering a truth makes, for the most part, as much impression on the mind of the listener, as the truth itself. It is as hard to receive the words of wisdom from the ungentle, as it is to love, or even to recognize virtue in the austere."

"Whether the vicious were more justly objects of indignation or of contempt: Metrodorus argued for the first, and I for the latter. Let the master decide." Epicurus responds: "Neither" ... "It has yet a third; and I hardly ever heard a question that had not. Had I regarded the vicious with indignation, I had never gained one to virtue. Had I viewed them with contempt, I had never sought to gain one."

- On the right to free opinion: "Talk not of presumption, my son. Who has not a right to think for himself? Or, who is he whose voice is infallible, and worthy to silence those of his fellow men? "

- [Time] "as he leads us gently onwards in the path of life, demonstrates to us many truths that we never heard in the schools, and some that, hearing there, we found hard to receive. Our knowledge of human life must be acquired by our passage through it; the lessons of the sage are not sufficient to impart it. Our knowledge of men must be acquired by our own study of them; the report of others will never convince us. When you, my son, have seen more of life, and studied more men, you will find, or, at least, I think you will find, that the judgment is not false which makes us lenient to the failings — yea! even to the crimes of our fellows. In youth, we act on the impulse of feeling, and we feel without pausing to judge. An action, vicious in itself, or that is so merely in our estimation, fills us with horror, and we turn from its agent without waiting to listen to the plea which his ignorance could make to our mercy. In our ripened years, supposing our judgment to have ripened also, when all the insidious temptations that misguided him, and all the disadvantages that he has labored under, perhaps-from his birth, are apparent to us — it is then, and not till then, that our indignation at the crime is lost in our pity of the man."

- An Epicurean view of compassion? "But you will say, that there are qualities of so mean or so horrible a nature, as to place the man that is governed by them out of the pale of communion with the virtuous. Malice, cruelty, deceit, ingratitude — crimes such as these, should, you think, draw down upon those convicted of them, no feelings more mild than abhorrence, execration, and scorn. And yet, perhaps, these were not always natural to the heart they now sway. Fatal impressions, vicious example, operating on the plastic frame of childhood, may have perverted all the fair gifts of nature, may have distorted the tender plant from the seedling, and crushed all the blossoms of virtue in the germ. Say, shall we not compassionate the moral disease of our brother, and try our skill to restore him to health? But is the evil beyond cure? Is the mind strained into changeless deformity, and the heart corrupted in the core? Greater, then, much greater will be our compassion. For is not his wretchedness complete, when his errors are without hope of correction? Oh, my sons! the wicked may work mischief to others, but they never can inflict a pang such as they endure themselves. I am satisfied, that of all the miseries that tear the heart of man, none may compare with those it feels beneath the sway of baleful passions.""

- On the lure of Stoicism: ""Oh," cried Theon, turning with a timid blush towards Epicurus, "I have long owned the power of virtue, but surely till this night I never felt its persuasion."

"I see you were not born for a stoic," said the master, smiling, "Why, my son, what made you fall in love with Zeno?"

"His virtues," said the youth, proudly.

"His fine face and fine talking," returned the philosopher, with a tone of playful irony.

- On the irreconcilable war between Stoicism and Epicurus:

"Oh, that Zeno knew you!"

"And then he would certainly hate me."

"You joke."

"Quite serious. Don't you know that who quarrels with your doctrine, must always quarrel with your practice? Nothing is so provoking as that a man should preach viciously and act virtuously."

"But you do not preach viciously."

"I hope not. But those will call it so, aye! and in honest heart think it so, who preach a different, it need not be a better, doctrine."

"But Zeno mistakes your doctrine."

"I have no doubt he expounds it wrong."

“He mistakes it altogether. He believes that you own no other law — no other principle of action — than pleasure.”

“He believes right.”