

Compassion in Epicurean Philosophy

Post by “Joshua” of February 7, 2022 at 8:13 PM

Quote

Am I forgetting any passage that would justify exactly calling friendship "the greatest pleasure"?

Your suggestion is quite right, Cassius; the formulation I used above is 'stuck in my head', as it were, and I would not be able to cite a source for it. Perhaps the answer lies in translation, or modern commentary, or my own internal phrasing. *Pleasure* is the good, full stop!

As we go through the above citations, it will become important to consider exactly what is meant by the term *friendship*. I have no opinion on that just now, but it is something to think about. On that note, we turn next to Diogenes of Oenoanda!

Please bear in mind that the inscription (translated by Martin Ferguson Smith) is very fragmentary; Even when whole, the inscription was more "arranged" than written. Many of the passages were quotations in whole or in part from early Epicurean works. A few come from Epicurus' surviving letters; a few from Diogenes' own letters, for he was evidently active in a 'community' of Epicureans, or so it seems from the text. A great many more that *appear* to be quotations come from Epicurean books or maxims that have otherwise been lost to history.

Quote

In this way, [citizens], even though I am not engaging in public affairs, I say these things through the inscription just as if I were taking action, and in an endeavour to prove that what benefits our nature, namely freedom from disturbance, is identical for one and all.

And so, having described the second reason for the inscription, I now go on to mention my mission and to explain its character and nature.

Having already reached the sunset of my life (being almost on the verge of departure from the world on account of old age), I wanted, before being overtaken by death, to compose a [fine] anthem [to celebrate the] fullness [of pleasure] and so to help now those who are well-constituted.

Quote

So (to reiterate what I was saying) observing that these people are in this predicament, I bewailed their behaviour and wept over the wasting of their lives, and I considered it the responsibility of a good man to give [benevolent] assistance, to the utmost of one's ability, to those of them who are well-constituted. [This] is the first reason [for the inscription].

Quote

[There are many who] pursue philosophy for the sake of [wealth and fame], with the aim of procuring these either from private individuals or from kings, by whom philosophy is deemed to be some great and precious possession.

Well, it is not in order to gain any of the above-mentioned objectives that we have embarked upon the same undertaking, but so that we may enjoy happiness through attainment of the goal craved by nature.

The identity of this goal and how neither wealth can furnish it, nor political fame, nor royal office, nor a life of luxury and sumptuous banquets, nor pleasures of choice love-affairs, nor anything else, while philosophy [alone can secure it], we [shall now explain after setting the whole question before you. For we have had this writing inscribed in public] not [for ourselves,] but [for you, citizens, so that we might render it available to all of you in an easily accessible form without oral instruction.] And ... you ...

Quote

and we contrived this in order that, even while [sitting at] home, [we might be able to exhibit] the goods of philosophy, not to all people here [indeed], but to those of them who are civil-spoken; **and not least we did [this] for those who are called «foreigners,» though they are not really so. For, while the various segments of the earth give different people a different country, the whole compass of this world gives all people a single country, the entire earth, and a single home, the world**

Quote

I say both now and always, shouting out loudly to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that pleasure is the end of the best mode of life, while the virtues, which are inopportunately messed about by these people (being transferred from the place of the means to that of the end), are in no way an end, but the means to the end.

Quote

[So we shall not achieve wisdom universally], since not all are capable of it. But if we assume it to be possible, then truly the life of the gods will pass to men. For everything will be full of justice and mutual love, and there will come to be no need of fortifications or laws and all the things which we contrive on account of one another. As for the necessities derived from agriculture, since we shall have no slaves at that time (for indeed [we ourselves shall plough] and dig and tend [the plants] and [divert] rivers and watch over [the crops), we shall] ... such things as ... not ... time ..., and such activities, [in accordance with what is] needful, will interrupt the continuity of the [shared] study of philosophy; for [the] farming operations [will provide what our] nature wants.

Quote

... [all] men [are able to save] themselves, [with the help from us and to effect a complete dispersal of misfortunes affecting the soul (?) and to do away with disturbing emotions and fears].

Quote

It is not nature, which is the same for all, that makes people noble or ignoble, but their actions and dispositions.

Quote

[I am confident, as I address the inscription to you,] my friends, [that many will become healthy in soul. Why do I say this]? What in the world are [the remedies]? The [inscription], dearest friends, [will afford help both] to us [ourselves] and [to others]; for I produced it for the benefit of my fellow-citizens; and] I produced [it] above all [from a desire to help our descendants], in case [they should walk up and down this stoa, as well as showing myself benevolent towards those strangers among us [who are well constituted]. And being perfectly aware that it is through knowledge of matters, concerning both physics and the emotions, which I explained in the places below, that [tranquillity of mind comes about, I know well that I have advertised the remedies that bring salvation].

I have underlined the salient passages; key words that it might be useful to know the Greek translations of I have put into red. It might be worth mentioning in passing that Epicurus' name in Greek means *helper* or ally.