

AFDIA - Chapter Four - Text and Discussion

Post by "Cassius" of February 26, 2022 at 1:49 PM

Major Philosophical Points Of Chapter Four:

1. Pride need not always lead a man to cut mount Athos in two, like Xerxes; nor ambition, to conquer a world, and weep that there is yet not another to conquer, like Alexander; nor vanity, to look in a stream at his own face till he fall in love with it, like Narcissus. When we cannot cut an Athos, we may leave uncut our beard; when we cannot mount a throne, we may crawl into a tub; and when we have no beauty, we may increase our ugliness. If a man of small, or even of moderate talents, be smitten with a great desire of distinction, there is nothing too absurd, perhaps nothing too mischievous, for him too commit. Our friend, the cynic, happily for himself and his neighbors, seems disposed to rest with the absurd. Erostratus took to the mischievous — to eternize his name destroying that temple, by the building of which Etesiphon immortalized his. Be it our care to keep equally clear of the one as the other."
2. "The desire of distinction, though often a dangerous, and often an unhappy desire, is likewise often, though I believe here sometimes were a better word, a fortunate one. It is dangerous in the head of a fool; unhappy, in that of a man of moderate abilities, or unfavorable situation, who can conceive a noble aim, but lacks the talent or the means necessary for its attainment. It is fortunate only in the head of a genius, the heart of a sage, and in a situation convenient for its development and gratification. These three things you will allow do not often meet in one person."
3. " The fate of greatness will always be enviable, even when the darkest storms trouble its course. Well-merited fame has in itself a pleasure so much above all pleasures, that it may weigh in the balance against all the accumulated evils of mortality. Grant, then, our great men to have been fortunate; are they, as you say, so many? Alas! my son, we may count them on our fingers. A generation, the most brilliant in genius, leaves out of its thousands and millions but three or four, or a dozen, to the worship, even to the knowledge of futurity.""
4. "No," said Leontium, playfully tapping his shoulder, "the master will make a distinction between what is beyond the reach of our capacity, and what beyond the reach of our practice. Erostratus might never have planned the edifice he destroyed; Ctesiphon could not always have planned it."
5. "I see you have a good memory," returned the master. "I did say so, and I think it still. Many might have been heroes, and many philosophers, had they had a desire to be either; had accident or ambition made them look into themselves, and inquire into their powers; but though jewels be hid in a sack of oats, they will never be found, unless the oats be shaken. Remember, however, we are now speaking of one class of men only —the ambitious; and the ambitious will never have any seeds in them, bad or good, that will not generate and produce their proper fruit. Ambition is the spur, and the necessary

spur of a great mind to great action; when acting upon a weak mind it impels it to absurdity, or sours it with discontent."