

Philodemus' "On Anger" - General - Texts and Resources

Post by "Cassius" of April 1, 2022 at 5:49 PM

In terms of commentary, the Preface helpfully suggests that those wanting an immediate overview should refer to sections 4 and 5 of the Introduction. I see that section 3 discusses the prior position of Plato and Aristotle, so that looks good too.

Here is a good baseline for comparison with the stoics: The Stoics held that there is no such thing as any kind of rational or natural anger, and this will be different from the Epicurean position, who are apparently going to focus on "vengeance" as a bad thing, but who don't consider all types of anger as bad:

So by the five words of the Stoic definition, taken in their Stoic meanings, Aristotle's view is systematically negated. There is no such thing as rational or natural anger for the Stoics. That, in fact, is the only aspect of their position that is explicitly mentioned in the surviving parts of *On Anger*. Philodemus asks his Epicurean opponent Nicasirates, who wanted to avoid even natural anger to the extent possible, if he is not merely abandoning their school's position to "those who take away anger entirely from the sage" (39.23-25). These can only be the Stoics.⁹⁵

And this is what I expected to find - the Epicurean will take action against the offender (of course this is commentary, so we need the backup to confirm):

ON THE SAGES...
The Epicureans had more to say about harm. Epicurus said that "harms from other people come about because of hatred, envy, or scorn, and the sage gets round these by reasoning and reflection."⁹⁶ The sage, however virtuous and friendly, may be the object of hatred, envy, or scorn from those who do not respond rationally to her good behavior, and thus she may be in danger of harm. By *logismos*, she can learn to avoid the harm that may result from those people. Nonetheless, if others intentionally harm her, she

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can and will inflict punishment on them to deter them and others from acting similarly in the future, whenever this is a practical option.

I don't know that I agree with the following in its opinion that "punishment for harm done is itself not harm..." -- it may be simply that the harm done to the offender is justified -- I would expect this to be an issue of definitions of "harm"

The sage is entitled to do this because of the Epicurean view of natural justice (τὸ τῆς φύσεως δίκαιον), which is a sort of social contract, i.e. a "guarantee of mutual advantage, with a view to neither harming one another nor being harmed" (σύμβολον τοῦ συμφέροντος εἰς τὸ μὴ βλάπτειν ἀλλήλους μὴδὲ βλάπτεσθαι, KD 31).¹⁰⁶ As KD 31–37 argue, this agreement, after primitive societies arrive at it by reasoning from experience, becomes the foundation of justice and a normative guide to the development of laws. All just laws reflect this natural justice, developing it in further detail and clarifying its terms, and they can be adjusted as societies change and develop. There can be unjust laws, which hinder human nonaggression, and laws that are neutral from the point of view of justice, since they neither promote nor hinder it. Accordingly, members of human society, which is founded on a code based in this normative idea of justice, can expect that their good behavior will be matched by good behavior on the part of others. Punishment for harm done is itself not harm, but an attempt to restore justice and set an example for others. In the context of the *On Anger*, anger, in its full sense, requires an intentionally inflicted harm, that is, a damaging violation of just laws, which are those based in the foundational agreement not to harm or be harmed.