

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

Post by "Cassius" of April 1, 2022 at 6:00 PM

Couple more quotes from the Philodemus text:

From page 41 of the Armstrong book:

37.24–39: “the emotion itself, taken in isolation, is an evil, since it is painful or is analogous to something painful, but if taken in conjunction with one’s disposition, we think that it is something that may even be called a good. For it (anger) results from seeing what the nature of states of affairs is and from not having any false beliefs in our comparative calculations of our losses and in our punishments of those who harm us.”

From page 42:

Philodemus explicitly says in *On Anger* that anger is an evil that is “inescapable, and therefore called natural” (ἀνέκφευκτον καὶ διὰ τοῦτο φυσικὸν λεγόμενον, 39.29–31; cf. 40.18–26). It is something “most necessary and most unpleasant” (ἀναγκαϊότατον, ἀηδέστατον δέ, 44.19–21), and it cannot be entirely rejected by anyone. Natural anger can suit the third and fourth categories also: it is advantageous, since it prods the Epicurean to self-defense, 111 and it is so-called because the name has the characteristic of “first utterances” or “primal appellations”: “direct, one-to-one correspondence with their objects.” 112

From page 43 (this is commentary but apparently a high-level summary):

The main thrust of *On Anger*’s argument is that anger for its own sake is never compulsory merely because one supposes oneself intentionally harmed. In a person of reflective disposition, suppositions of intentional harm are always contextualized and submitted to *symmetrēsis*, which requires knowledge and experience of the world and the possible consequences of anger. Only these can tell us whether our anger is natural and whether we can punish the offender (see 37.32–39). If the answer is no, we can simply profess ourselves “alienated,” hate and avoid the person who wronged us, and drop the relationship (see 42.1–4); hatred and avoidance are available to the sage who has suffered harm but cannot punish the wrongdoer and guarantee her continuing security. If the answer is yes to both questions, then the anger becomes necessary and inescapable in a completely different way: it would be absurd not to punish the wrongdoer.

As we gain wisdom, anger does not disappear from our lives any more than grief or love, but it is more and more framed in protective layers of cognition and reflection; we are more likely to feel natural anger. Of course, there are various ways in which this ideal progression can go astray: most people do not have the calm and awareness of circumstances and causes that the

Epicurean sage does, and even sages can make mistakes. That said, a reflective and aware person, and the sage most of all, can reluctantly “accept” (ἀναδέχεσθαι) anger, however strong one’s resistance to it, and can certainly retaliate under the right conditions with confidence.