

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

Post by "Cassius" of April 2, 2022 at 1:27 PM

I've now read to the end of the preserved texts described in the book, and I am reminded of my usual caveat to the Philodemus material: In many cases the text is so damaged that it's little short of speculation to try to derive any meaning from it. Even longer sections that appear to be well preserved could in many cases be sections where opinions he is writing *against* are being stated.

But all in all I am impressed with what I read in the introductory and summary material. The authors are frank in their disagreement with what other authorities (such as Asmis) have written and construed from the material. It appears to me that I am personally in the unusual position of finding commentators (other than Dewitt) with whom I agree - Armstrong and McOsker seem to agree with my take that Epicurus was in many ways an "activist" and was much less a passivist as some (including Asmis) make him out to be. The introduction lays out these disagreements pretty clearly.

The conclusion of all this seems to be about as is stated on page 301 of the text (Column 46 of the roll):

So, then, having laid down these things on our own behalf and concerning us, with arguments that prove it, in support of there being a natural kind of anger, we have [indeed] replied *that the sage will become angry*.

(my emphasis on the last six words)

The main distinction seems to be that the wise person will in fact become angry when the situation calls for it, and will in fact act on his anger, but only after evaluating the situation coolly so as to determine if he does have the capacity to act in a way that will deter future conduct of the same sort. The other significant premise seems to be that the wise man will not let his anger turn into "rage," with the point apparently being that the wise man will feel his emotions deeply, but will not let those deeply-felt emotions interfere with his clear thinking.

All this may appear simple and straightforward enough, but it flies in the face of the Stoic or the "emotion-suppression" model that a lot of people seem to attribute to Epicurus. And it also flies in the face of the view that the Epicurean will above all avoid disturbance. But that should surprise no one, since it is elementary Epicurean doctrine from Menoecus that:

Quote

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2446-philodemus-on-anger-general-texts-and-resources/?postID=17420#post17420>

Every pleasure then because of its natural kinship to us is good, yet not every pleasure is to be chosen: even as every pain also is an evil, yet not all are always of a nature to be avoided. Yet by a scale of comparison and by the consideration of advantages and disadvantages we must form our judgment on all these matters. For the good on certain occasions we treat as bad, and conversely the bad as good.