

Identifying And Dealing With Significant Error / Mistakes in Ourselves (and Others)

Post by "Cassius" of April 21, 2022 at 9:38 AM

One of the passages that caught my attention in recent A Few Days In Athens Discussions was this one from Chapter Eight:

Quote

Prejudices, when once seen as prejudices, are easily yielded. The difficulty is to come at the knowledge of them. A thousand lectures had I read to myself, ere I could calmly say, upon all occasions, it does not follow that the thing is, because I think it is;....

First of all, I am not sure that I can identify a specific passage in the texts which support this point, but I do think it is a fair expansion of the discussions of how to separate the true from the false.

Secondly, this particular passage may be focused more on reasons to be slow to anger because of error, given that we all commit errors. But if carried too far this would lead to radical skepticism, but of course I don't think that she means that or that Epicurus would endorse that conclusion. The much more useful analysis would be to identify under what conditions we should hold our conclusions as firm, what conditions less firm, and how we tell the difference.

But I wonder if there is not something else here too that would be worth thinking about: I wonder what "kind of lectures" that Frances Wright had in mind, or found a basis for in Epicurus, which would lead to this kind of conclusion?

Another way of asking the question here would be: What is the point here that would be significant for us to remember to improve our own thought processes? What "study and discipline" are necessary to produce "forbearance" and "candor"?

Here is the full context of the discussion:

Quote

I beg your pardon for the digression," said Theon: "but I think you have more forbearance and more candor than any man I ever heard of."

Epicurus: "If it be so, these useful qualities have not been attained without much study and discipline; for Zeno is mistaken in thinking all my virtues the children of temperament. I very early perceived candor to be the quality the most indispensable in

the composition of a philosopher, and therefore very early set my whole efforts to the attaining of it. And when once I fairly engaged in the work, I did not find it either long or difficult. I had naturally a mild temper, and a sensitive heart, and these gifts were here of inconceivable use to me. Feeling kindly towards my fellow creatures, I could the easier learn to pity rather than hate their faults; to smile, rather than frown at their follies. This was a great step gained, but the next was more difficult — to be slow in pronouncing what is a fault, and what is a folly. Our superstition would haunt with the furies the man who should take his sister to wife, while the customs of Egypt would commend them. How has the astronomer been laughed at, who made the earth revolve round the stationary sun; and yet who can say but the age may come, when this shall be established as a truth? Prejudices, when once seen as prejudices, are easily yielded. The difficulty is to come at the knowledge of them. A thousand lectures had I read to myself, ere I could calmly say, upon all occasions, it does not follow that the thing *is*, because I *think it is*; and till I could say this, I never presumed to call myself a philosopher. When I had schooled myself into candor, I found I was possessed of forbearance; for, indeed, it is hardly possible to possess the one without the other.