

Thoughts on Prudence and the Virtues in the Letter to Menoecus

Post by "Root304" of August 1, 2022 at 2:06 AM

"Now, the beginning and the greatest good of all these things is prudence, on which account prudence is something more valuable than even philosophy, inasmuch as all the other virtues spring from it, teaching us that it is not possible to live pleasantly unless one also lives prudently, and honourably, and justly; and that one cannot live prudently, and honestly, and justly, without living pleasantly; for the virtues are allied to living agreeably, and living agreeably is inseparable from the virtues."- Letter to Menoecus

Not sure on the "honourably" versus "honestly" switch. A lot of sites I looked at for this passage had that discrepancy.

Anyway, in following the recent discussions on epistemology in the podcast and in the forums, this passage brought up some thoughts for me. Is this talk of prudence being more valuable than philosophy a way of using the language of virtue ethics (which I gather he didn't think much of), to bring it back to the notion of anticipations being a core feature of his epistemology? Am I conflating the concepts of foresight and shrewd judgement in the idea of "Prudence", with notions of predictability associated with "anticipations"? I also need to look more into other discussions here on the forums for what Epicurus actually thought of the Virtues, as my current thinking is to include them in his "vain ideals."

Also I found it interesting in knowing a bit more about Epicurean philosophy, to try to unpack the use of the words prudently, honourably/honestly and justly in the passage rather than just seeing a bunch of "yay!" words strung together. Prudently potentially being a reference to his epistemology rather than to the virtues per se. Justice in Epicureanism being based on convention and contract, and the material conditions that bring about those conventions. Honourably/honestly being central to issues of reputation, and the potential for friendship and the security for living pleasantly that it brings.

The final part about "agreeably" and virtue is beyond my capability of analyzing. 😊 Cheers!