

Episode One Hundred Thirty Eight - Letter to Menoecus 5 - Pleasure Part One

Post by "Cassius" of September 9, 2022 at 7:48 AM

Here's a related issue, but I don't have the time to expand it at the moment. I have long had a negative reaction to Martha Nussbaum's book "The Therapy of Desire" <https://press.princeton.edu/books/paperbac...erapy-of-desire>

To me that title is off in the same way it would be off to say "The Therapy of the Finger." The default position in normal discussion would be that there is nothing WRONG with a finger in general, and only if a finger has a specific unhealthiness or lack of functioning does the finger need therapy.

So the book implies from its very title that there is something "Wrong" with all Desire in and of itself - which as we are discussing does not seem to be Epicurus' position at all. It's not "Desire" that needs therapy, but "Unhealthy Desires" or "Painful Desires" or "Impossible Desires" or "Unnatural desires" or something similar.

I have always read the book as a whole, and especially the closing chapters, as expressing some very negative views about Epicurean philosophy, and as taking a pro-Stoic position. But I don't think I have realized before that the very title seems to be taking what appears to me to be an unduly negative view of all desire. I think the title is revealing of something before the cover of the book is evened open. Is all of the rest of non-Epicurean Greek philosophy negative toward all desire? I find that difficult to believe, so is the issue some viewpoint of Nussbaum's herself, or of Greek philosophy.

As for religious influence in that case, I could be wrong but I think Martha Nussbaum is Jewish rather than Catholic. I am not aware of any specific tendency in Judaism to be negative toward all desire, but again I could be wrong there too. Nussbaum's attitudes toward desire in general, if in fact she has a negative one, may have totally different origins or foundations.