

New Article on the Inscription (And the "Bitter Gift" Misattribution)

Post by "Eikadistes" of October 3, 2022 at 10:32 AM

The author proposes that Epicureanism "propounded the avoidance of all things that would cause pain in life" which contradicts Epicurus' statement that "sometimes we pass over many pleasures, when greater discomfort accrues to us as the result of them: and similarly we think many pains better than pleasures, since a greater pleasure comes to us when we have endured pains for a long time [...] For the good on certain occasions we treat as bad, and conversely the bad as good." The author seems to extrapolate an avoidant, escapist interpretation of Epicurean philosophy.

They gloss over Epicurus' explicit recognition that "**Hēdonē** [and **not** *ataraxia*] is the Greatest Good" and then interprets Epicureanism as being a mild form of asceticism (like the "Middle Way" of Buddhism, of which I make additional criticism below). Note the incoherence of the author's following statement: "Although Epicureanism is a form of hedonism [...] it [is] very different from hedonism". As usual, the author equates the word "hedonism" with something gross and morally bankrupt, and implies that only a rejection of "true" hedonism can be considered justifiable.

I also find the following proposition dubious: "Today, [the stone inscription at Oinoanda] remains the only ancient philosophical text from the Greek and Roman world to have survived in its original form, according to *Archaeology Magazine*." The author later contradicts this assertion when acknowledging that "Deciphered carbonized scrolls obtained from the library at the Villa of the Papyri in Herculaneum contain a large number of works by Philodemus, a late Hellenistic Epicurean, and even Epicurus himself, attesting to the school's enduring popularity."

I do agree, however, with his statement that "The philosophy is often misunderstood."

The author goes on to propose that "Epicureanism rejects immortality", which *feels* right to critical, modern eyes, however, it reduces the nuanced employment of "immortality" in Epicurean philosophy. The animal gods have become indestructible as described by Epicurus. The measurement of daily pleasure is also immortal. Friendship is an immortal good. Indeed, we do not have immortal lives, and we are not born again, however, like "the gods", the idea of "immortality" is re-fashioned in Epicurean terminology, so the author slightly misses the mark on this point.

I also found another very common, very false comparison between Epicureanism and Buddhism, which, again, I **emphasize**, are on opposite ends of the philosophical spectrum: "The Epicurean way of life also resembles Buddhism in its temperateness, including the belief that great excess leads to great dissatisfaction." This always indicates to me that the author

does not have a thorough understanding of the nuances of either tradition, and, like many perennialists, chooses to find similarities between their philosophies-of-choice, regardless of their original, historical context.

Overall, the author repeats a number of common misconceptions about the philosophy, while mostly hitting the bullet points. This is a good article to demonstrate some of the widespread misunderstanding of Epicureanism.