

Episode One Hundred Forty-Four - Diogenes of Oinoanda (Part 4) Virtue Not The Highest Good

Post by "Cassius" of October 11, 2022 at 5:21 PM

Welcome to Episode One Hundred Forty-Four of Lucretius Today.

This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the only complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

I am your host Cassius, and together with our panelists from the EpicureanFriends.com forum, we'll walk you through the ancient Epicurean texts, and we'll discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. We encourage you to study Epicurus for yourself, and we suggest the best place to start is the book "Epicurus and His Philosophy" by Canadian professor Norman DeWitt.

If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

This week we will complete our discussion of the Inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda.

Now let's join Martin reading today's text:

Fr. 29

[There are many who] pursue philosophy for the sake of [wealth and fame], with the aim of procuring these either from private individuals or from kings, by whom philosophy is deemed to be some great and precious possession.

Well, it is not in order to gain any of the above-mentioned objectives that we have embarked upon the same undertaking, but so that we may enjoy happiness through attainment of the goal craved by nature.

The identity of this goal and how neither wealth can furnish it, nor political fame, nor royal office, nor a life of luxury and sumptuous banquets, nor pleasures of choice love-affairs, nor anything else, while philosophy [alone can secure it], we [shall now explain after setting the whole question before you. For we have had this writing inscribed in public] not [for ourselves,] but [for you, citizens, so that we might render it available to all of you in an easily accessible form without oral instruction.]

Fr. 30

... time ... and we contrived this in order that, even while [sitting at] home, [we might be able to exhibit] the goods of philosophy, not to all people here [indeed], but to those of them who are civil-spoken; and not least we did [this] for those who are called «foreigners,» though they are not really so. For, while the various segments of the earth give different people a different country, the whole compass of this world gives all people a single country, the entire earth, and a single home, the world. I am not pressurising any of you into testifying thoughtlessly and unreflectively in favour of those who say «[this] is true» for [I have] not [laid down the law on] anything, [not even on] matters concerning the gods, [unless] together with [reasoning.]

Fr. 32

I shall discuss folly shortly, the virtues and pleasure now.

If, gentlemen, the point at issue between these people and us involved inquiry into «what is the means of happiness?» and they wanted to say «the virtues» (which would actually be true), it would be unnecessary to take any other step than to agree with them about this, without more ado. But since, as I say, the issue is not «what is the means of happiness?» but «what is happiness and what is the ultimate goal of our nature?», I say both now and always, shouting out loudly to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that pleasure is the end of the best mode of life, while the virtues, which are inopportunately messed about by these people (being transferred from the place of the means to that of the end), are in no way an end, but the means to the end.

Let us therefore now state that this is true, making it our starting-point.

Suppose, then, someone were to ask someone, though it is a naive question, «who is it whom these virtues benefit?», obviously the answer will be «man.» The virtues certainly do not make provision for these birds flying past, enabling them to fly well, or for each of the other animals: they do not desert the nature with which they live and by which they have been engendered; rather it is for the sake of this nature that the virtues do everything and exist.

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