

How would Epicurus view "differences from the start of life that are out of our control?"

Post by "Don" of December 6, 2022 at 10:26 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Question:

"Do you know of any material on how Epicurus viewed differences from the start of life that are out of our control? For example, a baby being born into a rich family vs. a poor family and having more opportunities, or being born in adverse racial or ethnic or religious or other circumstances? Are these initial differences determined by Nature? I think not because that would imply some divine intervention?"

Fascinating question. I would reference VS09. From my perspective, this Vatican Saying addresses "differences from the start of life that are out of our control." It's also a clever bit of writing from Epicurus. The original Greek reads "κακὸν ἀνάγκη, ἀλλ' οὐδεμία ἀνάγκη ζῆν μετὰ ἀνάγκης." Note those three occurrences of ἀνάγκη/ἀνάγκης. The word itself means force, constraint, or necessity; so a literal translation would be something like "An evil, necessity (is); but (there is) no necessity to live in the midst of necessity." This retains the clever wordplay but is honestly a little clunky in English. To get the import of the statement, a paraphrase is better. Consider what he is saying. Being constrained - or perceiving or assuming that you are constrained - in your choices is an evil. If you have only one choice - or feel you only have one choice - that is an evil and thus painful. However, we have free will, so we are not required to live having our choices curtailed and constrained. Even if we make choices we don't want to make, we are exercising our free will. "I don't want to go to work today, but I have to." No, you don't. You could quit. But are you ready to face the consequences of quitting your job? You can consciously decide today is not the day I quit. I make the decision to get up and do the work. Likewise, maybe getting a new job is the right decision. Weigh your options. Exercise your faculty of choice and rejection. You are not forced to be forced to do something.

In the current discussion, this implies that one is not ultimately constrained by their birth situation - albeit with important caveats.

Epicurus encourages us to make prudent choices and rejections and to practice well.