

Did Epicurus Commit Suicide Due To His Disease? (Merger of Two Threads On When Voluntary Death Makes Sense)

Post by "Cassius" of December 9, 2022 at 2:49 AM

1 - Don's point about the serene spirit is one I had not previously appreciated so well. I thought I remembered the Atticus illustration, but the Diodorus one was new to me (or it has been so long since I scanned the Warren book I had totally forgotten it).

2 - I appreciate too where Pacatus is coming from but I am trying to think why I hesitate. I think I hesitate because it's easy to go from one extreme to the other and lose appreciation for the usefulness of words at the same time that we acknowledge their limits. I think Don is right that we do have the ability to grasp that there is a generally identifiable meaning to the words Epicurean or Christian and that we need to identify those meanings (maybe that is akin to what Epicurus was saying about being able to assign an image to a word so we don't go on explaining forever) while at the same time we acknowledge that that image does not come from God or from a realm of forms or from an "essence" that exists independently of the examples. So that is similar to keeping in mind both that (1) suicide is a last resort only for extreme circumstances but also (2) that suicide can be a powerful tool and reassuring to know that it is in our toolbox if or when those circumstances do occur. It's not a matter of taking a middle ground or seeing some kind of compromise but of seeing that both are true at the same time. The atoms and the void do exist at the same time, and for another example at the same time (1) the bodies and qualities of our world do have a "real" existence to us even though (2) they themselves are ultimately composed of atoms and void. We don't fall into despair and nihilism just because both perspectives exist at the same time, nor should we label one perspective or world as "true" and the other as "false."

Which reminds me of the Oinoanda comment that there is a flux but it is not so fast that we can't comprehend it. All this also causes me to associate Epicurus' views with the "this world vs the 'true world'" imagery that apparently Nietzsche was using if that video posted elsewhere recently is correct. There's no "true world" beyond this one, which is the only one we have. So many issues seem to resolve themselves if we recognize how many ways have been invented to try to use wishful thinking and word games to get around that reality and construct false alternatives.

In the same way, many of the otherwise obscure sayings of Epicurus make much more sense when seen as targeted at making very close to the same point. Epicurus seems to use "anxiety" and "pleasure vs. pain" terminology while Nietzsche and others may use words like "nihilism" vs "will" or "power," but the enemy of despair is pretty much the same, and it's Epicurus' formula for embracing life which really holds the best answer.