

The Ethics of Epicurus and its Relation to Contemporary Doctrines by Jean-Marie Guyau. Edited by Testa and Ansell-Pearson, translated by Testa

Post by "Cassius" of May 4, 2023 at 9:04 AM

This illustrates my love-hate relationship with the Epicurus Wiki at Epicurism.info: Two excellent paragraphs followed by immediate schizophrenic retraction -- as if "Oh NO Epicurus can't be in favor of a full life -- that would contradict our orthodox view of him! "

And of course it includes the trope that those poor stupid ROMAN Epicureans just didn't understand what Epicurus was all about! Which of course fails to account for why the Romans would be so stupidly interpreting Epicurus when they had ALL his texts with a complete explanation and 200 years of examples of people applying it, while the writer of this note has access only to a small fraction of that information.

NUTS TO ALL OF THAT!

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Vatican Saying 41

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Γελᾶν ἅμα δεῖ καὶ φιλοσοφεῖν καὶ οἰκονομεῖν καὶ τοῖς
[One ought] to laugh at the same time → and practice philosophy and manage one's household and [use] the

λοιποῖς οἰκειώμασι χρησθαι καὶ μηδαμῆ λήγειν τὰς ἐκ τῆς
rest (of one's) familiar things → and in no way stop [propagating] the [utterances] → →

ὀρθῆς φιλοσοφίας φωνὰς ἀφιέντας. 
of [correct] philosophy → →

Translation

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Analysis

With this Saying Epicurus disavows any allegiance to ascetic, monastic ideals. A philosophically enlightened person is not at all like the stereotype of the dour hermit, less yet the reclusive misanthrope. Such a person feels free to laugh out loud, and practices philosophy daily, naturally. Such a person lives a normal life, minding his/her business, managing his/her household, handling all the daily, familiar affairs of domestic life.

At the same time, the Epicurean-in-action never ceases to propagate the pronouncements of Epicureanism, thus becoming both a source of Epicureanism for others, and a living model, all at the same time. Unlike, however, the coldly forbidding Stoic Sage --and with this insinuation Epicurus may possibly have meant to launch an oblique attack on his philosophical rivals of the Arcade-- who is aloof and unapproachable, the Epicurean is someone the majority can easily relate to, and an attractive role-model for many. It is not hard to like a person who laughs generously, lives a normal life, and has some good advice to offer on occasion.

~~This Saying stands in striking contrast to the general attitude of Epicureanism, focused on withdrawal as it is. Despite Epicurus' lukewarm "permission" that one live a normal life, one full of the toils and troubles of quotidian occupation, this text seems to applaud a seemingly most un-Epicurean type of person, one occupied with household, possessions, (family?) and a plethora of other matters that constitute the ancient and modern concept of "normality".~~

~~It seems that Roman Epicureans felt closer to, or applied themselves more eagerly to this particular facet of Epicureanism than the original, Greek denizens of the Garden. Obviously such cloistered students of philosophy could not have been managing their households according to the social norms of ancient Athens, but were rather involved in a more "intensive course" of study, leaving much (or most, likely) of the rest of their lives behind them in order to live close to their Sage.~~

~~In a rather striking paradox, with this Saying Epicurus seems to praise quite a different type of student than those who worshipfully surrounded him in the Garden. Or, perhaps, he was speaking presciently of the future of Epicureanism, the global, post-Garden "society" of those whose life is illuminated by his teaching.~~