

PD07 - Visualizing Principal Doctrine Seven



Some men wished to become famous and conspicuous, thinking that they would thus win for themselves safety from other men. Wherefore if the life of such men is safe, they have obtained the good which nature craves; but if it is not safe, they do not possess that for which they strove at first by the instinct of nature.

- Epicurus Principal Doctrine Seven



****Visualizing Principal Doctrine 7****

This doctrine follows closely on the issue of self-protection presented in principal doctrine six, expanding it in an obvious direction while affirming that the ultimate test is always the result obtained, not conformity to an ideal:

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famous and conspicuous, thinking that they would thus win for themselves safety from other men. Wherefore if the life of such men is safe, they have obtained the good which nature craves; but if it is not safe, they do not possess that for which they strove at first by the instinct of nature."

Epicurus had previously said: **"To secure protection from men anything is a natural good by which you may be able to attain that end."** "Anything" is a broad term, and would include even politics and dictatorships being natural goods - if they are successful. But we can't know in advance what the result of any one course will be. It is possible that we may pursue dictatorship or kingship and overcome all obstacles to success. If we do, and if we die in our sleep surrounded by friends after a long and happy life, then our pursuit of fame or kingship has proven to be an excellent course for us. In other words, if we succeed then we have achieved the goal for which we set out, regardless of the odds that seemed to be against us based on past experience.

But it is frequently the case that politics and dictatorship and kingship spur envy and ill will from other men. Whether that response is justified or not, it is frequently the case that dictators and kings meet a violent and unhappy end.

Both are true -- the generalization is valid as a generalization, but a generalization is not a guarantee that a choice will work out in every instance.

The point here is the same which is made throughout Epicurean texts: There is no fate, no divine creator, no realm of ideal forms which will **inevitably** lead certain choices to success or failure. The universe operates by natural principles, including the swerve in the atom, and we have freedom to influence some things in life, but not others.

The Epicurean message may seem scandalous to those who would prefer "justice" or "fairness" in the universe, but the message is clear, and it is consistent with what we actually observe. Some dictators / kings / famous people live long and happy lives after following paths that many would consider awful, while others who are paragons of morality crash and burn in the worst possible ways.

In an Epicurean universe we should not look for inevitable outcomes. We can estimate generalities and make predictions based on past experience, but the test of success is **whether it in fact succeeds**. There are no divine patterns which will **always** produce the happiest outcomes in life. If we wish to live happily we make our choices, we take our chances, and we work as diligently as possible for pleasurable living, always knowing that there are no guarantees in life except that it will eventually be over.

More graphics for Principal Doctrine 7 can be found [here](#).