

Episode 185 - "Epicurus And His Philosophy" Part 37

- Chapter 14 - The New Virtues 08

Post by "Cassius" of July 31, 2023 at 9:10 AM

Here are links to two sources cited by DeWitt in the material covered this week for the proposition that philosophy misused can turn into a warped fixation on death as desirable and a complacency as to retaining life. The point DeWitt cites for Epicurus is not that we should be unhappy about the thought of being dead, but that we should be happy to be alive and not look forward to death except in extremely bad circumstances. These are examples as to the opposite orientation, particularly clear in Phaedo, where Socrates argues that death is not oblivion but ultimate wisdom when we are freed from the body.:

Plato's Phaedo:

[Plato, Phaedo, section 67c](#)

[67d] and hereafter, alone by itself, freed from the body as from fetters?"

"Certainly," said he.

"Well, then, this is what we call death, is it not, a release and separation from the body?"

"Exactly so," said he.

"But, as we hold, the true philosophers and they alone are always most eager to release the soul, and just this—the release and separation of the soul from the body—is their study, is it not?"

"Obviously."

"Then, as I said in the beginning, it would be absurd if a man who had been all his life fitting himself to live as nearly in a state of death as he could, should then be disturbed when death came to him. Would it not be absurd?"

"Of course."

"In fact, then, Simmias," said he, "the true philosophers practice dying, and death is less terrible to them than to any other men. Consider it in this way. They are in every way hostile to the body and they desire to have the soul apart by itself alone. Would it not be very foolish if they should be frightened and troubled when this very thing happens, and if they should not be glad to go to the place where there is hope of attaining [68a] what they longed for all through life—and they longed for wisdom—and of escaping from the companionship of that which they hated? When human loves or wives or sons have died, many men have willingly gone to the

other world led by the hope of seeing there those whom they longed for, and of being with them; and shall he who is really in love with wisdom and has a firm belief that he can find it nowhere else [68b] than in the other world grieve when he dies and not be glad to go there? We cannot think that, my friend, if he is really a philosopher; for he will confidently believe that he will find pure wisdom nowhere else than in the other world. And if this is so, would it not be very foolish for such a man to fear death?"

"Very foolish, certainly," said he.

"Then is it not," said Socrates, "a sufficient indication, when you see a man troubled because he is going to die, that he was not a lover of wisdom but a lover of the body?"

Cicero - Tusculun Disputations: <http://www.attalus.org/cicero/tusc1B.html>

[30.] [73] L Therefore he argues, that all good and wise men should take example from the swans, who are considered sacred to Apollo, not without reason, but particularly because they seem to have received the gift of divination from him, by which, foreseeing how happy it is to die, they leave this world with singing and joy. Nor can anyone doubt of this, unless it happens to us who think with care and anxiety about the soul, (as is often the case with those who look earnestly at the setting sun,) to lose the sight of it entirely: and so the mind's eye viewing itself, sometimes grows dull, and for that reason we become remiss in our contemplation. Thus our reasoning is borne about, harassed with doubts and anxieties, not knowing how to proceed, but measuring back again those dangerous tracts which it has passed, like a boat tossed about on the boundless ocean. [74] But these reflections are of long standing, and borrowed from the Greeks. But Cato left this world in such a manner, as if he were delighted that he had found an opportunity of dying; for that God who presides in us, forbids our departure hence without his leave. But when God himself has given us a just cause, as formerly he did to Socrates, and lately to Cato, and often to many others - in such a case, certainly every man of sense would gladly exchange this darkness, for that light: not that he would forcibly break from the chains that held him, for that would be against the law; but like a man released from prison by a magistrate, or some lawful authority, so he too would walk away, being released and discharged by God. For the whole life of a philosopher is, as the same philosopher says, a meditation on death.