

Cultivation of Friendship within Epicureanism

Post by "Joshua" of August 2, 2023 at 12:59 AM

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I'm curious what y'all think about this question, "What place do games have in Epicurean philosophy?"

I think that's a very good question, though it may be difficult to answer fully--although I think Don's answer settles the main point.

The Greeks were to a remarkable extent a gaming civilization--so much so that they literally set their calendars by it. They valued their games--Olympic, Pythian, Isthmian, Nemean, and other local affairs--for some of the same reasons we do; in the first place, because they helped to foster a unified and *pan-Hellenic* cultural identity. They aided in cultivating good relationships between City States.

In a remarkable passage in Xenophon's *Anabasis*, a mercenary army of 10,000 free Greeks that has just been marching for months overland across the whole length and breadth of hostile Persia finally reaches safety in the Greek colonies on the coast of the Black Sea, and they celebrate their immense good fortune by *playing games*! Extraordinary! I think if it were me I would have collapsed in a chair and not stirred for three months. The ended a forced march across difficult and dangerous terrain by celebrating with foot races, wrestling, discus and javelin.

So what did Epicurus think about all of this? On the question of Epicurus' alleged rejection of Greek culture Norman DeWitt has this to say;

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This Platonic program consisted of music and gymnastic, inherited from the Athenian past; of rhetoric, which had been introduced by the sophists; and of dialectic and mathematics, especially geometry, which were the addition of Plato himself.

Toward every component of this prevailing education the attitude of Epicurus was determined by the nature of the objective adopted for his

own program. This objective was not the production of a good citizen but a happy and contented man. For practical purposes this happiness was defined as health of mind and health of body. The famous prayer for mens Sana in corpore sano, "a sound mind in a sound body," recommended by Juvenal, is genuine Epicureanism.

This being the case, there was no reason for rejecting physical training, and approval of it was the easier not only because the laws required it — and Epicurus recommended obedience to the laws — but also for the reason that the amateur athlete and the citizen soldier were being replaced by the professional athlete and the professional soldier. Thus the rigors of the required exercises could be relaxed.

As for music, there need be little doubt that the approval of Epicurus was enthusiastic. His own capacity for appreciating good music seems to have been keen. It is told of him that he would arise early in the morning and trudge to the theater to enjoy the performance

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And then are there the tabletop games of Ancient Greece, most of which were distinguished by the common feature of gambling on chance. I suspect that Epicurus would have cautioned against gambling, though of course I don't know that.

In any case, playing a game for the game's own sake is a very human pasttime, enjoyed among friends, and yielding pleasure--and for those reasons is very much worth doing. Play like the Greeks!