

Episode 195 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 05

Post by “Cassius” of October 12, 2023 at 11:19 AM

I think your comment is on target - and I think that Frances Wright agreed with you and devoted a significant amount of her fictional reply of Epicurus to Zeno on the same point:

[Quote from A Few Days In Athens Chapter 7](#)

But, perhaps, though Zeno should allow this last effect of my philosophy to be probable, he will not approve it: his severe eye looks with scorn, not pity, on the follies and vices of the world. He would annihilate them, change them to their opposite virtues, or he would leave them to their full and natural sweep. ‘Be perfect, or be as you are. I allow of no degrees of virtue, so care not for the degrees of vice. Your ruin, if it must be, let it be in all its horrors, in all its vileness; let it attract no pity, no sympathy; let it be seen in all its naked deformity, and excite the full measure of its merited abhorrence and disgust.’ Thus says the sublime Zeno, who sees only man as he should be.

Thus says the mild Epicurus, who sees man as he is: — With all his weakness, all his errors, all his sins, still owning fellowship with him, still rejoicing in his welfare, and sighing over his misfortunes; I call from my gardens to the thoughtless, the headstrong, and the idle — ‘Where do ye wander, and what do ye seek? Is it pleasure? Behold it here. Is it ease? Enter and repose.’ Thus do I court them from the table of drunkenness and the bed of licentiousness: I gently awaken their sleeping faculties, and draw the veil from their understandings: — ‘My sons! do you seek pleasure? I seek her also. Let us make the search together. You have tried wine, you have tried love; you have sought amusement in reveling, and forgetfulness in indolence. You tell me you are disappointed: that your passions grew, even while you gratified them; your weariness increased even while you slept. Let us try again. Let us quiet our passions, not by gratifying, but subduing them; let us conquer our weariness, not by rest, but by exertion.’ Thus do I win their ears and their confidence. Step by step I lead them on. I lay open the mysteries of science; I expose the beauties of art; I call the graces and the muses to my aid; the song, the lyre, and the dance. Temperance presides at the repast; innocence at the festival; disgust is changed to satisfaction; listlessness to curiosity; brutality to elegance; lust gives place to love; Bacchanalian hilarity to friendship. Tell me not, Zeno, that the teacher is vicious who washes depravity from the youthful heart; who lays the storm of its passions, and turns all its sensibilities to good. I grant that I do not look to make men great, but to make men happy. To teach them, that in the discharge of their duties as sons, as husbands, as fathers, as citizens, lies their pleasure and their interest; — and when the sublime motives of Zeno shall cease to

affect an enervated generation, the gentle persuasions of Epicurus shall still be heard and obeyed.