

Another Tetrpharmakos Video Discussion

Post by "Cassius" of May 6, 2024 at 9:43 AM

Today I saw someone at Reddit post that the video I am going to reference here is "[A Great Introduction to Epicurus' Four Part Cure For Happiness](#)." I know in the past I have seen this and I may have posted about it earlier, but it bears repeating how off base some (not all, but a significant part!) of this video is:



As a first comment I would ask "Why can't this person actually find a picture of Epicurus rather than use a false drawing of a bald Epicurus that is totally unlike what the ancients used?"

**MEDITATE ON THESE
IDEAS DAY AND NIGHT,
AND THE ONES RELATED
TO THEM, BOTH ALONE
AND WITH SOMEONE
LIKE YOURSELF, AND YOU
WILL NEVER BE BADLY
DISTURBED
WHETHER AWAKE OR DREAMING.**



Then I would point out that never does Epicurus himself ever state that these four short statements are his "capital doctrines:" There is **one** occurrence of a formulation similar to this, in a Herculaneum scroll, and no other ancient source contains this formulation. Yes it's arguable that the actual doctrines can be construed to say something similar, but they say much more, with much different connotation.

1. GOD IS NOTHING TO FEAR

2. DEATH IS NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT

3. IT IS EASY TO ACQUIRE
THE GOOD THINGS IN LIFE

4. IT IS EASY TO ENDURE
THE TERRIBLE THINGS



CAPITAL
DOCTRINES
OF EPICUREANISM

TETRAPHARMAKOS

But this next clip is the real reason I made this post:

2 KINDS OF PLEASURE

PLEASANT, AGREEABLE,
SWEET STIMULATION

KINETIC PLEASURE



TRANQUIL, SATISFIED,
SELF-SUFFICIENT AND
SELF-ASSURED STATE



STATIC PLEASURE



This is the real heart of the problem. This slide and the audio overlay state that these are the two kinds of pleasure that Epicurus promoted, and this is simply not correct.

The true division of Pleasure into two kinds that characterizes the heart of Epicurean ethics is:

- (1) Agreeable stimulation (for which *sweet* is a fine additional word if you want to use it to make things clear)
- (2) **All other awareness in life** which is not painful.

This second type is NOT limited to a "tranquil, satisfied, self-sufficient, and self-assured stated." All of those adjectives are fine, as they are **parts** of pleasure, but the implication of this formulation is that "tranquility," "satisfaction," "self-sufficiency," and "self-assurance" (which I will now refer to as "TSSS") are somehow the **only** types of experience other than agreeable stimulation that are counted as within pleasure.

Even worse is to state or imply that this second category of TSSS describe a "higher" or "true" type of pleasure, for which agreeable stimulation is only a tool for achieving TSSS, and which can be dispensed when this TSSS is achieved (as if it can be achieved and maintained without the agreeable stimulation, which it can't, but that's an argument for later).

Once you read past these presentations of the "tetrapharmakon" into Epicurus' own letters, and into Diogenes Laertius, and into Cicero's summaries, you see that the key to the real picture is that Epicurus held there to be only two kind of feelings, pleasure and pain, and that every experience which is not painful should be considered as pleasure, and vice versa. [Citations for this are here.](#)

There is much more to say about this video, but I have circled in this next clip one particularly irritating way in which this viewpoint leads people astray:



Knowing that there is a limit to suffering definitely DOES remove fear of being dead, and other fears as well, but it does not removed "Longing for more life." The rest of Epicurean philosophy

(which is butchered in this video by the restrictive definition of pleasure) does indeed remove the longing for an *unlimited* life span, because "[PD19](#). *Infinite time contains no greater pleasure than limited time, if one measures, by reason, the limits of pleasure.*"

But Epicurean philosophy not only does not teach that there is no need to wish for "more" life, it teaches that life is desirable, because life is absolutely necessary for the experience of pleasure. Life is so desirable, and so important, that every aspect of life which is not specifically painful is worthy to be considered pleasurable.

One of the worst distortions of Epicurus that comes from Stoic and Buddhist eclecticism is that there is somehow no need to be concerned about staying alive, because you're part of the universal divine fire and should be happy to return to it if you're a Stoic, or because life is suffering and you should be happy to escape it if you're a Buddhist.

There are many people who are vulnerable to the idea that their lives are unimportant and that they should not do everything they can to lead the best life possible while they are alive. That's a point I think we need to hit home as frequently and persuasively as possible.