

Episode One Hundred Thirty-Four - The Letter to Menoecus 01- Context and Opening of the Letter

Post by "Cassius" of December 14, 2024 at 5:51 PM

Thanks for letting us know about that GnothiSeauton, and I hope your post here will spur lots of discussion. And more thoughts from you on it as well.

The issue of how to deal with people who have firm pre-existing ideas about what Epicurean philosophy is all about, when those ideas turn out in fact to be an eclectic blend of Stoicism, Buddhism, humanism, and general "virtue-based-ethics," is never going to go away.

Those who are committed to those viewpoints don't understand that they are not Epicurean, and they are unlikely to be interested in changing them. As pointed out in A Few Days In Athens, argument over core ideas accomplishes little but disruption and bad feelings.

What we have tried to do here on the forum is be straightforward at the very beginning about core controversial issues. Hopefully no one who glances over the opening page or the new member materials will have any illusions - IF they read them.

The idea of any effort to force people to hold ideas with which they disagree would be absolutely anti-Epicurean, but at the same time freedom of thought doesn't mean that we have to ignore the thoughts of those who want to participate. There are many fundamental points of Epicurean philosophy involving controversial issues of determinism, skepticism, and the nature of what "absence of pain" really means that are non-negotiable if you're going to have a truly "Epicurean" group.

One point I always make is that there are plenty of other places on the internet, or meetup groups in the world, for those who want to study Buddhism or Stoicism or just want to do general riffing because they love to talk philosophy of any kind. It's my experience that trying to work with people who are committed to a generalist / eclectic / anything-goes approach rarely leads to anything truly beneficial and never lasts for long.

Every person and group has to decide for himself with whom they want to interact, but I think it's essential to have boundaries, and to be up-front and honest about where those boundaries are.

Here at the forum we have put a lot of time into refining our front page, our member rules documents, and our welcome messages about where those boundaries are. Those are there because it's a fact of life that Stoicism and Buddhism and humanism are much more popular than reading closely what Epicurus really wrote. And it's a fact of life that the prevailing view is that Epicurus was basically a Stoic or Buddhist who used different terminology. Therefore

anyone who sets up any kind of "Epicurean" public endeavor has to expect that many who ask to participate are going to hold attitudes that are deadly to a "truly" Epicurean project.

So the first and most important comment I have is that your experiences are problems that we'll always be dealing with, but the rewards are worth dealing with them.