

When Epicureans Choose Pain / When Epicureans Treat Pain As Good

Post by "Don" of December 22, 2024 at 11:50 AM

130, right?

. [130] τῆ μέντοι συμμετρήσει καὶ συμφερόντων καὶ ἀσυμφόρων βλέπει ταῦτα πάντα κρίνειν καθήκει. χρώμεθα γὰρ τῷ μὲν ἀγαθῷ κατὰ τινὰς χρόνους ὡς κακῷ, τῷ δὲ κακῷ τοῦμπαλιν ὡς ἀγαθῷ.

Where was I getting my take then?! Oh, I left it out of my full translation but not the commentary. That's what I get for looking at a translation (even mine!) and not *returning to the books*.

Here's the line in question ..

130b. χρώμεθα γὰρ τῷ μὲν ἀγαθῷ κατὰ τινὰς χρόνους ὡς κακῷ, τῷ δὲ κακῷ τοῦμπαλιν ὡς ἀγαθῷ.

Let's start at the beginning:

χρώμεθα

This one takes some explaining, and it seems to be often passed over in translation. This verb is in the middle voice which means the subject of the verb is both the agent and experiencer. So, χρώμεθα generally means something like "we consult a god or oracle for ourselves" or "the declaration of an oracle or god." I think this is significant, because, in the context of Epicurean philosophy, there are no gods who are going to provide advice through a supernatural means via an oracle. So, what is going on here? The Epicurean consults their own faculty of weighing the consequences of their own choices.

The word is also used in several more places within this verse.

This is especially important because the next word γὰρ "because" sets up the answer to the question "Why do we 'consult the oracle' of the consequences of our actions?"

Next, we have our old friends μὲν...δὲ.... Let's look at the similarities in those two phrases:

[μὲν] τῷ ἀγαθῷ κατὰ τινὰς χρόνους ὡς κακῷ,

[δὲ] τῷ κακῷ τῷμπαλιν ὡς ἀγαθῷ.

So, Epicurus is contrasting τῷ ἀγαθῷ "the good (pleasure) with τῷ κακῷ "the bad" (pain). Let's look at the embedded phrases that modify the meaning here.

κατά τινος χρόνου "over time"

τᾶμπαλιν "on the other hand, on the contrary"

So, "we consult the consequences of our actions because, on the one hand, good/pleasure over time can lead to bad/pain; on the other hand, bad/pain can lead to good/pleasure."

PS .. with κακῶ and ἀγαθῶ being in the dative, that's where I'm getting "leads to." In the sense of the means with which something is done or the cause of something. So, I don't think there's a simple A is B and B is A construction here. That said, I am more than happy for someone with more experience with ancient Greek to comment on that.