

Music Theory And Epicurean Philosophy

Post by "Cassius" of May 27, 2019 at 9:08 AM

Ben: I agree with what you say, Cassius Amicus, and interpreting Philodemus in the light of Epicurean criticism of Plato makes sense. But I also can't escape the notion that Philodemus was not aware of everything we have discovered about music therapy in recent times, and if he had known this, he might have changed his tune (pun intended).

Cassius Amicus: Ben what do you think Philodemus would have changed (or what would be different in the way this article represents Philodemus as saying)?

Ben: I would hope he would see instrumental music as something meaningful (though without the Platonic notion) in itself, that affects the mood, and can be useful in therapy, and contributing to the good life (eudemonia).

Cassius:

Ben wrote: "I would hope he would see instrumental music as something meaningful (though without the Platonic notion) in itself, that affects the mood, and can be useful in therapy, and contributing to the good life (eudemonia)." Absent absolutely clear proof to the contrary (which is why I am suspicious of aggressive reconstruction of fragmentary texts) I have to believe that what you have just stated Ben WAS generally the Epicurean position. Lucretius would not have written his poem, and Epicurus would not have enjoyed the public festivals and talked about smooth motion, had they not derived pleasure from poetry and music.

It seems very likely to me that the contention that the Epicureans were against ALL music and ALL poetry is malicious misrepresentation of their true position, calculated to marginalize them and dissuade people from learning more about their philosophy. When evidence is conflicting I think it should be interpreted in a way consistent with what we are sure of as to the basics of the philosophy. We know that Epicurus embraced all kinds of pleasures; we know that certain kinds of music and poetry in certain contexts are pleasurable; therefore we can be sure that Epicurus appreciated music and poetry, and that the issue he had was something deeper than is superficially portrayed by his enemies.

And anyone who suggests that pleasure of any kind is anti-Epicurean is himself displaying that he does not understand Epicurus. "PD8. No pleasure is a bad thing in itself, but the things which produce certain pleasures entail disturbances many times greater than the pleasures themselves. VS 37. When confronted by evil nature is weak, but not when faced with good; for pleasures make it secure but pains ruin it."